“Language Teaching and Character Building”

IKIP PGRI SEMARANG
3rd - 5th November 2011

English Education Department
Faculty of Language and Arts Education
IKIP PGRI Semarang
 Proceedings
58th TEFLIN International Conference

"Language Teaching and Character Building"

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Language Teaching and Character Building

Editors

DR. Suwandi, M.Pd
Subur L. Wardoyo, P.hD
Drs. Sutoyo, M.Ed

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PREFACE

The quality of education is in fact inseparable from the quality of the students’ character. Education is considered successful when it can change the students’ behavior and attitudes toward life. It implies the meaning that the better the quality of the students, the better their character will be. If in recent years students tend to be immoral, doing anarchism, cheating, being irresponsible, being intolerant, it shows an indication of the failure of the education itself. In response to this problem, the English Education Department of IKIP PGRI Semarang hosted TEFLIN International Conference by taking the theme of “Language Teaching and Character Building.”

This conference explores approaches, issues and questions related to the character building in language teaching. Therefore, the topic areas include (1) the concepts of character building, (2) method and material development in character based language teaching, (3) trends in the linguistics study of English for science and technology, (4) courses assessment and evaluation, (5) the role of IT in language teaching, (7) translation in language teaching.

In this opportunity, the committee extends deepest gratitude and high appreciation to all contributors to make this conference possible. It is realized that the publication of this proceeding is still far from being perfect; however, hopefully it will be useful for the readers as a reference for enriching their knowledge on language teaching and character building.

Semarang November 3, 2011

Chair of the Committee

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LIFE SKILLS AS BASIC COMPETENCE TO BUILD STUDENT'S CHARACTER  
(Its Implementation in English Teaching/Learning Stages)

Senowarsito  
Dyah Nugrahani  
English Department, IKIP PGRI Semarang  
semo_ikip@yahoo.com  
nugrahaniidyah@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

In accordance with the national education system, the purpose of education is to create an all-inclusive human being, that leads the learners be able to adapt to the development of science, technology, and art, and have a professional attitude and spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social maturity. Those competencies can be accomplished if the learners have life skills. Whereas, life skills is the abilities for having adaptive and positive behavior that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. If the adaptive and positive behavior is internalized as one's attitude, it will be one's positive character. If one has good life skills, s/he may have strong character.

It should be developed learning model that can build the two components of life skills, i.e. hard skills and soft skills to students in teaching and learning process. Both must be integrated in each activity in learning and teaching process. Rationally, strengthening students' soft skills will lead to strengthening of their hard skills. The attitude of independence and responsibility will encourage self-motivation and develop creativity, and critical thinking skills.

The implementation of life skills can be carried out in every stage in English teaching learning process. It can be implemented through manipulating the course content, making one accustomed, behavior improvement, and arranging class activities. Some activities that can develop student's life skills in each learning/teaching stage are small group discussion, simulation, discovery learning, self-directed learning, cooperative learning, collaborative learning, contextual instruction, project-based learning, and problem-based learning. Those should be implemented in four stages of learning/teaching English consistently, and continuously in the form of reflective, interactive, cooperative, and collective activities.

Key words: hard skills, soft skills, life skills, characters, learning stages

A. Introduction

Nowadays, there are many graduate schools who are good academically and vocationally, but because they do not keep upright their social and personal competence, they are not able to actualize themselves in society maximally. They will have many constraints of social as well as personality which obstruct them growing in their community. They have less
fighting spirit in struggling in more competitive life. The increasing of disguise unemployment, especially from college graduates is apprehensive. It can be seen from the number of unemployment in Indonesia. The unemployment rates continue rising. In 2005, the total of jobless graduates is 323,902; and in the mid-February 2007, it has reached 1.4 million people. Now it is certainly more numerous than before (Kompas, 20 November, 2009).

Such conditions is due to lack of readiness of graduates in facing the competitiveness of life. From the beginning they were only equipped with academic and vocational skills, but less prepared to acquire soft skills to life struggling. To overcome these problems, it is required a teaching learning process that can develop students' life skills. In fact, the Goverment Regulation number 19, 2005, section 13 article (1) stated that "Life Skill Education can be put in the curriculum for primary schools to senior high schools; article (2) life skills education as contemplated in article (1) includes personal, social, academic, and vocational skills. The curriculum guidelines issued by BSNP (The Board of National Education Standard) also emphasizes life skills education as the content of curriculum for schools at all levels. On that point, both formal and non-formal education should have concerned on developing learning teaching process based on life skills.

Preliminary research on general senior high schools and vocational schools in Semarang municipality, teachers understand that life skills is scoped in the curriculum and syllabus. But it can be identified that from the lesson plan (RPP) they made, in general, the learning activities are still focused on the development of academic and/or vocational skills (hard skills) only. It does not touch much on the development of personality and social competencies (soft skills). From the interviews with a number of high school/vocational teachers in Semarang, the constraints faced by the teachers in integrating life skills in English learning and teaching is a lack of teachers' understanding about the concept of life skills-based learning and how to integrate it in English teaching learning in the classroom.

In genre-based approach of English teaching, teachers have to develop two cycles four stages for learning English to achieve the expected competencies. The two cycles are spoken to written and 4 steps or stages in the learning process are building knowledge of the text, modeling of the text, joint construction of the text, and independent construction of the text. Each stage provides the opportunity for students to gain learning experiences through the activities individually, in pairs, or groups. Each of these stages is possible to integrate the activities that lead to life skills education. The problem is: (1) How is the implementation of life skills in English teaching learning process?; and (2) How to integrate life skills education in teaching and learning English.

A study on life skills perspective is expected to contribute in the development of teaching learning process which appropriates to educational purpose. More in-depth study on this issue is expected to be useful for carrying out activities to teaching and learning process at all levels of education. It is considered as an essential issue to the existence of the facts in this present life, such as: (1) The changing of social life as the impact of technological development and social environment. It has boundary of an opportunity people to develop social and personal competence; (2) Adjustment to the competition of life (both personal and social life and the world of work) demands the mastery of the hard and soft skills (Ramdhani, 2008).

B. Life skill Perspective

Life skills is a one's ability to actualize all individual capabilities in his/her environments. World Health Organization (WHO) defines life skills as, "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday
Life skills is one's ability to be adaptive and have positive behavior to survive in real life. Furthermore, UNICEF stressed that "life skills is a behavior or attitude change development approach, designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills". Life skills is considered as an approach of the changes or the development of behavior which is intended to develop an individual to behave a solidity mastery of knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

Related to the learning in life skills perspective, life skills is basically an effort to empower people with the entire competency to conduct positive activities in improving a better quality of life. It will have a broad meaning when learning activities are designed to provide a positive impact for students in helping themselves to solve and overcome their own problems of life. It can be regarded as an ability to build attitudes, mental, and positive competence to face the reality of life. In brief, the competency of hard and soft skills is demanded in facing the competitiveness of life in their environment and the world of work.

Hard skills are referring to the mastery of science and knowledge. More specifically, hard skill is mastery of science, technology and technical skills related to the field of science. For instance: mechanical engineer should master the science and machine engineering; a doctor should be competent in the field of medical science, a soccer player must have the technical skills of dribbling, and a teacher must have the skills to educate and teach. Every profession requires mastery of certain hard skills, but soft skills must be shared in every profession.

Soft skills are the skills used in self-development, communication and cooperation with others. In general, the skills that fall into categories of soft skills are ethics, professional, leadership, creativity, cooperation, initiative, communicative ability, critical thinking, and problems solving. Theoretically, these skills can be categorized as one's skills in dealing with others (interpersonal skills) and skill in organizing themselves (intra-personal skills) which are able to develop their performance maximally. Interpersonal skills are motivation skills, leadership skills, negotiation skills, presentation skills, communication skills, relationship building skills, public speaking skills, and self-marketing skills. Being categorized as intra-personal skills are time management, stress management, change management, transforming beliefs, transforming character, creative thinking processes, goal setting and life purpose, and accelerated learning techniques.

While some dominant soft skills, such as initiative, creative, critical and analytical thinking, logical arguing, having commitment, willingness to learn, motivation, enthusiastic, reliability, independent, strong, communicative (spoken & written), adaptive, decision maker, problem solver, summarizing, cooperative, flexible, working ability in teams, managing themselves, coping ability on stress, and manage time ability are required to be applied in the world of work. Those skills are reflected in positive attitudes, such as ethical, integrated thinking, honest, responsibility, fairness, tolerance, and respect to others. According to Howard Gardner (Suwirid: 2008) the requirements and qualifications of an ideal worker can be described in diagram 1 below:
Diagram 1. The Requirements and Qualifications of An Ideal Worker

From the diagram above, it can be seen that the interpersonal and communication skills are the most essential requirements and qualifications of the successful worker, then it is followed by academic qualifications and work experience; ability or other skills. Overall soft skills are more dominant to determine one's success than hard skills are.

C. Life Skills-based Learning Approach

There are 3 main components which, according to UNICEF, are critical component of the success of Life Skills-based Learning Approach.

1. Skills should integrate the development of hard and soft skills, and among the components that exist in the hard skills and soft skills itself. Psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills are competencies that can not be separated. The proficiencies are related with other skills. As an example, the skills in making decision would be associated with a component of creative, logical and critical thinking skills, including ability to analyze the values.

2. The contents should be consisting of three aspects: knowledge, attitudes and skills.

3. Life skills-based learning methods should be reflective, interactive, cooperative, and collective. Reflective learning should provide space for participants to be able to evaluate themselves, to see their weaknesses and strengths, and able to motivate themselves to lead in making improvement. Interactive learning should provide opportunities for learners engaging in a multi-directional. The achievement of life skills will be more effective if it is done in a group that allows interactions among the learners, and is expected that there will be a cooperative activities among them. Moreover, life skills cannot be learned individually, for example, psychosocial can not be learned only by reading books alone.

The basic concept of the development of one's life skills is not only on changing in awareness and know-how, but much further in changing attitudes and behavior. "Information-based" approach in general is not enough to change attitudes and behavior. One will change his/her behavior and attitudes through exercises and by giving a manipulated situation to lead him/her having life experiences as much as possible. This will work well if there is a reinforcement, repetition, and reflection. Analogically, If a message is delivered once, your brain will remember 10% of the message a day later, and if the same message delivered 6 times a day, then our brain will remember the 90% of the message given. Life skills is the abilities for having
adaptive and positive behavior that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. If the adaptive and positive behavior is internalized as one’s attitude, it will be one’s positive character. If one has good life skills, s/he may have strong character.

D. The Targeting Life Skills Model

Hypothetically the development of life skills is how one can activate and mobilize all the competencies maximally to be implemented in surviving and struggling in daily life. Recognizing the targeting life skills seems an essential issue before implementing it in learning teaching process. The Targeting life skills can be described in the following diagram:

Diagram 2: The Targeting Life Skills Model


From the diagram, it appears that there are 4 main components to target the development of life skills. Those are Head, Heart, Hands, and Health (4Hs). Head refers to thinking and managing, which covers the aspects of managing and thinking skills; Heart refers to relating and caring, which are associated with the ability to build relationships and develop feeling and attention to others; Hands comprises working and giving, a proficiency to drive the ability of working and learning or helping others, and Health encompasses living and being, skills for survival and recognition of the existence in the environment.

Utah State Office of Education (2006) more specifically describes the core curriculum to develop life skills in the education of children. It covers thinking and reasoning, employability, systems thinking, communication, aesthetics, character, and social and civic responsibility (http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/curr/civics/lifeskills/index.). UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO put the core of the strategy and technical of life skills development. They are creative thinking, critical
thinking, decision-making, problem solving, effective communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. These skills can build one's ability to think critically and creatively, to develop alternative solutions, to consider the pros and cons, and to make rational decisions in solving all problems. Those skills also guide individual able to build interpersonal relationships with others, and to communicate effectively, to ensure that messages are delivered properly and to avoid miscommunication and misinterpretation. Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence are tools to enhance understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses that exist within him. These skills will guide one to be able to capture any opportunities and to determine treatment possibilities. Self-pride and confidence can be the thrustworthy for one to dare to act or make decisions. The ability to empathize and self-control will guide people to interact with their environment well.

One example of the achievements of the life skills development to young people about the awareness of healthy living is the development of understanding of life skills, attitudes, and values in healthy behaviors, such as the ability to reduce health risks and adopt healthy behaviors that can improve their lives in general (such, forward planning, career planning, making decisions, and establishing a positive relationship).

Some researches show that programs aimed at life skills development has produced a major impact on reducing criminal and self-destructive behavior; enhancing good social behavior, increasing the ability to plan ahead and to choose an effective solution to a problem; repairing self-image, self-awareness, the ability to adjust in his/her environment and to control emotions; increasing acquisition of knowledge, improving behavior in class; being able to control himself and to cope with interpersonal problems and uncertainty, and to find solutions to problems.

In accordance with the national education system, the purpose of education is to create an all-inclusive human being, that lead the learners have a professional attitude; spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and socially mature, and are able to adapt to the development of science, technology, and art.

The expected output of educational program is that the graduates have competitive challenges, have a professional attitude; spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and socially mature, and are capable to work together to achieve goals. For that reason, teaching and learning programs should be measured by how they can actualize their academic competence in real life. It is obviously measured from their independent attitude, creativity, responsibility and entrepreneurial spirit. Furthermore, graduates are expected to be:

a) Communicator (able to communicate spoken and written)

b) Professional (able to work with common principles, performance based development, uphold the code of ethics)

c) Leader (adaptive, responsive to the environment, proactive, motivated, able to work together)

d) Entrepreneur (high work ethic, skills, entrepreneurship, innovative, self-reliance)

e) Thinker (critical thinking, analytical, innovative, lifelong learning, researchers)

f) Educator (able to be agents of change)


In teaching and learning process, it should be developed learning model that can build the two components of life skills, i.e. hard skills (vocational and academic competence), and soft skills (social and personal competence). Teaching and learning process must integrate those skills. Rationally, strengthening students' soft skills will lead to strengthening of the hard skills of
students. The attitude of independence and responsibility would encourage self-motivation and will develop creative, innovative and critical thinking skills. In addition, the learning process must consider the sustainability of activities. The assumption is that the development of attitudes, behaviors, and skills can be achieved if they are carried out regularly and continuously.

E. The Implementation of Life Skills in Teaching/Learning Stages

In language teaching, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is the basic concept to the birth of teaching approach called Communicative Approach (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 64). Later on, through the SFL, the Genre-Based Approach is developed. This approach concerns with communicative competence which discourse competence is considered as the main competence. This competence consists of socio-cultural competence, linguistic competence, strategic competence, and actional competence. This approach is adapted in English Competency-Based Curriculum for junior and high schools (National Education Department, 2003). Genre-based English teaching approach has been introduced in junior and high school in Indonesia since 2004. Moreover, the expected competence of the curriculum includes academic, vocational, social and personal competencies as well.

Although the approaches, methods and teaching techniques are expected to be flexible, it should be emphasized that, in the implementation, the teacher is expected to consider the process or stages that are designed. It is hoped that all activities that occur in the classroom leads to one destination that is gaining competence or ability in academic as well as social and personal competence. It, of course, involves a complicated process, so the key lies on all the processes how to develop an integrated and comprehensive lesson plan.

To achieve the expected competencies, need to develop various learning models. One of them is four stages for learning language. The four stages in the process of learning are building knowledge of the field, modeling of the text, joint construction of the text, and independent construction of the text. Each stage provides the opportunity for students to gain learning experiences through the activities individually, in pairs, or groups. Each of these stages is possible to integrate the activities that lead to life skills education. The following diagram shows the 4 stages of learning English.

Diagram 3: the Four Stages of Learning (NCELTR: 1992)
The four steps which are developed in English learning are the normal and common steps in learning teaching process. Those steps can help students feel easier to understand and perform in accordance with the desired skills, through the stages of learning experience that should be passed by a student when they are learning to do something. To achieve the expected competencies, in early stage, their understanding of something must be built (building knowledge of the field). The students will be easier to understand something when they are introduced to the things that already exist or similar as a model to build their understanding of something (modeling); to help students to master what is learned, students need to perform various activities (in pairs, small groups and large groups) to get better learning experiences under guidance of teacher (joint construction of the text), and the next stage for strengthening of students’ understanding and experiencing expected skills it can be done by giving individual learning experiences (independent construction of the text).

The implementation of life skills can be carried out in every stage in English teaching learning process. It can be implemented through manipulating the course content, making one accustomed, behavior improvement, and arranging class activities. The learning model which integrates the achievement of knowledge, attitude, and skills are the small group discussions, simulation, discovery learning, self-directed learning, cooperative learning, collaborative learning, contextual instruction, project-based learning, and problem-based learning. Those activities can be implemented at each stage. We need not to change the academic and vocational competencies that have been designed. Reasonably if the learning activities are carried out and implemented consistently and continuously, social and personal competence will be developed naturally.

The learning models which build the three components of life skills, knowledge, attitude, and skills should be developed in every teaching learning process. While the basic concept of forming one’s life skill is not only in a changing of attitude and knowledge, but further also in a changing of behaviour. It can not be done instantly, but it must be done continuously and sustainably.

F. Conclusion

The purpose of education is to create an all-inclusive human being, that lead the learners are able to adapt to the development of science, technology, and art (knowledge), and have a professional attitude, and maturity in spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social (attitudes), and are able to implement all competencies in real life (skills). Whereas, life skills is the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

There are three main components of life skills-based learning approach, which should be considered. Those are skills that should integrate the development of hard and soft skills, and among the components that exist in the hard skills and soft skills itself; the contents that should consists of four aspects: social, personal, vocational and academic competence; and methods that can be reflective, interactive, cooperative, and collective.

In teaching and learning process, it should be developed learning model that can build the two components of life skills, i.e. hard skills (vocational and academic competence) and soft skill (social and personal competence). Teaching and learning process must integrate those skills. Rationally, strengthening students' soft skills will lead to strengthening of the hard skills of students. The attitude of independence and responsibility will encourage self-motivation and develop creative, innovative and critical thinking skills. In addition, the learning process must consider the sustainability of activities. The assumption is that the development of attitudes,
behaviors, and skills can be achieved if they are carried out regularly and continuously. Life skills is the abilities for having adaptive and positive behavior that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. If the adaptive and positive behavior is internalized as one's attitude, it will be one's positive character. If one has good life skills, s/he may have strong character.

The implementation of life skills can be carried out in every stage in English teaching learning stages for genre-based approach. It can be implemented through manipulating the course content, making one accustomed, behavior improvement, and arranging class activities. The activities that can be integrated in each stage are the small group discussions, simulation, discovery learning, self-directed learning, cooperative learning, collaborative learning, contextual instruction, project-based learning, and problem-based learning. To integrate life skills in teaching and learning English should consider the skills (hard and soft skills); the contents; and methods. Those should be carried out and implemented consistently, and continuously.

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