IMPLEMENTING A PROVERB-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING MODEL TO BUILD STUDENTS' CHARACTER

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Abstract

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The rapid development of information and technology in today's digital era, followed by its relatively easy access, has created major changes in society. This is a challenge in itself in character building. There are concerns about local languages as an essential aspect of national identities, which tend to be abandoned by language users themselves. One of the local languages in Minahasa that is starting to experience this is the Tombulu language; however, it is believed that local language proverbs can be used to prevent this from continuing. This study aims to implement a proverb-based language learning model, using Tombulu proverbs as an English learning tool to build students' character. This study used a qualitative approach with observations and interviews as data collection techniques. The model was designed and implemented for English Department students taking a course that focuses on writing skills. Students were then interviewed regarding the use of the proverbs in their English learning in order to build their character. The results showed the students' enthusiasm in learning English based on Tombulu proverbs and their motivation in learning local languages. Another important finding was their positive tendency in building their character through discussions of cultural values contained in the proverbs.

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Introduction:

Education in schools is not only about giving instruction or knowledge for its students to become smarter because, with the way things are now, children can acquire them from different kinds of media all around them. Formal education also teaches students about character education, which is intended to manifest ethical and moral values in their lives (Singh, 2019). The impact of good character education on their learning achievement is quite significant. Several studies have found that an effective character education at school that results in ethical values is able to improve students' academic achievement (Jeynes, 2017; Zefanya, 2018; Khadijah et al., 2021; Corazzin et al., 2021). Positive behavior executed by the students as a result of effective character building impacts their motivation and attitude towards learning. Creating an effective character education program is not an easy task. The implementation of character education in the learning process must include commitment and coordination from the

school community which involves well-planned activities for character building (Zurqoni et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, the rapid development of information and technology in today's digital era, followed by its relatively easy access, has created major changes in society. This is a challenge in and of itself in character building. In the modern era, teachers find it challenging to internalize ethical values through learning activities and their materials for students (Pohan & Malik, 2021). The widespread information accessed by the students can easily affect a person's character, which in turn may affect their identity, whether positively or negatively. It depends on how creative the teachers are in terms of implementing the character values inside and outside the classroom while at the same time keeping the students engaged and interested. There are times when the learning conditions are unsuitable for activities involving character building, so it is a challenge for teachers to insert character values in that type of environment (Hidayat et al., 2022). Unsuitable learning conditions include disinterested students, unsupportive parents, and different perspectives.

In a language-based classroom, character values can be implemented in different lesson plans and materials. Milal et al. (2020) have found that using supplementary materials that add to the main lesson materials can support the learning activities not only by improving the students' language skills but also by building character as well. Literature has become one of the most benevolent learning materials that can develop students' good qualities. The integration of literature and character education can enhance students' understanding of ethical values and their practice of them (Pike et al., 2020). Language learning contains many texts to read and analyze as part of the lesson plan. Thus, teachers can pick literature that not only enhances students' language ability but also gives them positive character traits.

Language is a vital course in constructing people's identity and culture, which correlates to character building. Indonesia, as of today, has around 704 living indigenous languages, with Indonesian being its official language (Etnologue, 2023). Each language in Indonesia represents the identities and cultures of each part and region of Indonesia. Character building in education is aimed at helping students understand, appreciate, and practice the cultural values of Indonesia from various regions there; it is also known as local wisdom (Darmawan & Tjalla, 2021). Local wisdom, such as local languages and traditions, impacts the character of its people and relates to religion practices, the environment, and the way they interact inside a community. It has a significant relationship with ethical values and character building, especially for Indonesian citizens (Wibawa & Awaliah, 2023). The norms and values of Indonesia are based on the local wisdom there.

Nowadays, local languages are rarely used by the community, especially by the younger people. Andriyanti (2019) found that young people often associate local languages with being traditional and old-fashioned. They preferred learning modern languages used in media, which are foreign languages. One of the signs of language death, as mentioned by Atifnigar et al. (2021), is the unfamiliarity and inability to understand that local language, which is reduced to embarrassment and a negative image of that language. There are also issues with urbanization, intermarriage, and formal situations that instruct them to speak Indonesian as the official language (Bowden, 2012; Farisiyah & Zamzanih, 2018). Those factors drift people further away from using their local languages.

In order to preserve and maintain the local languages from extinction, the local governments of each region ordered the implementation of local languages in the schools' curriculum, whether as a whole course or incorporated into other courses. Students will feel a

sense of interest and belonging when they are exposed to course materials and examples that are familiar to their social environment and cultural background (Qoyyimah, 2016; Kusmana et al., 2020). This will result in appreciation for their cultural and ethical values, which then help maintain the local wisdom, in this case, the local language.

Literature Review:

Studies containing local languages as part of the implementation of building character have shown positive results, and it depends on the teachers and other resources to liven the education environment and increase the enjoyment of students in learning that local language. The teaching practice, learning environment, and teaching materials must be in harmony and support the goal of language maintenance for students to possess a good understanding and appreciation for their local language. By increasing students' cultural awareness, the local wisdom will soon follow and build good character, which identifies the local region (Otoluwa et al., 2016; Albantani & Madkur, 2018; Yamin et al., 2020).

One of the methods that can be used to teach a local language and at the same time build character identity for students is to find the value of that language. The unique value that centers around local languages can present content for people to be interested in and gives people the opportunity to be even more creative in ways of preserving them (Setya et al., 2019). As mentioned earlier, teachers are encouraged to use high-quality learning materials and literature that contain ethical values and, at the same time, can improve the students' language skills. Proverbs are one of those unique learning materials that achieve both.

Proverbs in general are traditional sayings, whether in sentences or phrases, that are metaphorical and are used to compare, give advice, or instruct. Proverbs are very common in Indonesia, and they have become a part of society in each region of the country. Mansyur et al. (2021) found 13 cultural values included in proverbs, such as religion, honesty, and discipline, that can be taught to shape and build people's character. Proverbs in local languages possess the identity and culture of the locals from whom they originated. They signify the region's culture and identity. It represents how people communicate inside the community, whether in daily conversations, to joke around, or to give advice. These things are passed down from the previous generation to the newer ones and embedded in their minds and beliefs (Saddhono et al., 2019; Rahayu & Wahyuni, 2022).

The basic nature and cultural background of proverbs make them perfect learning materials for language preservation and character education inside the classroom. Proverbs has many strong values, which shows that cultural evidence is being preserved and revived and can instill positive characters in people (Widawati et al., 2018). In language teaching, teachers can use proverbs as materials in learning activities to enhance communication and language competence. Proverbs also contain moral and cultural lessons for students' practical use (Daskin & Hatipoglu, 2019). The social control that binds people to avoid bad character and bad traits is stated in proverbs. Students can learn to implement good character in their behavior and attitude in society by learning about proverbs (Sumarlam, 2020).

Tombulu is one of the local languages in Minahasa, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Similar to local languages in Indonesia, there is a decline in Tombulu language speakers among young people. Most of the students in Minahasa prefer to speak Indonesian or Malay-Manadonese. For local language preservation, the Tombulu language is incorporated into the English language course at a university. The Tombulu language also has proverbs used among the community. The aim of this study is to implement a proverb-based language learning model using Tombulu

proverbs as an English learning tool that would be able to build students' character. The results of this study will explore the Tombulu proverbs and students' perceptions of the proverbs' impacts on their character.

Methodology:

This research utilized a descriptive qualitative research design where the results are described in narrative and explained thoroughly. The data was collected using observation and interviews (Mirhosseini, 2020). The model was designed and implemented for English Department students in a course focusing on writing skills. Students were then interviewed regarding the use of the proverbs in their English learning in order to build their character. The collected data was then analyzed using theme analysis (Mishra & Dey, 2022). The interviewees for this research are university English students who took Writing Class on their second semester. The principal researcher, who was also the subject's lecturer, designed and implemented a proverb-based language learning for that particular class. As mentioned in the introduction, local proverbs can be used in teaching English as an effort to maintain local languages and national identity and to prevent changes in students' character due to online learning in today's digital era.

The process of implementing Proverb-based language learning model are as follows: (1)The lecturer presented and explained the meanings and examples of local proverbs word by word (specifically Tombulu language proverbs); (2) The lecturer discussed those local proverbs in general with the class; (3) The students were grouped into small groups, four people per group; (4) Each group was asked to discuss the proverbs in more detail and depth to produce a fiction or non-fiction writing; (5) Each group later presented the result, the writing product from their group work. After implementing the proverb-based language learning model, the students involved were then interviewed related to their perceptions and thoughts on using local proverbs to learn English.

Findings dan Discussions:

The findings of this research are compiled from interview transcripts by each interviewee describing their experiences and impressions. This section presents the findings in which some correlates with each other, and so it will be summarized and later analyzed in the discussion part.

Findings

The transcripts from each interviewee are separated into three sections based on the questions that were asked by the interviewer about their perceptions regarding proverbs-based language learning model.

1. How the group worked to discuss the proverbs in Tombulu language to produce an English writing either fictional or non-fictional.

M1: *We discussed it within the group about "Wahu nae'wahu" proverbs. Then, we divided jobs for each member of the group so that everyone could give out their opinion about the proverbs and searched some references from articles and like what I told you we created a logical answer to answer the task given together as a group. After discussing it by giving each of our own opinions, we then unify them into a concrete and comprehensive sentence that can be understood well. When discussing about "Saru Lutu*

Tamburi" (another Tombulu proverb), we also searched some information by reading from articles and other references from the Internet and translated them.

M2: We used a search engine to find the background and history of Tombulu ethnicity because among our group, we do not have any members from Tombulu. We also found more information about Tombulu language and outlined the meaning from "Wahu nae'wahu ung keroan" proverb to achieve a conclusion. Similar to "Wahu nae'wahu ung keroan" proverb, we also used a search engine from the Internet to find the meaning word per word of "Saru Lutu Tamburi" proverb and we added some impacts of laziness and the solutions for that.

M3: Each member of the group gave their own ideas about the titles of the proverbs given. Later, we incorporated those ideas into an in-depth of an essay.

M4: First, we discussed the real meaning of these proverbs, then we began by explaining in detail about the significance and applicable examples of the proverbs. We also gave each of our own opinions about the proverbs which become the additional points in the essay.

M5: We tried to discuss them within our groups by asking one another. Unfortunately, none of the members knew and understood those proverbs. We then asked the lecturer which she gave us a huge information and clues about where those phrases and proverbs came from.

M6: We discussed the tasks by searching to know more in-depth information about the proverbs. In addition, we also elaborated about things that correlate with the proverbs, for example how we correlate the proverbs with our daily lives. We also added more about the benefits that we could learn from those proverbs.

M7: Initially, each member was asked about their own opinions regarding the proverbs given. Because the proverbs are related to "diligence leads to great fortune", we also asked each other whether there were members who disagree with that proverb. Everyone agreed with the saying, so we decided to make a sketch together. We communicated over the phone, gave opinions, and examples regarding the proverbs given.

2. Group discussion regarding cultural values in the local proverbs

M1: We discuss some values that were embodied in the proverbs by reading what we had translated or the opinions that we gave. We also poured some cultural values from the meaning of the proverbs.

M2: Our group discussed about the cultural values inside the proverbs that we could find from the Internet and we also put those values in the essay we produce by understanding the context of this proverb and its language then added our own ideas there.
M3: There are of course some cultural values. Because we are studying at the Cultural and Humanities faculty, we made some thoughts about cultural values in regard to the

task given. We put some cultural values in our essay as well by referencing to the correlation with the title and proverbs given.

M4: Yes, surely, the discussion about cultural values must be done to find the significance of the proverbs given. All the results and discussions for the cultural values is written in Indonesian by us then translated into Indonesia.

M5: After we knew about the source language and the proverbs' meaning, we did some research on the Internet but the results were quite few. Fortunately, we found some Internet pages discussing this topic. Then, we adapt those Internet resources and put them into writing.

M6: Regarding the cultural values, we did not put them. However, we put values and norms that correlate to our daily lives.

M7: We can say the cultural values alone are only incorporated in the proverbs we put as the title for our sketch. However, we put some examples of daily activities and norms related to the proverbs in our sketch.

3. The strengths and weaknesses of proverbs-based language learning model

M1: According to me, the strengths of this models is we can understand and comprehend more about the local proverbs. And for the weaknesses, I think it is more from our own selves who are not familiar with proverbs from our local region. The important lesson that I got from this task is of course, enabling myself to learn more knowledge about local proverbs and the proverbs contain many lessons and wisdom that we can learn from. The meaning of "wahu nae' wahu ung keroan" proverb is a diligent person will get good fortune and it implies so we can be more diligent in going through our lives. My impression about this lesson is really positive because we can learn many things from the tasks.

M2: In my opinion, making English writing based on local languages is very unique and rare. The strength that I got is I can know some word in local language especially Tombulu language which encouraged me to preserve my own local language which is Pasan language (A language from Ratahan, South-East Minahasa). The weaknesses that I encountered is more on the fact on my inability to research more information on social media. My ability in English language also increased further because the proverbs had several unique vocabulary and structure similar to English. The meaning of each proverb built my character to be diligent in doing my tasks and obligations. The interesting thing that I got is learning about Tombulu language. Because, I used to be more familiar with foreign languages from other countries and I did not know that in North Sulawesi especially Minahasa, people still used local languages. My impression about this learning model is it can train the students' writing skills in English using local languages. By putting us in groups, we can divide the work and share our own knowledge and ideas to be summarized in an essay.

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M3: I think the tasks given had strengths and also weaknesses. The strength is by giving a task related to local language, we were able to know more about the things we did not know before regarding cultural values in our regions from each member of the group. The weaknesses, however, we found the task a bit difficult, because of the differences in local language and English to incorporate them into one. The interesting experience and lessons that I got from this is about working as a team. Our group became more unified and could work together really well because of similar perceptions and thoughts.

M4: In my opinion, this task can help us to understand important values in our own cultures and simultaneously train us to write in English. However, I think the downside is the task was a bit difficult to find some references from the Internet. The experience that I got from this task is how we did our work without the help of Internet resources but from our own perspectives and opinions. My impression about this is, it is quite unique, and it is the first time I received task to convert Indonesian proverbs into English essays.

M5: The strength that I can think of from this task is it has increased my knowledge about phrases from local languages in Minahasa. It also increased our ability to work as a group, to analyze cases, and upgraded our English skills, primarily in writing. The weakness is, according to me, about the limited resources and materials to find in the Internet. The interesting thing that I experienced is learning more about each individual member of the group and becoming closer with each other. My impression about this learning model is I think it is already quite good.

M6: I think this local language assignment is very interesting. The positive side for me is I can know about Local Languages and proverbs made from these local languages. For the negative side, I need to dig deeper to know about the meaning of the proverbs. The interesting thing I found when doing this assignment was, I can know proverbs in a local language and can increase my knowledge about that. My impression about this is this assignment is very interesting and useful. One thing I can add is I hope this assignment can help us in our daily lives because the meaning of each proverb is very useful.

M7: This assignment has a good impact for my self because I can know a little bit more about local languages especially Tombulu language which is the language used in the proverbs. The good thing about this is this assignment gave me more knowledge regarding local language (Tombulu). The downside is maybe because local language is rarely used in our daily activities, so some students were unable to understand properly about those proverbs. The interesting experience when doing the assignment is when the other members and I were sharing about our thoughts and making jokes to use for the sketch. The lesson that I can gain from this assignment is I have to be a diligent person and stop being lazy. I think this kind of learning model is very effective for introduction among the students because we can be familiar with each other, and build trust and teamwork between each student.

Discussion

By analyzing each transcript and answer from the interviewees or students involved, the researcher found some benefits and significance of proverb-based language learning model in

regards to character building for students. Character building is taught in educational institutions because of its importance in society. Proverbs can become one of the literary devices use to integrate character values in language learning as mentioned by Pike et al. (2020). Proverbs-based language learning model contains five elements of character building based on the research interview.

1. Cultural Appreciation

"Our group discussed about the cultural values inside the proverbs that we could find from the Internet and we also put those values in the essay we produce by understanding the context of this proverb and its language then added our own ideas there"

The first and foremost benefit of using local proverbs in teaching English is to help students appreciate the culture and cultural values from these proverbs. Local language proverb instills cultural values in them. A language defines a person's individuality and culture. Languages and cultures interrelate with each other and thus influence and shape one another (Imai, Kanero, & Masuda, 2015). From the results, students actually include quite a few cultural values themselves in their assignments. By using local language as a resource for study, students can learn to appreciate and be aware of their cultural values. Shresta (2016) added that using contents related to culture such as local language can help students tolerate with intercultural whether in class or in their community in general. This will then promote learners' cultural values and typical identities. This will help to build students' character of tolerance and understanding for culture especially local cultures that are considered "traditional" and "old".

2. Open Mindedness

"My impression about this lesson is really positive because we can learn many things from the tasks."

"In my opinion, making English writing based on local languages is very unique and rare."

During the new learning experience using local language proverbs, students seemed to exhibit an open mind in doing these assignments. They were enthusiastic about learning a new language they were not familiar before and tried to research more about them. Instead of seeing this assignment as burdensome, the students actually found them unique and liked the implementation. Open-mindedness has an important role on accepting diversity and significant impact for learning and creativity to innovate (Al-Abrrow, et al., 2021). Closing the mind from new and unique things can hinder someone from developing and understanding how the society works. The social environment is very diverse and students should learn to respect all the different traditions and habits of different people whom they socially interact with. The results for this are backed up by Kashima (2017) how students with higher mindfulness tend to learn better in unique

cultural society. This will lead to the willingness in understanding unfamiliar and rare situations and then respect to other people.

3. Responsibility

"The strength that I got is I can know some word in local language especially Tombulu language which encouraged me to preserve my own local language which is Pasan language (A language from Ratahan, South-East Minahasa)."

Being responsible is one of the characteristic traits that is needed in the community. Responsibility plays a critical role and affects family life, social relations, work performance, and many other aspects in life (Duda, 2018). A student after learning the local language proverbs had an urge to do the same with their region's local language. That feeling of responsibility is one of the first step to achieve the goal. Local language preservation and maintenance is often being disregard as merely a waste of time by students, but once the importance was explained and taught to them. The students will feel a sense of responsibility to keep their local identity and local language. Ting (2023) showed a strong suggestion about indigenous language revitalization being everyone's responsibility and the society must feel the sense of belonging in maintaining the language to be used in their community. This statement is also similar with the results of this research how students feel the responsibility to revitalize their own local language.

4. Self-Awareness

"We tried to discuss them within our groups by asking one another. Unfortunately, none of the members knew and understood those proverbs. We then asked the lecturer which she gave us a huge information and clues about where those phrases and proverbs came from."

"And for the weaknesses, I think it is more from our own selves who are not familiar with proverbs from our local region."

The interview done to the students about this subject is not only useful for this research, but it also enabled them to reflect on the lesson and its importance for their study. The challenging and unique assignment given about proverbs in a language they were not familiar of, had made the students aware of their ability and their feelings toward the language. Self-awareness is also an important trait to have for the community. When trying to reach a goal, people often face sudden obstacles in their way. Self-awareness can help identify these obstacles and knowing each limitation in order to make a better plan in overcoming them (Kreibich, Hennecke, & Branstatter, 2020). The local languages proverb learning model is quite new and uncommon, so this challenges the students to think out of the box. This resulted in students' becoming empathic and self-aware of the situation in front of them. DeMink-Carthew, Netcoh & Farber (2020) suggest teachers to engage in helping them reflect on challenges that will increase their self-awareness on difficult situations. Teachers can help students to cope with their feelings by using emphatic means.

5. Doing Good Deeds

"The meaning of "wahu nae' wahu ung keroan" proverb is a diligent person will get good fortune and it implies so we can be more diligent in going through our lives."

"The lesson that I can gain from this assignment is I have to be a diligent person and stop being lazy"

The last is the most obvious use of this learning model which is related to the use of proverbs themselves. Proverbs are used to give advice and restrict wrong doings (Rahayu & Wahyuni, 2021). Similarly, local languages proverbs also contain moral values and meanings that help the society to become a good person. The participants in this research also found the moral lesson in the Tombulu proverb they learned by translating and understanding its meaning. Since they only studied about one proverb, the moral lesson is that one particular statement. However, if other proverbs are incorporated as a learning tool, students will learn even more character values for their education. This prove is revealed in Mansyur, et al. (2021) who found 13 different values when analyzing Indonesian proverbs such religious values, honesty, decency, discipline, justice, hard work, humility, independence, love of knowledge, loyalty, courage, frugal living, and social care. The values help shape the identity of students to grow into noble humans who do good deeds.

Conclusion:

English teaching and learning can incorporate many different learning models to make the class more engaging and interesting. Character building in education is important to help students to grow into a better person in the community. Character values are embedded in different kinds of teaching, and proverbs can be used as a learning tool for character education. Local language also impacts the society identity and characteristics which makes it important for the community to revitalize and preserve the endangered language. The study concludes that implementing proverb-based language learning model in an English class to enhance writing skills can also build the students' ethical values and character. The most noticeable one is students' appreciative attitude towards their local culture and local language. They can also get many moral lessons when learning about proverbs because of the nature of proverb itself. They feel the sense of responsibility and motivation to learn about their local languages and preserve them and become more aware and mindful about diversity and uniqueness of each culture and language.

The research shows a positive relationship between character building and proverb-based language learning model. However, it is still quite limited to the participants of the research and does not signify the overall students. Thus, further research is still needed as it is quite a new topic to incorporate local language proverbs in an English class. All in all, local languages identify who humans are, and so incorporating them using different methods is one of the ways of preserving them from endangerment.

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