

Incorporating Character Education And Bilingual Literacy Into Early Childhood Classroom: Practical Ideas

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Abstract: Character education and literacy becomes prominent issue in today's education and it is suggested to be taught earlier. Since children have unique characteristics in learning, specific methods and media are frequently required to make them engage during the lesson. This article attempts to elaborate practical ideas for classroom practice for the inclusion of character education and bilingual literacy by using bilingual big book. Bilingual big book here refers to a big book with pictures created by the teachers. It uses teacher-made stories delivered in two languages: Bahasa Indonesia and English. Teacher-made stories are suggested for the character education so the stories can be adjusted with the students' language abilities and preferences. Teacher made-stories also enable them to set the targeted moral values. In this paper, it will provide step-by-step activities to implement the bilingual big book in the classroom. It will also give some pedagogical recommendations for teachers to engage young learners in learning English. It is expected that this article can benefit teachers of early childhood for promoting bilingual literacy and inserting character education.

Keywords: early childhood education; big book; bilingual education; character education

INTRODUCTION

Teaching young learners has different characteristics compared to teaching teens and adults. The students should be treated equally to appreciate their uniqueness and potentials. Thus, young learners' teachers should provide an educational environment which allows them to play as well as to grow [1]. Although preschool is not included in the formal education, this period is considered important because the students are in the golden age period. Children who are in the age of 4-5 years old should actively interact with their friends and adults. It is due to the scaffolding process occurs when students having interaction, doing challenges, or getting supports from the others. During the golden period, children should be guided to develop their motor, social, and language skills.

The structure of curriculum for preschool consists of intracurricular activities and the enhancement of *Pancasila* (The Five Principles) learners' profile. [2] The intracurricular activities focus on learning by playing as it is suggested by the new campaign of ministry of education, that is independent in learning, independent in playing. Therefore, the activities should be meaningful and enjoyable for the students. The learning resources are expected from the things near the students' environment. When the resources are not available, teachers can use book or technology as alternatives.

One of important skills for children is literacy. The European Literacy Network [3] define literacy as the ability to read and write as well as to understand and use information from any media. Literacy skills are basic abilities for children to be able to understand the world, and be able to use these abilities in their daily activities. Today, children are not only expected to able to read and write in their L1, but also are encouraged to know foreign languages. Therefore, bilingual education becomes prominent in the recent years. Although it has controversy, bilingual children are reported get more advantages than the monolinguals [4]–[6]. Bilingual children have more opportunities to acquire the foreign languages, especially in their pronunciation.

Furthermore, character education also gains more and more attention. Santrock [7] postulates that children were born immoral, but they have the potentials to learn through interaction with adults and reflection from their experiences. Character education should be infused to children education so they can grow appropriately with good manners and attitudes [8]. Children should be introduced to the moral values so they can filter good and bad things to do. Character education in kindergarten is usually given through modelling, but inserting it in the teaching and learning materials is also advised.

One of popular strategies for teaching literacy and character education is through storytelling. This technique is considered effective because most of children love stories. It is reported that storytelling becomes the third favorite of children choices of learning strategies after playing and singing [9]. Through story, children learn while listening and they do not feel that the teachers are teaching them [10]. Storytelling also helps learners to improve their vocabulary, including foreign language vocabulary [11]. Therefore, storytelling benefits young learners' teachers for both the inclusion of character education and introduction of bilingual literacy.

Seeing the advantages, the authors then interested in proposing practical ideas for applying storytelling in the preschool classroom. Storytelling here is accompanied with bilingual big book. Big book refers to a big book with simple story and interesting illustration. The stories in the big book is advised to be teacher-made so they can embrace the teaching objectives wanted to be achieved, the vocabulary wanted to be taught, and the moral values wanted to be introduced. It was reported that storytelling book could effectively be used in young learners' classroom and it helped the students to understand the moral values infused in the story [12]. Although it is considered effective, there is only a few articles which discuss how to implement big book and storytelling in the classroom. Therefore, this article attempts to detail the step-by-step teaching activities that can be applied in the classroom. It is expected that kindergarten teachers or young learners' practitioners can adapt or adopt the lesson in their classroom.

RATIONALE

The importance of character education and bilingual literacy for young learners

In this modern era, moral values are slowly being eroded. The occurrence of modernization in various aspects of life has its own impact on the nation's generation, both young people and children. Nowadays, children are vulnerable to moral degradation in various aspects such as attitudes and behaviors. Children development is affected by parenting and education [13]. It is explained that parents are the primary educators in influencing their children. Therefore, effective parenting is one of the efforts that parents should attempt to [14]. Parenting and education of children must receive attention so that they do not become children who are weak in faith and grow up to become a pious generation.

One of important aspects of development for early childhood is religious and moral values. Therefore, character education is a basic need in creating humans who have good personality and behavior [15]. Young learners who are infused with good moral values are expected to grow well and can differ between good and bad behaviors. Hapsari explains that character has the meaning of a fixed character or nature and can be a feature to identify a person's personality, an object or an event. Character is a characteristic of a person's nature or character that can distinguish one individual from another. Character is formed from three interconnected components, namely moral knowledge, moral feeling and moral behavior. To have a good character, it is necessary to know the good and to do the good things. With good character, a person will be able to direct his life appropriately and to be more mature because he understands what he should do [8].

Instilling character values into preschoolers, such as kindergarten students, requires learning methods that can lead to teaching children's character and moral values. Most of the methods used in the kindergarten are grouping and classical methods, such as playing and singing. Good learning activities for kindergarten students are learning activities that stimulate children's curiosity, children's motivation, children's intelligence, and also children's preferences. One of the learning activities that meets those criteria is storytelling. Storytelling stimulates students' imagination. Interesting story even can immerse the students to enjoy plots and learn life lesson without realizing it. In the storytelling, students can learn the phonology, the morphology, the syntax, the semantics, and the pragmatics of the language [16].

In storytelling, teachers usually will need visual aid to help learners better understand the story. Photos or illustrations are good media because it can visually explain what the teacher is being talk about. Big book is one of suggested media because it usually contains only 15 pages, have simple and short story, but interesting with repetitive vocabulary [17]. Repetition in vocabulary is salient for literacy teaching because it will help young learners to retain the vocabulary longer. In addition, for a bilingual big book, it should noticed that the vocabulary used are limited to vocabularies that are concrete, meaningful and around the students. Abstract vocabulary will be hard to be explained and understood.

Proposed Procedure For Teaching Character Education And Bilingual Literacy Using Bilingual Big Book Storytelling

In this section, we would like to share a procedure consisting of four stages for teaching character education and introducing bilingual vocabulary to early childhood classroom. This procedure is based on our previous research on the development of bilingual big book storytelling for teaching kindergartens [18].

Step 1: Planning and creating the story

Using teacher's made story is suggested because the teachers can plan what they want to convey through the story. Teachers can limit how many vocabularies should be used and what kinds of moral value should be introduced to the students. Using available story is fine, but it is possible that the two mentioned benefits cannot be fully achieved. In addition, creating story for preschool is not difficult. The procedure for creating the story can be completed using these three steps: 1) to determine the

objective (including the moral value), 2) writing the storyboard, and 3) arranging the story and pictures.

First, when setting the objectives, teachers can refer to the syllabus or list of themes. The selection of the moral value can be based on that particular theme, for example when teaching about *Myself*, teachers can teach them about discipline, honesty, and confidence. After that, start to think about the setting and the plot. Children story usually use simple plot. Figure 1 shows the example of writing plot for teaching about self-discipline.

Table 1. Example of Storyboarding for children story

Setting		
Characters: Rara (Female-4 yo), Raja (Male-4 yo), Bu Ani (Female-30 yo)		
Time and Place: In the morning, at school		
Plot		
1. Rara and Raja plays at the school yard	2. Bu Ani comes to Rara and Raja, giving advice about health protocols	3. After playing, Raja forgot to wash his hands
4. Rara reminding Raja about Bu Ani's advice	5. Raja then washes his hands	6. Bu Ani and Rara give compliments to Raja

Table 1 shows that the story is simple. It is started by introducing the setting and characters. Then, it ends by giving rewards for the character who performs good behavior. After having the storyboard, teachers then can make their own big book. Using drawing book (A3) is the easiest option because it is available in the market. Teachers can draw themselves or using some pictures from the *Google Images*. Although the quality of the picture is important, the teachers' way to tell the story to children is much more important.

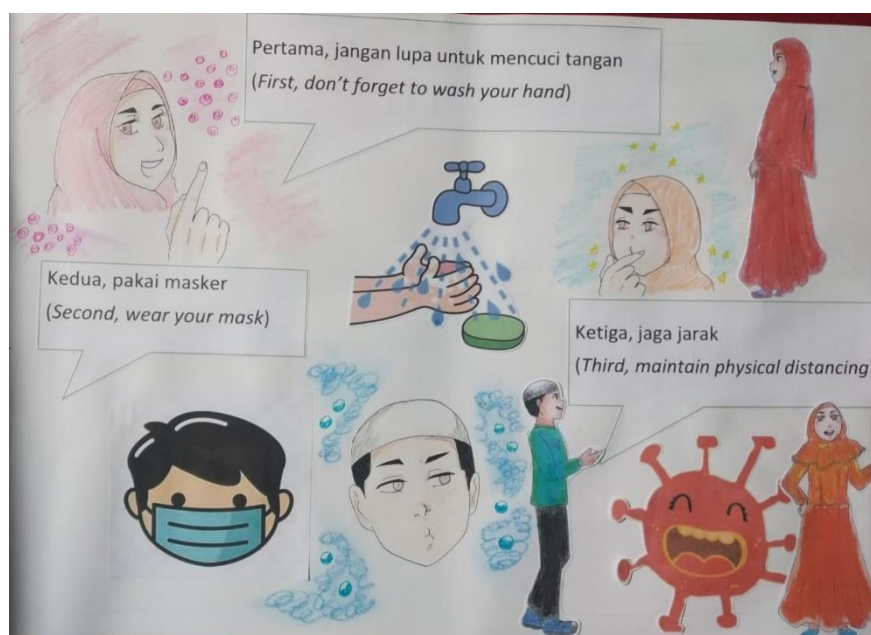


Figure 1 gives an example of teacher's self-drawing for the big book.

It can be observed from Figure 1 that all of those pictures can be easily found in the *Google Images*. They also can get helps from their colleagues who are good at drawing and their store the pictures for future use. Therefore, if teachers are not good at drawing, they do not need to be worry for creating their own story and big book.

Step 2: Introducing and internalizing new vocabulary

Before coming to the storytelling activities, we need to introduce the students to new vocabulary they are going to encounter during the story time. Since it is a teacher-made story, of course, we already set the vocabulary. In the bilingual big book, the story is written in two languages: Bahasa Indonesia and English. Teachers also can write it in the students' L1 and English. This option is based on the students' and school's needs. What we need to remember is the language should be simple and repetitive. Repetition is necessary so the students can retain the vocabulary.

When introducing the vocabulary, using flashcard is suggested. The use of flash cards are considered effective for vocabulary learning and early reading training [19][20]. Figure 2 shows the example of how to use flash cards for children before the story time.



Figure 2. How to Use Flashcards for Introducing Vocabulary

Flashcards usually are designed back and forth. On the back, we can write the name of the vocabulary in Bahasa Indonesia and English. Meanwhile, on the front, we can insert the picture of the vocabulary. Therefore, we can show the picture first, then ask students to guess the vocabulary in their L1. After that, train them to mention in Bahasa Indonesia and English. Teacher also can use the flashcards as a means for assessment of the vocabulary so that we can track the students' progress. When the students can mention the vocabulary in both Bahasa Indonesia and English, it means the vocabulary has successfully been acquired by the students. This activity can be repeated several times during the lesson.

Step 3: Story time

After the students recognize the new vocabulary, we can start to use the bilingual big book to start the story. Ask students to sit in a big circle, surrounding the teacher. When reading the story, invite the students to read aloud or repeat what the teacher's said. Al-Mansour and Al Shorman [21] reported that reading aloud significantly improved students reading comprehension during the story time. Teachers also should not talk alone during storytelling. They should have interaction with the students by asking some questions. Ariani and Haryono [10] emphasizes that it is not only the story which is important during the storytelling, but also the teacher's way to deliver the story.

Therefore, it is suggested that during the story time, teacher can use some of the following alternatives:

1. Invite the students to read aloud the story
2. Frequently ask questions to engage the students during the storytelling. For instance, when seeing a picture of a soap in the big book, ask the students what it is. When showing the characters doing good or bad things, the teachers also can ask the students their opinion.
3. Ask students to act out activities in the story. For example, when the teacher said, "Now, Raja is washing his hands" the students could perform the activities together.

Step 4: Interactive Story Quiz

The last step is doing a quiz. This activity is intended to track students' comprehension towards the story, their acquisition of vocabulary, and their understanding of the moral value introduced in the story. To measure their comprehension, teachers can make simple questions regarding the story, such as "Where were Raja and Raja?" "What were they doing," etc. Then, to assess their vocabulary acquisition, again teachers can utilize flashcards used in the step 2. Another alternative is by using realia can be found in the classroom. Last, for investigating the character education, teachers can use simple yes-no questions. For example, "Is wearing mask good?" "Is not washing hands after playing good?" The make the students more engaged during the quiz, teachers give stars for the students who can answers the quiz correctly. Figure 3 shows the example of story quiz report.




Name	Rewards
Queenzi	
Rony	
Abdullah	
Malik	
Paramita	

Figure 3. Story report quiz

CONCLUSION

Teaching young learners require teachers to be creative in selecting the methods and media for delivering the lesson. For the purpose of introducing literacy and infusing character education, bilingual big book storytelling can be an option to be implemented in the classroom. This method and media can engage students by inviting them to listen to a story. Accompanying with visual aid from flashcards and big books, teachers can introduce vocabulary in Bahasa Indonesia and English. During the story time, teachers should actively invite the students by asking them questions, commanding them to repeat the teachers' talks, or acting out the activities being said. Assessment in the post-story activity is encouraged so teachers can measure students' comprehension as well as their understanding on the moral values instilled during the storytelling. Last, it is recommended for young learners' teachers to develop the proposed teaching procedure to meet their learners' abilities and characteristics.

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