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Character education in English subject: Teachers' perceptions and strategies

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Character education is a purposeful, proactive attempt to develop good character in students or, more simply, to teach students about the right and the wrong. In relation to character education, the purposes of this study were to find out teachers' perceptions of character education and their strategies to implement it in the classroom. In addition, this study also investigated the teachers' problems in implementing character education and their proposed solution. The participants of this study were two teachers of English at one of public senior high school in Palembang and the students from two classes which taught by the two teachers. The data of this study were collected through questionnaire, interviews, classroom observation, and document review. The results of this study showed that the teachers agreed that character education was important to be applied during the teaching and learning programs through strategies such as group discussion or individual assignment. Students' characters and behaviors stated by the teachers as the problem in teaching the character education and having communication with students and observing them during the teaching and learning process were mentions as the ways to solve the problem.

Keywords: Character education, teachers' perceptions, strategies, problems, solution

INTRODUCTION

Globalization era brings a big effect on today's social life, there was a change in the way people live, think and act. It also gives a big influence on the educational area, especially in students' characters. The teachers' and school's role were really needed in order to 'fix' students' condition and to fulfill the needs in this modern era. They need to have a strong character which will help them in making decisions and in overcoming any obstacles in the life. Dealing the challenges of the 21st century requires an intentional effort to cultivate personal growth of students and the ability to fulfill social and community responsibilities as a global citizen (Bialik et al., 2015).

The Indonesia government has already set up the goal of National Education to make smart Indonesian students with a good attitude, behavior that would lead them to have a good characteristic. It was proved in The 1945 Constitution Article 31 point 3 and the government regulation of National Education system number 20 years 2003. Through the constitution and the regulation, Indonesia government hopes that the national education can create a good human or students with good character, moral, attitude who believe and piety to God Almighty, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and being a democratic and responsible citizen and it is in line with the eighteen characters value defined by the Ministry of Indonesia National Education, as follows: 1) Religious, 2) honest, 3) tolerance, 4) discipline, 5) work hard, 6) creative, 7) independent, 8) democratic, 9) curiosity, 10) the spirit of nationality, 11) love

the homeland, 12) appreciating the achievement, 13) communicative, 14) love the peace, 15) reading interest, 16) environmental awareness, 17) social awareness and 18) responsibility (Indriani and E, 2017).

Character is the mental and moral qualities of someone. The character can be defined as a full set of psychological characteristics, formed in part by growth in cognition that enables a person to act as a moral agent (Althof and Berkowitz*, 2006). On the other hand, character means the individuals inner makeup as a well-established structural whole as manifested in the individual's actions habits and mode of thought, as well as in the human sphere of the emotions (Bialik et al., 2015).

Whereas, character education is about the acquisition and strengthening of virtues (qualities), values (ideal and concept), the capacity to make wise choices for a well-rounded life and thriving society and good hope for people in this global era because character education aims are to build the foundation to lifelong learning, support successful relationships at home, in the community and the workplace, and last character education can develop the personal values and virtues for sustainable participation in a globalized world (Jubilee Centre of Character and Virtues, 2017). Character education is also defined as the intentional effort that needs to be developed in core ethical and performance values of young people (Lickona et al., 2014).

In the Indonesia education system, character education included in the newest curriculum designed by the governance, the 2013 curriculum. They claimed that all subjects were fully integrated with character values so it means that those character traits must be involved in lesson plans and must be applied during the teaching and learning process. The governance hopes that the teacher or the school can give and deliver the character education in the class through the material that they use in delivering the subject matter as it mentioned by Stiff-Williams (2010) that character education must be integrated with field studies and continuous through all classes and taught by all teachers. Yet, the fact is nowadays the teacher and the school, they are focusing more on the students' skill rather than students' character (Bialik et al., 2015). The lesson plan with character values included might be designed by the teachers but in fact, the activities done by the teachers in the classroom did not promote the character values (Pratiwi, 2018).

Teaching and implementing character education in the classroom are not easy, the school together with teachers must be planned the direct instruction in advance (Pala, 2011). Some strategies might be used by the teachers in implementing character education during the teaching and learning process, such as discussion, brainstorming, or doing the assignment. Reading literature could also be a strategy to build students' character. It is in line with Tyra (2012) who said that children's literature can be a strategy for the teacher in teaching character education in English classrooms. Smith and B (2002) said that whether told in the books of children or of adults, stories give the reader an experience of living through the trials and thrills of characters. The discussion could also be a strategy for the teachers in teaching the character education in the learning

program (Leifeld and A, 2015). Discussion is a hidden project of teacher, through discussion in the classroom the teacher can insert and teach character education to the students.

In developing students' character, the teachers need a long process. They might find some problems during the process. Students' backgrounds and the lack of knowledge about character education from the teacher could be the problems for teachers implementing character education in the classroom. Students came to the school with different backgrounds and diverse characters. Without a doubt, it would affect the way they socialized in school. It was noted by UNESCO (2010) that the values and attitudes people live by affecting the way they relate to others and their activities. While students' social environment such as family, friends, and school helps them in creating their character (Ozen, 2011). There should be adequate knowledge of the teacher to solve this but in fact, many EFL teachers in Indonesia got difficulties in implementing character education during teaching and learning process such as connecting the character and the teaching material, the lack of experiences in teaching the character values and students' background (Nova, 2017).

Despite that, the problems that the teacher faced during the process of developing students' character were not a 'dead-end'. The teacher might use an activity that could help them such as observation. Observation plays a main role in teaching practice, it helps the teacher to collect the information about their students that can later use during the follow-up discussion (Richards et al., 2011). Then, the rich content of the subject matter could also help the teacher in developing students' character. Lickona in 1993 said that teachers can teach values through the curriculum by using ethically rich content of the academic subjects.

This study was in line with some studies done by Ampel (2009) and Nova (2017). Ampel in 2009 shared the teachers' perceptions of character education, it said that character education proved to be useful in expressing the ideal and explicit action for the school to ensure a balance between academics and positive character values but this situation might not be implemented in the school environment if the teachers do not have adequate knowledge and skills of character education. In fact, rather than building students' character, some teachers focusing more on raising the students' scores.

Then, Nova in 2017 whose study was to know the implementation of character education in Indonesian EFL classroom, had found out that Indonesian EFL teachers have inserted character education during the teaching and learning process with several frequencies and different focuses. Yet, there were several obstacles that the teacher faced during the implementation of character value that categorized three major obstacles; they were teachers' pedagogic, students, and the teachers themselves. However, there is a gap between this study and the two previous studies. The data collection of those studies was taken from several schools with a large number of teachers as the participant. While this study conducted at one school in Palembang with only two teachers of English as the

participants. Thus, there might be a possibility that the result of this study could not be generalized to other teachers from a different school and the responds to the questions were not answered carefully. The lack of understanding and teachers' reluctance may have influenced teachers in responding to the questions.

By looking from the previous related study, this study is essential to be undertaken because it is expected that the results of this study could change some teachers' mindset that prioritizes more in students' academic achievement only and also help the teacher, especially the teacher of English, to find out the appropriate strategy in implementing character education in the classroom.

So, to reach the expectation of this study, the writer conducted a study in one of public senior high school in Palembang where they had already applied the 2013 curriculum which means they should provide some activities to build students' character during the teaching and learning process. Moreover, based on the pre-observation, the teachers claimed that they have already applied and taught character education through some activity both outside and inside the classroom. Thus, the objectives of this study were to find out teachers' perceptions of character education and their strategies in implementing the character traits in the classroom. This study was also to know the problems or challenges that teachers got during the implementation and also their solution for the problem.

METHOD

This study was a qualitative study which use descriptive qualitative to describe the finding. This study was conducted to get the perceptions among teachers of English of character education. Qualitative study is used to explore a problem and develop a detail understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell and W, 2012). The site of this study was in one of public senior high school in Palembang. The participants of this study were the teachers of English from that school who taught the tenth grade with the total number of two people and the students from both classes. The initial of the teacher would be Teacher 1 (T1) and teacher 2 (T2). The information of the participants was presented in **Table 1**:

This research study used a triangulation technique. This research study was used methodological triangulation which involved the use of multiple methods of data collection (Carter et al., 2014). The ways to collect the data were presented in **Table 2**:

In collecting the data, the two teachers of English had to answer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was about character education. The questionnaire was used to get the teachers' perceptions about the character education in English classroom. The questionnaire was based on five points of Likert scale from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD), for this research the teachers have to choose always, almost always, sometimes, never and unsure to answer the questionnaire. The

questionnaire was taken from a thesis written by Tuff (2009), and it consisted of 5 questions, 3 questions in section one which talked about the demographic information of teachers and 2 questions in section two which talked about the teachers' perceptions of character education. The complete results of questionnaire could be seen in the appendix.

After giving a questionnaire, the interviews were conducted with the teachers in order to strengthen the perception. The interview questions related to the research problem. The questions for the interview were the open-ended questions which will follow up the response that interviewees give to the particular questions by the researcher to encourage them to elaborate and explain their thinking (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2012). In order to know the strategies used by the teachers, the observations were conducted in both of the teachers' classes. The observation was conducted while the teacher was teaching, this activity was conducted to see what strategies that the teachers use in characterize students. The writer also observed the students in both classrooms, this observation was conduct to see whether the students had already characterized by the activities that the teacher gave to them or not. The teachers' lesson plans were reviewed by the writer with document review. The document review was conducted in order to get more information about the strategies. The data from lesson plan was used to support the result of observation.

The descriptive analysis was used to analyze the instruments. Each question in the questionnaire was analyzed and described by seeing the total percentage of the point in the questionnaire. Then, the writer transcribed the record of the interview and made it as a script. This necessitates a need to convert these words to a computer document for analysis. Alternatively, the writer might listen to the tapes or read the field notes to begin the process of analysis (Creswell and W, 2012). After that, the writer analyzed the script along with the result of the questionnaire and then describes them to get the perception.

For the observation, the writer saw the result of the observation through the checklist then described it based on the checklist to find out the strategies used by the teacher in applying and implementing the character education. In order to strengthen the result of observation, the writer reviewed the lesson plan used by the teachers when they taught the subject material. The results of the document review were described by the writer.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perceptions of Character Education

After analyzing the data, it was found that both of the teachers of English from this school shared the same perceptions about character education. They agreed that character education program was really important to be inserted in the teaching and

TABLE 1 | Demographic Information of the Teacher

Respondent	Age	Experience	Male/Female
Teacher 1	42 years old	>15 years	Male
Teacher 2	25-30 years old	1-5 years	Female

TABLE 2 | Instruments of the Study

No	Research Questions	Instruments			
		Questionnaire	Interview	Observation	Document
1	What are the teacher's Perceptions of character education in English subject?	P (English teachers)	P (English teachers)		
2	How are the teachers' strategies in applying character education during teaching and learning process of English subject?		P (English teachers)	P (English teachers, students)	P (lesson plan)
3	What is the problem faced by the teachers in applying character education during teaching and learning process?		P (English teachers)		
4	What is teachers' solution for the problem that they faced?		P (English teachers)		

learning process and they also agreed that school takes a big responsibility in creating their students' character.

From the result of the questionnaire, both of the teachers gave a positive response over the first question. Teacher 1 and teacher 2 chose primary (100%) as their responses to the question. Both of them were agreed that school had a big responsibility in developing students' character. The way teachers and other staff interacted would influence the way students socialized with others. It could be proved from both of the teachers' responses to the questions about the school's responsibility in teaching 18 characters value which presented in **Table 3**:

The second question was talking about which character education traits that the teachers integrated into their teaching practice. The first teacher who was taught more than 15 years respond it that he always integrated (100%) those 18 character education traits by the Ministry of Indonesia National Education in the classroom. Inversely proportional to teacher 1, the second teacher was choosing always (66.6%) and almost always (33.3%) as her responses. She did not integrate all the character traits during the teaching and learning process because of the lack of knowledge about the character she said. There were only 12 character values that she believes integrated by her during the teaching and learning process. It could be proved from their responses which presented in :

School was a place where students' character gets easily to influence because they spend most of their time in this place. It could be from their teachers, friend, and school environment. It is a must for the school to develop their students' knowledge and skills along with the good character. Character education is not a subject that can be taught directly like math or biology, it is something that must be integrated with the subject matters and implemented during the teaching program. Stiff-Williams

(2010) said that character education must be integrated with field studies and continuous through all classes and taught by all teachers. Moreover, schools have a responsibility to foster a virtue, define and make a priority list of what they want then integrate them into all teaching (Jubilee Centre of Character and Virtues, 2017). Then, Ampel (2009) said that school is an academic place that prepares the future life of the country's youth, both from their academics and attitude.

Character education gives a good impact on students' life. Goss et al. (2014) said that attitude and character can have a major impact for school environment. Then, high-quality character education can promote academic achievement (Benninga et al., 2006). From the interview, the two teachers from this public school Palembang agreed that character education had a positive impact for the school environment, especially for their students. It could be seen in the results of the interview of teacher 1 and teacher 2:

Teacher 1:

I saw some students get a problem in their first year at the school, for example, they are not discipline and get a bad score in some subjects. But through the rules made by the school and also the motivation given by the teacher, slowly but sure they change into someone better than they used to be."

Teacher 2:

"Character education is really important to be inserted in the school subject. For me, education could be a good place to build a character. The good character of students will lead them to good achievement."

Next, based on the interview results, these two teachers of English agreed that in success the character education program, there must a good collaboration between parents and school.

TABLE 3 | Level of Responsibility school should play in Teaching 18 Character Education Traits

No	Character Traits	Primary		Somewhat		Just a bit		Not at all	
		T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
1	**Religious**	P	P	–	–	–	–	–	–
2	**Honesty**	P	P	–	–	–	–	–	–
3	**Tolerance**	P	P	–	–	–	–	–	–
4	**Discipline**	P	P	–	–	–	–	–	–
…	**….**	P	P	–	–	–	–	–	–
17	**Social caring**	P	P	–	–	–	–	–	–
18	**Responsibility**	P	P	–	–	–	–	–	–
N		18	18	0	0	0	0	0	0
Percentage		100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

No	Character Traits	A		AA		S		N		UNS	
		T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
1	**Religious**	P	P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	**Honesty**	P	P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	**Independent**	P	-	-	P	-	-	-	-	-	-
…	**…**	P	P	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	**Democratic**	P	-	-	P	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	**The spirit of Nationality**	P	-	-	P	-	-	-	-	-	-
N		18	12	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Percentage		100%	66.6%	0%	33.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Teacher 1:

"Well, there should be collaboration among parents, school and teachers to shape students' character education. School and teacher have to work together with parents to develop students' character. For me, children's character development has happened in the home means from their parents."

Teacher 2:

"That's right; I agree with the statement that parents, school, and teacher should do a collaboration in developing students' character because I think it will be useless if we the teachers and school have already taught students about character education but there is no support from their parents. It will make the students get confused because what they get in the school is different from what they get in the home."

Big support and good collaboration between parents and the school's staff is really important to success the character education program. A good communication between teachers and parents could be a kind of collaboration between them. Parents were the first and important moral educators of their children (Lickona et al., 2014). Yet, schools play an important role, along with parents and community members in modeling, reinforcing the important value, and preparing students to be better than they used to be (Tuff, 2009).

Teachers' Strategies in Applying Character Education

From the interviews and observation results regarding to the teachers' strategies, both of the teachers were already trying so hard to shape their students' character. They used some strategies that might be effective in implementing character values because they realize that character education could give a good impact both for their attitude and achievement though some values that did not applied by the teachers during the learning process. Those strategies used by them were hidden in the learning activities started from the pre-activity, whilst activity, and post-activity. Yet, the most strategy used by the teacher to build students' character was group discussion. They also made themselves as an example in showing the good character. The list of strategies that teachers used in implementing character education could be seen in **Table 4** :

As it was mention before, the most strategy used by both teachers was group discussion through literature. They believe that by doing this activity, students might build their character because discussion let students to share their point of view and taught students to appreciate each other or it could be said that discussion was used as a method which shared a different point of view that involves both written and oral expression (Jubilee Centre of Character and Virtues, 2017). Then, litera-

TABLE 4 | The **strategies that the Teachers Used in Implementing Character Education**

NO	Strategies	Character Education Traits
1	Praising God Almighty	Religious
2	Brain storming	Curiosity
3	Group Discussion	Tolerance, Honesty, Democratic, Appreciating, Responsibility, Communicative, Creative, Independent.
4	Doing assignment	Responsibility, Discipline, Independent, Creative, Honesty, Reading Interest.

ture might also be a strategy and technique that help students to build their character. Children's literature can be a strategy that might help the teacher in applying character education in EFL classroom (Tyra, 2012) because reading and responding to literary works do not only function as something entertaining for the students but also give moral values that will influence their behavior and to strengthen the establishment of character and personality (Inderawati, 2012).

Besides observing the teachers, the writer was also observing the students from 2 different classrooms, one class from teacher 1 and one class from teacher 2. Based on the observation, the students from those two classes had already performed the good characters, though they did all the activities just because following their teachers' instruction. But without they realize, they had already shaped themselves into a good student with a good attitude and character. Even though some character traits were not appeared at that time, but the writer believes that someday the students will form others character since they are still in a process.

Teachers' Problems in Applying Character Education

Teaching students in digital era were full of challenges, they were 'a product' of today's modernization. During teaching and implementing character education in the classroom, the teachers might get the challenges and both teachers were agreed there were challenges in teaching and implementing the character education in the classroom. The following were the teachers' statements:

> My students came from different backgrounds and also came with a different character. Some of them are really active while some of them are the attention seeker, they do everything only to get the teachers' attention. It is not easy to deal with them.

> *Teacher 1*

> Sometimes I got difficulties to make the students who were not really active be a little bit active, to make the active students not covered all the activity and make the trouble maker realized that what they did all this

time was not good. I am also a new teacher here, I get lack of training about character education.

> *Teacher 2*

So, from the interview results, it could be said that both of the teachers got a problem in understanding their students' character that came from different backgrounds and the lack of knowledge and training about character education. Those problems faced by teacher 1 and teacher 2 were in line with a statement from Nova (2017) who stated that connecting the character values and teaching material, the lack of experiences regarding character education and students' background were the difficulties that many EFL teachers in Indonesia faced during the process of implementing the character value. Whereas, according to Leifeld and A (2015) teacher should actively learn a specific curriculum and method to get success in teaching character education in the classroom because teaching character education to the students is not only by giving some advice to them but also showing how exactly the value work in the real life.

Teachers' Solutions to the Problems

Teacher was a facilitator for students in learning the academic and a model in implementing the character values, they had a responsibility to tell and show his/her students which one was wrong and which one was right though they faced some problems during the process. Yet, the problems were not a failure for the teacher. Based on the interview result, it could be concluded that teacher 1 and teacher 2 tried their best to deal with the problems they found out during implementing the character education. Here were the teachers' answers during the interview:

> I tried to communicate with my students. Asked them what was their reason to behave so badly in the classroom and what they actually wanted to. After that, I motivated them, guided them so that sooner or later the students could change to be a good individual.

> *Teacher 1*

I observe my students first and make a note about them. The observation is to know the reason why they act like that and also as the reflection for me. Then, I tried to find and read as many research articles related to character education as I can. It quite effective for me. I observe my students first and make a note about them. The observation is to know the reason why they act like that and also as the reflection for me. Then, I tried to find and read as many research articles related to character education as I can. It quite effective for me.

Teacher 2

"I observe my students first and make a note about them. The observation is to know the reason why they act like that and also as the reflection for me. Then, I tried to find and read as many research articles related to character education as I can. It quite effective for me."

From the interview results above, it could be concluded that both teachers used the positive things that they thought might help them in facing the problem such as communicate with students and then observe them. Communication between teachers and students was really important because an act of communication generally has a desired outcome and communication is affected by the emotions, beliefs, and social orientations of those involved (Metusalem et al., 2017). So, through this activity, the teachers might get more information about their students. Knowing their problems, knowing what they actually wanted to do, or even knowing who their students were. Through communication, the teachers could decide which strategy that they are going to use in implementing the character education. Moreover, communication between teachers and students is one of the ways to strengthen the character values in the school environment (Jubilee Centre of Character and Virtues, 2017).

Then, besides did communication with their students, the teachers were also observing their students. As an educator, observing their students was a good way to know students more. By doing observation, the teacher would acquire more about their students' information that can later use during the follow-up discussion (Richards et al., 2011). So, it could be said that by observing their students, teachers can get more information that can be useful for them in deciding which strategy that might help them in developing students' character.

To sum up, the same perceptions among teachers and the same strategies regarding the character education were really important because when the teachers did not share the same perceptions about this program, there will not be a general character education culture in the school environment. Ampel (2009) stated that it is a must for all teachers to be ready and own similar perceptions on importance, efficacy, and practice of character education to possess a quality and consistent character education program within a school environment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was talking about teachers' perceptions of character education and their strategies when they applied and implemented character education program during the teaching and learning process. The results of this study indicated that two teachers of English from one of public school in Palembang had the same perceptions. They agreed that character education is really important for students because character education teaches students to be an educated person who has a good attitude and can be wise in choosing between right and wrong for their own life and people around them.

Next, from the strategies that those two teachers used in teaching and applying character education during the teaching and learning process, they also share almost the same strategy. For example, they used group discussion as a strategy to implement character values during teaching and learning process, they let their students build their character by sharing opinion and discuss a topic in a group but it does not mean that the teachers do not care with students. The teachers are a facilitator, a guide, and a role model for students during the process of implementing character values. They will be there when students need help and guidance from them.

Then, the problems that both teachers get during the implementation of character education in the classroom are actually almost the same. Both of them get difficulties in dealing or understanding students' character because each student shares a different character. Yet, they had tried their best to clear the problem. They had found the solution for the problems such as communicating with students and observing the students. Summing up, the result of this study might not be the best. Yet, it could be additional information for other teachers in understanding character education. It also could help the teachers to change their mindset that character education is as important as students' academics. Besides, the result of this study might help teachers to find out strategies in implementing character education that fit with their teaching style.

Last but not least, some suggestions are given to the teachers and the school. Suggestion for the teachers is they need to prepare everything well in order to implement character education during teaching and learning process. Find more resources or teaching material that reflects character education or teaching material that could shape students' character. Be consistent in showing the character value to the students as they are the real role model for them in the school. For the school, big support is really important to success character education program. Facilitate teachers by giving a chance to join character education training. Set a friendly school environment that could shape and develop students' character. School environment is a perfect place for children to experience lesson related to character issues (Skinner and S, 2013).

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