

# Character Education in Higher Education

## An Example of Genre-based Approach Practice

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**Abstract**— Effective character education is required in any level of education, including in higher education. This paper will discuss a literacy based teaching approach known as Genre-based approach under Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The discussion will focus on the practice of Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre-based approach in three psychological dimensions of character education namely awareness, attitude, and action. Later on in this paper, Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre-based approach with its principles and teaching stages can maximize students' learning. This means Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre-based approach can be an effective way for character education through literacy. This paper is expected to be a technical guideline for lecturers in higher education to apply Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre-based approach in character development.

**Keywords**—character building; character education; character development

### I. INTRODUCTION

Learning is more than just developing one's intellectual, it is about developing or building one's character [1]. Character is realisation of a person's positive or good development, which enable the person to act intellectually, socially, emotionally, and ethically [2], [3]. Character deals with two essential and interconnected parts namely performance characters, such as diligent and work ethics, to reach excellence in any performance environment (e.g. academics) and moral character, such as respect and open-minded, which are important to have successful interpersonal relationship [4]–[6]. In order to reach these good characters, effective character education is needed.

In Indonesia, some papers have pointed out interesting ideas on character education. First, a holistic approach that integrates sustainable character building to every aspect of campus life. Promotion of moral practices should involve not only lecturers but also staffs and everyone in the campus [7]. Then, a paper proposed sustainable character education as integral part of “Tri Dharma” of higher education in Indonesia [8]. The last, integration of character education into teaching and learning activity in the classroom, by infusing character education to lesson plans, learning media, classroom activities, assessment, monitoring, and evaluation [9]. These papers have the same purpose that is to initiate a sustainable and good character education in higher education. However, the ideas described in those previous papers were too abstracts and have

insufficient evidence as a consideration to implement those ideas.

This paper will discuss a literacy based teaching approach, which is known as Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre-based Approach (hereafter abbreviated to SFL GBA) in character development. Many studies have shown that SFL GBA enhanced academic writing and critical thinking in higher education ([10]–[12]). Recently, a study has shown that SFL GBA can develop students' characters [13]. Accordingly, this paper is different from the previous papers because of two reasons. First, this paper has research based reports that suggest SFL GBA can enhance literacy, critical thinking, and even character as the main topic of this paper. Second, this paper will focus on the practice of SFL GBA in three important psychological dimensions of character education namely awareness, attitude, and action, which have not been provided by the previous papers. The discussion will begin with a brief introduction to SFL GBA and character education followed with the practice of SFL GBA in character education, which include suggested teaching practice and assessment in details. This paper is expected to serve as a technical guideline for lecturer to apply SFL GBA in character development, which becomes a great demand these days for many academicians in Indonesian higher education context.

### II. SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS GENRE-BASED APPROACH

This section will discuss a brief concept of Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre-based Approach (hereafter known as SFL GBA). The discussion will begin with brief history of SFL GBA followed with the principles and stages of SFL GBA which later on can be considered suitable for character education practice.

The genre-based approach that will be discussed is based on Halliday's theory of functional linguistics or known as Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter abbreviated as SFL), which is developed by Australian known as “Sydney school” [10], [14]. SFL GBA has been widely used in many countries, such as Singapore, South Africa, USA, Italy, Hongkong, Australia, UK, China, Canada, Sweden, and Thailand. It has been becoming the increasingly influential in the field of English language teaching [15] and also since 2004, it is also applied in Indonesia [10]. SFL GBA looks very promising especially for literacy-based teaching.

Literacy is more than just learning reading or writing. It is a technology that serves a certain purpose [16]. For example, critical literacy can be defined as an exercise power to enhance everyday life in schools and communities, and to question practices of privilege and injustice [17]. Then, moral literacy is about literacy as a moral orientation of what is right and what is wrong [18].

Besides Sydney school, the work of genre is also developed by North American under rhetorical theory, which tends to be ethnographic rather than text analysis [19]. Then, ESP movement, which is far more linguistic in orientation, views genre as a class of structured communicative events employed by specific discourse communities whose members share broad social purposes [20]. North American and ESP movements will not be elaborated any further in this paper as this paper focuses on the practice of SFL GBA with a brief underlying theories of SFL GBA.

#### A. Principles of SFL GBA

There are six important principles of SFL-GBA. First, explicit, i.e. making clear the learning objective. Second, systematic, i.e. providing a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts. Third, needs-based, i.e. ensuring that course objectives and content are derived from students' needs. Forth, supportive, i.e. giving teachers a central role in scaffolding students' learning and creativity. Fifth, empowering, i.e. providing access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts. Sixth, critical, i.e. providing the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses. The last, consciousness-raising, i.e. increasing teachers' awareness of texts to confidently advise students [21].

A teacher should support and empower the students through scaffolding or explicit teaching during the teaching and learning activities. The scaffolding processes "enable a child or a novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" [22]. In order to do scaffolding, the teacher controls the elements of certain tasks, which are beyond the learner's capacity, and permits the learners to concentrate upon and complete only elements that are within the learner's capacity [22]. Therefore, the teacher should be able to provide proper texts and understand the structure, and meaning behind the texts related to a certain subject or topic.

Having guidance from a teacher is a must in SFL GBA which is suitable to character education where a teacher should act as a caregiver, model, and mentor [23] in appropriate ways for college students. This also implies that SFL GBA can foster character, for example, in academic writing subject. The application of explicit teaching in SFL GBA means that the teacher explicitly provides good example of a good academic writing and it will be much better if a teacher show his or her own writing. Besides the teacher, peers also have the power to affect other students where some peers have low level performance meanwhile others have medium or high level of performance. To handle that problem, providing explicit teaching in an equal manner is crucial even though explicit teaching gives more benefits to students with low-level performance [24].

#### B. A Model of SFL GBA

Last important thing is the model of SFL GBA. In Indonesia, SFL GBA model consists of four stages. Well, not really stages that one when finish in a particular stage can move to the next stage. Instead, it is more likely to be recurring stage where each stage is interdependence to each other. Students can go back and forth from one stage to the other in order to achieve better learning [25].

First stage is known as building knowledge of topic. The students gather information from various texts on a particular topic. Second, lecturer models the text. The lecturer gives various examples of a text type or genre that is appropriate to the purpose of the study. Third, cooperation between the students and their teacher during the joint construction of a text. The students learn with their friends, gather more information, and construct a text. The lecturer monitors the students' works and gives feedback and correction explicitly to ensure the students do their best. Lastly, independent construction of a text through recursive process-drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. The students independently constructing a text. The lecturer can give a different topic from the joint construction stage to the students, which make them have to build their knowledge on the new topic [25]. The illustration of these stages is available in the next section.

### III. SFL GBA AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

This section will discuss SFL GBA practice in three psychological dimensions of character education in order to give easiness to understand SFL GBA in character education. SFL GBA practice here will include the examples and assessments.

Character education has many definitions and one of them is "the deliberate use of all dimensions of school life to foster optimal character development" [2]. From this definition, character education involves every dimension that can bring positive character development of the students. Character has three psychological aspects or dimensions namely, cognitive (the head), emotional (the heart), and behavioural (the hand) [6], [23], [26], [27]. In relation to performance character and moral character, the term is also known as awareness, attitude, and action or 3 A's [6].

#### A. SFL GBA in Character Education

An example of SFL GBA practice [25] in academic writing subject will appear in the discussion of each aspect or dimension of character education. Nevertheless, this paper has no intention to separate the dimensions of character education [28]. Instead, every dimension should be encouraged in every stage of SFL GBA. However, to provide clear example of SFL GBA practice, this paper will limit each stage of SFL GBA to one dimension of character education.

The very first dimension of character education is cognitive. It means that bringing the students to be aware (awareness) of certain characters [6], in this case from various texts on a certain topic. Building knowledge of the given topic can support the cognitive dimension of character education.

For example, a lecturer can give some exposition texts about plagiarism in academic writing to the students. During

reading of the texts, the lecturer can ask the students to identify the negative things of plagiarism and its effect to their performance and moral in academic writing subject. At the same time, the lecturer can introduce certain characters that can develop the students' writing skills, such as diligence, which is related to performance character and honesty, which is related to moral character. Knowing these things do not imply the students understand expository writing, plagiarism, and good characters in academic writing.

The lecturer can move to the next stage, which is modelling where the lecturer can provide more exposition texts. By doing so, the students can identify the schematic structure of an exposition text and rules in academic writing which will be practised by them later in joint construction stage.

In joint construction stage, the lecturer can emphasize the attitude aspect of character education before the students move to independent construction. Students' works can reflect the attitude aspect of character education, in this case how they perceive and care about how to avoid plagiarism and the good characters of academic writers [6]. In higher education level, it is more suitable to ask the students to write an exposition text about what they have known about plagiarism. However, for students with low level of performance, it is better for the lecturer to demonstrate 'how to write'. By doing so, will help the students to understand about what to do even though it has already been explained before in building knowledge of topic and modelling stages.

The students will learn together with their friends in groups how to construct an exposition text. The lecturer can assign roles to each student or let them assigned the roles themselves, such as writer, editor, and reader [29], [30]. During the activity, the lecturer should monitor the students' work. If it is not finished yet, the lecturer can ask the students to finish it at home or simply let them work on it later on the next meeting.

After completion, the lecturer can ask every group to exchange papers with another group to give feedback. The feedback should cover about the structure of the text, organization of the ideas, and the rules of academic writing. To ease the reviewing process, the lecturer can give the students guidelines. The purpose of this review is to see their understanding about the characters of good academic writers and rules or ethics of academic writing to avoid plagiarism.

At the same time, the lecturer can start to find students who really work hard and practice good characters of academic writers during the joint construction stage, then prepare them to be reviewers for the independent construction stage later on. After the students' reviews are finished, the lecturer can ask their difficulties during the review sessions but still the lecturer should read their works to see how they get things done.

The lecturer can give feedback explicitly about the structure of their expository writing and the organisation of the ideas of their writing. The awareness of the lecturer to the students' mistake, including noticing their difficulties in writing the text are fundamental. The reviewing process itself can take one or two meetings. In joint construction stage, the lecturer should warn the students if they did plagiarism.

Warning the students about plagiarism is not an easy task. Being furious to the students surely will not help them to be better learners. A lecturer should be able to empower them to be better [21]. The aspect of attitude can be very difficult to achieve. Having the knowledge, for example plagiarism, does not mean the students will not be doing it. One way to do this by giving them illustration, let say, if the same thing happens to them, in this case, someone copies their writing without permission. Exploring about what they will feel will help them to care about others' feeling. Probably lecturers do not want to pay attention to this kind of problem. Yet, lecturers as educators must realize what will happen to their students in the future. The job of educators is to make sure the students can have the social skills to live in the societies later on. Ignoring this problem will leave more problems for the students in the future [31].

The last dimension of character education is action. It is about how the students' strive for excellence ethically and morally [6]. This dimension focuses in independent construction stage where the students independently practice what they have learned from previous stages. In this stage, the students read texts with different topic. By doing so, the students have to do their own building knowledge of the topic given. The lecturer reduces his or her and their friends' involvement during this stage. The reduction depends on the students' conditions because every student has different level of skills and characters to reach excellence. During this stage, the lecturer can monitor the students' works less frequently in order to provide comfortable space for them to write.

After the students finished their first drafts, perhaps not in one meeting, the lecturer can review it to see how they get things done. It will not be easy to do this especially when the lecturer handles a large class. That is why, it is important for the lecturer to finish the joint construction stage to ensure the students are able to write an exposition text and practice the good characters of academic writers because in the independent construction the lecturer will assign these kinds of students as reviewers. After the students review their friends' works, the lecturer can ask the reviewers what they have confronted during the review process. Again, the lecturer should also look the students' works. Before submission of the first drafts, the lecturer can remind the students to provide two copies of their first drafts. One draft is for the students' reviewers and the other copy is for the lecturer. By doing so can make more effective learning in a very limited time.

The lecturer can notice what went wrong from the student reviewers' reports. However, giving a huge responsibility to the students is not wise. Therefore, the lecturer still has to review the students' works. The lecturer probably will find that some students still did plagiarism that cannot be detected by the student reviewers especially when they used a very difficult expression on their own writing meanwhile they did not understand the expression. Here, the lecturer can give special notes to the students instead of giving warning like what have been done in joint construction. Still, the lecturer must give an indirect warning to the whole students, not to individual, that there will be consequences if the students still do plagiarism. By doing so, the lecturer can expect a sense of humility come from the students because of doing a mistake and hoped that

the students have learned the lesson of being good academic writers.

Character development is surely a complex process and more likely unseen from the lecturer's observations as character is about "doing the right thing when no one is looking" [32]. Giving warning and punishment at the end do not always work properly [33]. Some students might see the lecturer as not-so-wise person. Before that happen, take some times with these students and see what their problems are. Some students will try to do their best, some of them will just do what they can do, and some will do nothing. What ever happen, character development of one student is different from the other [28].

#### *B. Assessments of Students' Character Development*

Assessments of the students' character development should use more than one tool to get more valid results. From the illustration provided here, the students' writings are not sufficient for an assessment. The lecturer can ask the students to fill questionnaires or journals after each stage of SFL GBA practice. The questionnaires or journal can be about what have they learned and developed from the academic writing subject [23].

Then, the students also need to point out how did their friends' learning progress, including what is missing from their learning and what they did to help other students to achieve excellence in academic writing subject. Other important thing is the students should assess the lecturer's characters in order to see how good the efforts of the lecturer to the students in character development [32].

In order to see the effectiveness of SFL GBA in character development, five indicators can be used. First, the teaching and learning activity implements accepted principles in character education, such as students have opportunities for moral action. Second, the teaching and learning activity produces greater gains in students who experience the program, compared to students who do not. In this case, students who are absence or never come to the class will gain nothing. Third, it strengthens a school's sense of community. For example, the students learn to share their thoughts, give feedback, and critics ethically and morally in every academic activity in the campus. Forth, it employs practices that are research-based. For example, the practice of cooperative learning by assigning students in-group and everyone in the group has his or her own role. Fifth, classroom or school wide behaviour improves even if there is no control group. For example, a reduction of the number of the students who did plagiarism from join construction stage to independent construction stage can show there is a change of the students' behaviour [34].

#### *C. Important Notes in SFL GBA practice and Character Education*

Three points need to be taken into account by the lecturer in the practice of SFL GBA and character education. First, a lecturer must work hard to find good texts for the students in order to raise their interest on a certain topic discussed and to reduce boredom in the teaching and learning activity. Then, it takes more time for the students to build their knowledge on a certain topic and a certain text type or genre because some

students probably are not motivated enough to read or even to write especially related to a lengthy text.

Second, character education is more than just a teaching and learning activity in the classroom. In order to have effective character education, everyone in a school or campus should give positive influence to the students. If not, character education will not be so effective because the students think that it is just a condition that they have to deal with in the classroom [32].

Third, character education can be regarded as a form of indoctrination [35]. This assumption needs to be taken seriously because it can change the whole concept of character education. Lecturers need to understand that character education is about developing the students the good values or virtues that are beneficial and positive for them to be good citizens. Then, it is not appropriate for lecturers to model a negative character or even ignore students' character development [32].

It is not exaggerating to say that SFL GBA can cope with character education. Implementing SFL GBA can bring effective character education in Indonesia. It is an approach that has been widely used, including in Indonesia. What lecturers need to do now is to get in touch further with SFL GBA and character education, and practice it in the classroom. Avoid any sense of ignorance that may lead to pessimistic because lecturers are the one who hold the key to a successful application of SFL GBA and character education in the classroom. There will be a time for everyone in the campus and surrounding environment to be involved in order to initiate an effective character education.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Character education is about developing good characters of students in any level of education, including in higher education. Being university students do not change the reality that they do not need character development. Instead, character education is a must in higher education. One way to do it is by using SFL GBA.

The whole process of teaching and learning activity in SFL GBA can be very complex because every class, student, and lecturer is unique. There is no telling that the illustration given on this paper can be implemented to other settings. Therefore, to reach a successful teaching and learning activity is to understand and practice SFL GBA that is relevant to character education. Trial and error need to be conducted appropriately without losing the fundamental concept of SFL GBA and character education.

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