

# Techniques for Building Character and Literacy for 21st Century Education

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**Abstract**—The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze techniques of building character and literacy needed for 21 century at school. The research was conducted at North Bali Bilingual School in Bali, involving 5 teachers, the school principal, and 56 students from Grade 4, 5, and 6. The data were collected through observations and in-depth interview with the teacher and the school principal. The results of data analysis show that there are many techniques implemented at the school which are all literacy and character-based namely empowering the use of reading log and reading response journal, students' clubs and houses for building characters and reading different variations of texts, and project-based learning which emphasizes students' experiences and building their own new knowledge. Through these techniques, the students improve their literacy, and their behaviors are identified reflecting good characters.

**Keywords**-Character, Literacy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it becomes a national issue that characters and moral of Indonesian have been downgrading and many indicators of moral degradations are obvious and easily identified. Hate speech and bad expressions are scattered in social media even stated towards the president and top leaders of the country who is supposed to be highly respected. If the phenomenon is traced and analyzed, one of the causes is low literacy of the people that make them cannot differentiate between a hoax and correct information. The 21st century is indicated by digital and technology advancement (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). However, this technology makes people use it for positive as well as negative purposes. Those who are having vested interest use their skill to create hoax as a media of introducing wrong information, misleading half-truth, manipulations of facts created for establishing hate feeling or even for character assassination. On the other hands, people, because of lack of reading, do not have correct information which can be actually used to filter the information from the wrong one. False information created in the hoax can easily influence people which lead them to build wrong characters about people they inform in the hoax. For that reason, serious effort on how characters can be built and how literacy can be improved need to be seriously considered.

Literacy can be defined in many ways. Literacy is considered as the activities of reading and writing conducted by the students about the real world in order to understand the real

world itself (Purcel-Gates, et. al., 2012). It is also described as complex sets of tools or practices that one learns to employ with text to participate within certain communities (Lankshear and Knowbel, 2007 in Rainey, 2016). Literacy also refers to the ability to construct meaning through reading and writing (Owocki, 2001; Morrow, 2007; Neuman and Roskos, 1993). In the context of language learning, it refers to an ability to read and write (Bainbridge, 2008; NCREL, 2003; Haryanti, 2014).

Karatay (2011) conducted research and found out that literary work can be used as an effective method for character education at schools. Analyzing characters through literary works can lead students to perceive the values of behavior and then adopt them. Character education is an important part of establishing smart individual with good characters. Since it was introduced the first time, character education is still implemented in formal, non-formal, as well as in informal institutions in Indonesia. However, its impact is not yet well distributed (Nuryanto, 2017).

The era of the 21st century makes the role of having good character and being smart is even more important. Every student should have and acquire the skills of the 21st century as mentioned in the framework for 21st-century learning. The framework describes the skills, knowledge, and competencies students should have in order to be successful in their life and career. There are three classifications of skills such as life and career skills (flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility); learning and innovation skills (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration); and information, media and technology skills (information literacy, media literacy, ICT- information, communication and technology literacy). These skills must be mastered by each student in order to successfully thrive in the globalized world (Partnership for 21st-century skills, [www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org); Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Pertaining to the demand for 21st-century skills, one of the solutions needed is to promote literacy improvement and character building through education. Literacy improvement can be established if people read frequently to build reading habits. This is not always easy to be done, and teachers at schools often have difficulties on how reading habits can be formed on students, and what activities can be carried out for promoting literacy skills.

Despite many research conducted on literacy and character education, however, research which emphasized on character education and relates it to literacy for the 21st century is not much conducted yet. For that reason, this paper is intended to describe how character education can be implemented, what techniques to be utilized and how the techniques can build students' literacy for the 21st century.

## II. METHOD

This is a qualitative research conducted at a bilingual school in North Bali. English is one of the subjects studied at the school and the time allocated for English subject is 3x35 minutes for a week. As a bilingual school, languages of instruction are English and Bahasa Indonesia. The subjects included in this research were students of grade 4,5,6 who were 56 students altogether. Besides that, the subjects also include 5 teachers consisting of the English teacher, three classroom teachers, and the school principal. The English teacher is a native speaker of English who has teaching experience for more than 20 years. An English teacher was sometimes assisted by the classroom teacher who was not the native speaker of English. The data were collected through close observation and deep interview for about one semester. The data were analyzed qualitatively.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis towards the observations conducted at North Bali Bilingual School and interviews conducted towards the teachers and the principal of the school reveals that there are six major techniques identified for building character and literacy in the school. First, empowering reading log for shaping reading habit and discipline. This technique refers to in-class and outside class activities that involve students in the activity of continuous reading and the writing of their feeling about the book they have read in the reading log. Reading habit and discipline are shaped by careful planning that includes:

- A. Obligating each student in the school to fill in the reading log. Every student should have a reading log where the student should write the books they read every day, the kinds of books read, the amount of time spent in reading and parent's signature. The reading log is used as a medium for controlling the students to read. The use of reading log is started as soon as students registered at the school the first time as grade one students.
- B. Building the awareness of the importance of reading, and forming reading habit through introductory library program. The school introduces Introductory Library Program by asking students to borrow books at the library and choose the books they like. The introductory Library Program is character based where each student must follow the systems and rules of using the library. In other words, the students must take the initiative of what to read, be patient to queue before the librarian if needed, be responsible to returning books after they finished reading, and be respectful on the rules implemented at the library.
- C. Motivating free-at-home-daily-reading and controlled by reading the log. Every student must read the books borrowed at home; however, in case of the students are not capable of reading independently, the students can ask their parents to read the books with them. After they finish reading, they have to fill in the reading log with the information about the books they read, the amount of the time spent, and also the parent's signature as an evidence that the student has carried out his responsibility. The chances provided to students to read the books they like at home also strengthens the concept that the teacher is not only the sources of learning (Penn, 2005).
- D. Rewarding any students who have filled in the log book. The reward is in the form of points as negotiated by the teacher and the students. Every morning, during homeroom routine, the teacher controls the log book of every student and awards a certain point for those who carry out their responsibility. This system of rewarding students is very effective because the reading log evidently empowers the students to read every day and monitored by their parents. This research confirms the previous research which found out that rewarding enhances the power of repetition (Padmadewi, 2016). The facts that the students read daily can slowly build the students' habit which then leads to form their character. This study supports the importance of rewards in reading. Chen and Wu (2010) did research about rewards in reading. They reveal that rewards are very important and very valuable in motivating students to read.

Second, the implementation of Reading Response Journal to provide scaffolding so that students are trained to be responsible for their own learning. Thus, this strategy can promote students' autonomy and literacy. Teacher and students can use the journal as a way of interaction and discussion on the texts/novels the students have to read.

Third, the use of Newspaper Club as a co-curricular activity where all students who are interested in reading and making news can join the group. Their activities are to produce news related to the activities in the school. They work on a writing project, providing appropriate pictures, photographs, or other illustration, and then they can display their project on a special news corner at the school. This activity does not only train them to be critical and creative, but it is also a good exercise for them to write in a natural and challenging way.

Fourth, the implementation of Empowering Houses to enhance literacy improvement. This technique involves the activity of grouping students into several Houses. Each group is free to name their House. This grouping system is effective to improve students' literacy skills because the students read together and help one another. The reading activities are mainly literacy-based, such as rewarded-base readings, project-based activities like rice field projects, Social Science Gallery project, and other related projects. Every activity they do is assessed and the scores are added and accumulated. Every end of the semester, the school would announce the House who achieve the highest total scores.

Fifth, Project based learning technique which requires students to produce something. As the matter of fact, based on the two-week observation in the school, projects seem to be the basis for learning activity in the school. There is always a project, a smaller one is conducted almost every day, and bigger ones are conducted every Saturday or on special events. Students are encouraged to work together and carry out the projects. The focus of the activities lies more in the process they experience. The teachers give orientation to start with, and after that, the students must be able to accomplish the tasks in the group. The value of the activities lies in the opportunities for the students to experience themselves and construct their own knowledge based on the experiences they have. In other words, teaching students how to learn and manage their own learning and make reports about them orally or in writing. Most projects conducted include the practice of reading, writing, speaking and mathematics by nature. The results can improve students' literacy on reading and writing as well as in mathematics. It confirms the study by Bell (2010) which reveals that the project outcomes is a greater understanding of a topic, deeper learning, higher level reading and increased motivation to learn; and has a significant effect on students' writing competency (Chikita; Padmadewi; and Suarnaja-ya, 2013).

Sixth, the employment of Cooperative Literacy based activity that provides students with opportunities to interact, collaborate and build the skill of teamwork. The uniqueness of this technique lies in the management of grouping the students. The students can be grouped not only with classmates but also with older/younger students from different classes or even from different schools. If paired with students from other schools, it is usually conducted on special events organized by the school. For example, the school invites other students to celebrate Earth Day at the school where the students can share information from the books they read to the students from other schools.

The results of the in-depth interview with the teachers and the principal of the school clarified that the literacy-based activities conducted as mentioned previously are all arranged in a careful-planned system, and noted in the academic calendar of the school. Parents and stakeholder-related are also notified in advance so they would be able to participate in the activities which need their participation.

All activities conducted are literacy based where students should carry out a lot of readings, share information, work together in a group, and report the activities in authentic settings. Real-world literacy can be introduced by providing students with real-world activities (Purcel-Gates, et. al, 2012). The teachers bridge the school-only literacy with the real world literacy so they bring real-life literacy into the classroom. Naturally, along with the process, the students' characters grow to mirror the characters modeled from others and teachers around them.

The literacy-based activities conducted in the school are recognized as very successful because the skills and literacy of the students improve consistently which certainly of great importance for students' academic life. The findings of this study in line with Zhang (2017) who states that content literacy plays a pivotal role in students' academic development. Students need to be able to read and comprehend texts in order to access information and materials which are obtained through an understanding of content knowledge.

Learning and innovation skills of the 21st century which include critical thinking for problem-solving, creativity for innovation, and communication for collaboration are all practiced and exercised along the process of conducting all the activities and the projects. The literacy achieved by the students in the school has been a foundation and a basis of how literacy in other areas can be developed. The ability of reading and writing in English, which is provided with the 21st-century skills of learning have been managed by design and authentically practiced by the students in every activity conducted at the school. The literacy of the students has been very useful as a bridge which connects the students to understanding the world, exploring new knowledge, and obtaining new insight. The activities like the projects and the tasks carried by the students have led students to search information themselves, and build their self-directed behavior. The character building has been always empowered along the process. This is in line with the previous study which reveals that literary work can be effective for character education (Karatay, 2011). The character education is clearly indicated in the activities. For younger grade students, character building is formed by modeling and led by example along the process and when social encounter happening at the school. The assessment is conducted by monitoring the actions performed by the students, and their literacy understanding can be checked by assessing their physical response toward the instruction provided, and by monitoring the students' behavior and performances. The results of close observations confirmed that all students evidently can speak English well, produced pieces of literary works in good English and also performed behavior reflecting good personality and character

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Techniques for building character and literacy skills are not an instant process, yet very highly needed in this 21st century. The implementations of the techniques need commitment and seriousness. For continuous success, every member of the school needs to be committed and serious to plan, organize, monitor, and control the process of the implementation in order the evaluation bring satisfying results. Consequences need to be put as a part of the system as a way of strengthening positive behavior and minimizing the negative and unwanted ones. Repeating the habits of good behavior will form characters. With a good system and management, the students' literacy and character can be convincingly improved.

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