Integrating Character Education in English Language Learning: A Case Study

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Abstract

Current developments in education require language learning to focus not only on linguistic skills, but also on character building. In the context of English language learning at SMPN 2 Tellu Siattinge, the integration of character values is an important effort to instill moral attitudes and social awareness. This study examines how character education is integrated into English classes through a descriptive qualitative case study involving three seventh-grade classes, one eighth-grade class, and two teachers. The results show that teachers integrate character education through positive habits, role modeling, local culture-based learning, and reflection. Character values appear in all stages of learning opening, core, and closing with 14 values identified in the moral knowing aspect and 11 values in the moral feeling and moral action aspects. This integration proves that English language learning can be an effective means of shaping students' personalities. However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of consistency in implementation and limited variety of strategies. This study recommends the need for teacher training, the development of innovative methods, and further research on the impact of character integration on student learning outcomes. Thus, English language learning not only improves communication skills but also shapes a generation with strong character.

Keywords: *Character Education; English Language Learning; Moral Education*

Introduction

The strengthening of character education has become a national priority in Indonesia, as mandated by Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and reinforced by Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK). These policies emphasize the holistic development of students, aiming not only to enhance cognitive skills but also to foster moral, emotional, and social growth through habituation and exemplary practices. In this regard, schools are positioned as central agents in shaping students' values, with teachers, principals, and staff collectively responsible for cultivating positive character traits.

Traditionally, character education has been associated with Civic Education and Religious Studies. However, scholars increasingly argue that all educators share responsibility for students' moral development (Lickona, 1999; Zahri Harun, 2015). English language teaching, in particular, offers unique opportunities for this integration. As a subject focused on communication and cultural interaction, English classes provide space to instill values such as empathy, respect, cooperation, and tolerance. Activities like

storytelling, debates, role-plays, and peer reviews not only enhance language skills but also develop students' moral reasoning, collaboration, and social awareness (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Amanatu, 2022).

The urgency of embedding character education in EFL is heightened by the demands of 21st-century skills. Rapid social and technological changes require learners to master not only academic competencies but also soft skills such as critical thinking, adaptability, teamwork, and ethical decision-making (Herlinawati et al., 2024). Thus, integrating character values into English lessons serves a dual function: advancing language proficiency while shaping students into responsible citizens. Despite strong policy support, challenges remain in practice. Many teachers struggle to design character-focused activities due to limited training, lack of assessment frameworks, and a persistent focus on grammar and vocabulary that often overshadows value-based learning (Tsauri, 2015; Fitri Andriyanti, 2024). Research also suggests that while Indonesian schools highlight values such as discipline, honesty, and teamwork, systematic incorporation into language classrooms is still limited.

In response to these gaps, this study explores how character education is integrated into English language learning at SMPN 2 Tellu Siattinge. Focusing on classroom interactions and pedagogical strategies, the research aims to identify the types of character values emphasized, the methods teachers employ, and the challenges they encounter. By doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how EFL classrooms can serve as platforms for both linguistic and moral development in the Indonesian context.

Research Methods

This study employed a case study approach, a methodological framework suitable for exploring a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are unclear (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2012). The choice of a descriptive case study design was particularly relevant, as it enabled the researcher to provide a detailed account of how character education was integrated into English language learning at the junior high school level. This approach aligned with the research questions, which focused on "how" and "why" aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. The research was conducted at SMPN 2 Tellu Siattinge, a junior high school in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, from February to April 2025. This site was chosen because the school not only emphasizes discipline and positive student behavior but also promotes extracurricular programs, such as scouting, religious activities, and an English Fun Club, that reinforce both language and character development. Conducting the study in this setting provided meaningful insights into the integration of character values in EFL learning.

To gather the data, the study relied on purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2009; Sugiyono, 2019), with English teachers selected as the primary participants due to their central role in embedding character education in classroom practices. Data collection employed multiple techniques: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations focused on teacher–student and student–student interactions, supported by fieldnotes and video recordings, while interviews provided deeper insights into teachers' strategies, challenges, and perceptions regarding character education. These instruments were complemented by observation checklists and interview guidelines to ensure consistency and focus in data collection. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of findings, the study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (as cited in Nassaji, 2020) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Triangulation was applied by combining different data sources—observations, interviews, and recordings—to strengthen the reliability of the results. Data were analyzed following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, which involves three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the reduction stage, the raw data from transcripts and fieldnotes were simplified and organized around key themes, particularly honesty, discipline, and collaboration. The display stage involved presenting the reduced data in descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to highlight emerging patterns in the integration of character education.

Finally, the conclusion stage entailed interpreting and verifying findings through iterative analysis and triangulation, ensuring that the conclusions were firmly grounded in the collected evidence.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the data collected during the fieldwork. The findings are organized according to the research questions that guided this study. The first part focuses on the types of character values identified among students at SMPN 2 Tellu Siattinge, analyzed through the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. This analysis provides an overview of the values that emerge during the teaching and learning process, such as religiosity, discipline, honesty, responsibility, and other important traits that contribute to students' personal growth. The second part discusses how character education is integrated into English language learning, highlighting the strategies employed by teachers, including modeling, positive habituation, contextual learning, and reflection. By presenting the findings in this structure, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of both the values fostered in students and the pedagogical practices that enable their development within the EFL classroom.

Types of Character Values

Character education, as conceptualized by Lickona (1991), emphasizes three interconnected components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These dimensions are essential in shaping students' character holistically, covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. The findings from this study show that students at SMPN 2 Tellu Siattinge demonstrate various character values that align with these three domains, reflecting both the influence of the school environment and the role of teachers in guiding value formation.

Moral knowing refers to students' cognitive understanding of moral principles and their awareness of what is right and wrong. In this study, 14 character values were identified in this domain, including religiosity, discipline, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, independence, hard work, creativity, environmental care, appreciation of achievement, communicativeness, curiosity, love of reading, and love of the country. Students recognize these values through daily routines and learning activities; for example, punctuality in attending class illustrates discipline, completing assignments shows responsibility, while participation in religious practices reflects religiosity. This indicates that students possess a clear conceptual understanding of values that serve as the basis for moral reasoning.

Moral feeling represents the emotional dimension of character, such as empathy, respect, and the motivation to act in accordance with values. Eleven character values emerged strongly in this category, including religiosity, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and environmental care. These values are visible in students' affective responses, such as pride in academic achievement, empathy for peers, or concern for cleanliness and order. However, some values like love of reading, communicativeness, and love of the country were less emotionally internalized, as students tended to demonstrate passive rather than engaged responses. This suggests that while the foundation of emotional attachment to values exists, it still requires further cultivation to achieve deeper internalization.

Moral action is the behavioral manifestation of moral understanding and feelings, where values are translated into consistent habits. The findings show that 11 character values were expressed through students' actions, including leading prayers, helping peers, maintaining school cleanliness, and actively engaging in group work. These behaviors indicate that students are capable of practicing their values in real-life contexts, though not all values were consistently reflected in daily practice. Similar to the emotional dimension, communicativeness, love of reading, and nationalism were less frequently demonstrated in concrete actions, highlighting the gap between knowledge, feeling, and practice.

Taken together, the types of character values identified in SMPN 2 Tellu Siattinge reflect the dynamic process of character education, where students progress from understanding values to internalizing them emotionally, and ultimately to practicing them in daily life. The strong presence of values such as religiosity, honesty, discipline, and responsibility shows that these traits have become core

aspects of students' development. However, the partial realization of other values points to the need for ongoing reinforcement, contextual learning, and role modeling by teachers to strengthen the holistic growth of students' character.

Integration of Character Education in English Language Learning

The integration of character education into English language learning at SMPN 2 Tellu Siattinge reflects a deliberate pedagogical effort to combine linguistic development with moral and social formation. Rather than treating character and language as separate domains, teachers embed values throughout the stages of instruction, creating a holistic learning environment. This approach ensures that English lessons not only build communicative competence but also cultivate moral integrity, discipline, and social awareness among students.

One key strategy identified is modeling, in which teachers consistently demonstrate positive behaviors for students to emulate. For example, punctuality, respectful communication, and the use of polite expressions in English become daily practices that encourage students to internalize discipline and respect. In addition, positive habituation plays a significant role, as teachers design classroom routines—such as prayers before lessons, maintaining cleanliness, and orderly participation—that foster values like religiosity, responsibility, and cooperation.

Another integration strategy is contextual learning, particularly through the inclusion of local culture in English materials. Lessons that incorporate elements of Bugis traditions and values help students connect moral principles with their own cultural identity. This not only enhances comprehension but also strengthens students' appreciation of their heritage while practicing English. Moreover, reflection and feedback are consistently used at the closing stage of lessons. Teachers invite students to reflect on what they learned, not only in terms of language but also the values embedded in the learning process, such as honesty, tolerance, and environmental care.

Overall, character education is integrated into English language learning at SMPN 2 Tellu Siattinge through a combination of routines, role modeling, contextual materials, and reflective practices. These strategies ensure that character development is not incidental but intentionally woven into daily classroom activities. By embedding values into the stages of opening, core, and closing lessons, teachers succeed in turning English instruction into a medium for shaping students' linguistic competence as well as their character, preparing them to become both skilled communicators and morally responsible individuals.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study provides important insights into the integration of character education in English language learning at SMP Negeri 2 Tellu Siattinge. The findings show that character values are implicitly incorporated through positive habituation, teacher role modeling, contextual approaches that connect learning materials with students' culture and social life, and reflective activities at the end of the lesson. Through these strategies, students are able to develop character values across three dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, with most of the values established by the Ministry of Education and Culture successfully identified. Furthermore, the integration of character education is systematically reflected in the stages of learning—opening, core, and closing—where teachers consistently instill values such as discipline, religiosity, honesty, responsibility, creativity, and other positive attitudes.

Nevertheless, the study also reveals that not all character values are strongly manifested, particularly within the dimensions of moral feeling and moral action. This indicates that although the integration of character education has been effectively implemented, further reinforcement is still needed so that the values are not only understood cognitively but also deeply felt and practiced in students' daily behavior. Despite these challenges, English learning proves to serve not only as a means of developing

linguistic competence but also as an effective medium to foster personal growth and moral awareness among students.

In addition, this study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, data collection was conducted only in four out of nine available classes due to school schedules and the fact that some parallel classes were being used by other researchers. Second, the data were primarily obtained through classroom observations and interviews with English teachers, which may not fully capture students' perspectives or represent school-wide practices comprehensively. While these limitations may influence the generalizability of the findings, they do not diminish the significance of the results in understanding how character education is applied in the context of SMP Negeri 2 Tellu Siattinge.

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