Strengthening of early children's character education stunting children in Indonesia

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Forming human resources (HR) with character is challenged by social phenomena that show degradation of morality, ethics, and morals, as well as violent extremism. This is the basic reason for the importance of the strengthening character education (SCE) movement, which involves education units, families, and communities, and education must be implemented from early childhood, especially for children who are stunted. This study aimed to describe how the strategy for SCE is based on early childhood education classes for stunted children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This type of research is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The participants in this study were the headmaster and teachers of Kindergarten PGRI Donggala Regency, Indonesia, in 2022. Collecting data using a questionnaire was equipped with interviews. The data were analyzed by content analysis, namely the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing important patterns from the results of in-depth interviews.

RESULTS: The results of the study showed various patterns that became research themes as strategies for strengthening SCE in early childhood including integrating character values in learning for stunted children, introduction of SCE to stunted children, SCE habituation to stunted children, strengthening SCE for stunted children, and reflection on SCE for stunted children. Various character values produced in SCE include religiosity, creativity, curiosity, hard work, honesty, discipline, friendship, social care, independence, and responsibility.

CONCLUSIONS: Each school for early childhood has a learning program that focuses on developing children's abilities in terms of motor, cognitive, social–emotional, language, and religious and moral values. However, schools must also have an adequate character education program, especially in dealing with children who are stunted, social–emotional, language, and religious and moral values.

Keywords:

Character education, early childhood, stunting

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Introduction

The development of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 with advances in information and communication technology is a challenge in today's life. Human resources (HR) who have good character, high literacy skills, and superior competence for the twenty-first century, namely being able to think critically, creatively, communicatively, and collaboratively, with strong emotional control, are one of the main assets that is needed and must begin to be carried out in education for early childhood.[1]

Forming HR with character is not easy to do, and there are many challenges that must be faced such as social phenomena that show the degradation of morality, ethics, and morals, as well as violent extremism.[2] This

is the basic reason for the importance of the strengthening character education (SCE) movement, which involves educational units, families, and communities and must be carried out from early childhood education.[3]

Implementing character education in children from an early age is very important. Early age is the golden age; that is, at this age, children have brain development that is quite rapid so that all forms of education provided can be digested quickly and easily.[4] By providing character education from an early age, the potential for the development of conscience and good morals in children tends to be greater.[5] This of course will provide many benefits when they grow up. The child will grow up to be a polite person who is socially respected because of good behavior and always shows positive values to others and the surrounding environment.[6]

Good character is reflected by knowing what is ma'ruf, having the intention to do what is ma'ruf, and practicing habits of thinking, behaving, and acting that are ma'ruf. All three are necessary to lead a moral life and improve moral maturity and are very important in shaping children's character in the hope that they will be able to decide what is ma'ruf, have a very deep concern for what is ma'ruf, do what they believe is right, and remain consistent in amar ma 'ruf nahi munkar.[7]

Building character in children requires different attention, especially for children who are stunted. Stunts in children are a condition of failure to thrive caused by chronic malnutrition.[8] Stunting in children can interfere with brain development and reduce mental abilities and the level of intelligence of children.[9] In addition to experiencing growth disorders, stunted children will experience decreased levels of intelligence, speech disorders, and learning difficulties.[10] This condition greatly affects the character of children, so SCE in stunted children is needed, especially at an early age or in toddlers.[11]

The problem of character education in early childhood that is not optimal is the toughest challenge in the world of education in shaping children's character. Strengthening good character education in the family, education, and community environment is very much needed, especially for children who are stunted. SCE in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 87 of 2017 paragraph 1 is an education movement under the responsibility of the education unit to strengthen the character of students through harmonization of the heart, exercise of feeling, thought, and sports with involvement and cooperation between educational units, families, and communities as part of the Movement for National Mental Revolution (MNMR).[12]

The main values in SCE consist of religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity. The main values in SCE do not stand alone but are interrelated. Each main value has many sub-values. One sub-value may be part of two or more main values.[1]

Religiosity refers to an attitude of faith and piety, peace-loving, tolerant, appreciating differences, steadfastness, self-confidence, willingness to work together, compassion, friendship, sincerity, respecting the opinions of others, loving the environment, living clean, healthy, and protecting the small and left out. Nationalism refers to the attitude of loving the motherland, following the rules, being disciplined, respecting cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, respecting oneself, respecting others (including those who are different), caring for the environment, being proud of one's own national culture (including language, clothing, and manners), self-sacrifice, excellence, and achievement. Independence refers to the attitude of diligent work, tough and fighting spirit, following the rules, and developing curiosity, creativity, and courage. Mutual cooperation refers to the attitude of having a caring attitude, respecting the work of oneself and others, respecting collective agreements, working together, getting used to deliberation, consensus, and discussion, helping each other, and developing an attitude of solidarity, empathy, and antidiscrimination.[1] From various literature searches, the concept of SCE has never been found in young children who experience stunting. Based on this background, this study aimed to describe how the SCE strategy is based on early childhood education classes for stunted children.

Subjects and Methods

Study design and setting
This research is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach, namely research that explores how the SCE strategy is based on early childhood education classes for stunted children.

Study participants and sampling
The participants in this study were a headmaster and four teachers of TK PGRI Donggala, Indonesia, which will be held from August to October 2022.

Data collection tool and technique
The data were analyzed by analyzing the content,[13] namely the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing important patterns from the results of in-depth interviews. The stages in carrying out the data analysis include the following: transcribing the interview results and observation results obtained, performing coding based on the in-depth interview question guidelines, performing open coding combined

with all the results of the in-depth interview transcripts conducted, searching for and finding patterns and relationships based on the findings from in-depth interviews, and drawing conclusions, and the results of the conclusions are used to obtain information regarding the SCE strategy based on early childhood education classes for stunted children. The data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti 8 software.

Ethical consideration
In fulfilling ethical clearance, data collection was carried out by prioritizing informed consent, namely the consent given by research informants. Initially, the informant was given an explanation in easy-to-understand language regarding the research to be carried out by the informant and provided guarantees for the confidentiality of the informant.

Results

The application of SCE for children who experience stunting at PGRI Donggala Kindergarten is basically the same as for other students or normal children. Based on the results of data analysis, the themes constructed as a result of this study include the following [Figure 1].

Integrating character values in learning for stunted children: The results of the analysis show that the informants carry out learning that integrates character values through structuring the playing environment and teaching methods that are appropriate to the planned theme or subtheme. Mrs. Arni stated that "*We apply learning character values in class through various games, such as playing blocks and dragons*" The block and dragon game models are recognized as having character values starting from religiosity, creativity, curiosity, hard work, discipline, independence, and responsibility.

Introduction of SCE in stunted children: In the introduction of SCE, the results of our analysis show that most of the participants always introduce students to forms of kindness to strengthen character in children through discussion and storytelling. Mrs. Hasmi stated that "*We always apply character education to students in every lesson, such as short stories with role models, examples of good deeds and the importance of mutual respect and mutual help.*" This condition allows children to recognize various examples of goodness, to know the reasons for the importance of each good deed being taught, and to understand the feelings after doing good by exploring children's empathy.

Habituation of SCE in stunted children: The results of the analysis show that most of the participants habituate the application of SCE by setting an example through positive emotions when acting and communicating, for example, by not labeling children negatively and praising children's behavior when they do good and giving character praise to children. Ms. Muri stated that "*We always apply character education to children by reprimanding children who are not good and giving them an understanding of the importance of doing good, giving appreciation to children, and always applying examples of good character in every lesson. Like praying before studying, pray before eating, respect each other and don't bully friends.*"

Strengthening of SCE in stunted children: The results of the analysis show that most of the participants reinforce character education by motivating children to always behave well, as well as appreciating children when they do good and explaining the benefits of their good deeds. Mrs. Wati stated that "*We always encourage children to do good, such as the importance of helping each other (lending their belongings to friends in need), disposing of trash in its place, being disciplined and responsible.*" Mrs. Hikma also added that "*We also motivate children by giving appreciation to children who do good and set an example for their friends.*"

Reflection of SCE on stunting children: The results of the analysis show that the majority of participants reflect on the application of character education by guiding children to remember and be able to convey the character values (good behavior) they have learned. The teacher also repeats the character values conveyed. Mrs. Wati stated that "*We do reflection by repeating examples of good deeds accompanied by the character values of these good deeds and conveying them back to students repeatedly, all of which are done every day.*"

Discussion

Integrating SCE in learning for stunted children: Implementation of learning integrates character values through structuring the playing environment and appropriate teaching methods according to the planned theme/subtheme. Educational games are a form of implementing SCE through play tools or facilities that contain educational values in them. In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, it is stated that the term play comes from the basic wordplay, which means doing activities or activities to please the heart. In this context, playing must be understood as an effort to make children happy, comfortable, cheerful, and excited.[14]

There are many games or early childhood educational game tools that can be used as a medium for instilling character values in early childhood. Any educational game tool can be used to cultivate character values. It is just that one game tool cannot cover all aspects of character values. So, it takes a lot of games or other educational game tools to cover all the character values.[14]

One form of play in the application of SCE is a game of blocks. A block game is a form of educational game tool consisting of pieces of blocks of various shapes, colors, and sizes. Block games have many benefits for children's development, including stimulating children's fine motor skills, imagination, creativity, and concentration and recognizing colors and various geometric shapes.

The character values that can be instilled through playing with blocks include religiosity, creativity, curiosity, hard work, discipline, independence, and responsibility. Religion is obtained when starting and ending playing blocks, namely by reading prayers. Creativity is obtained when playing with assembling blocks. When assembling these blocks, children indirectly have curiosity, work hard, be disciplined, be independent, and do it with full responsibility.

The next game is the dragon snake game. Dragon snake is a form of traditional game consisting of several children who form like an elongated snake, and there are two people who serve as the mouth of the dragon snake. Then, other friends walked past or entered the dragon's mouth and the last one himself was caught and then asked to choose which group to join. The game is said to be over when all have been caught. The winner is determined by the number of members who follow one group. This game is very useful for training social–emotional, cooperation, and physical–motor skills in early childhood. This game is more emphasis on fun or joy.

The character values that can be instilled through dragon games are religiosity, honesty, discipline, friendship, social care, and responsibility. These values are obtained by children when carrying out their play activities. Of the several types of early childhood educational games, there are still other forms of educational games that can be used as rides.

The development of the character values above is in accordance with Piaget's theory that the approach is often called moral education, which emphasizes that students participate in moral thoughts and actions through discussion of moral dilemmas, role-playing, collaborative peer interaction, and democratic class/school culture.[15]

Introduction of SCE in stunted children: Various efforts can be made to good character recognition. Children are introduced to forms of kindness to strengthen character in children through discussion and storytelling. Children know various examples of kindness, know the reasons for the importance of each good deed that is taught, and understand the feelings after doing good by exploring children's empathy.

Discussions and storytelling will form social attitudes in children. Social building in children is one of the efforts to shape children's character. Social attitudes are formed by social interaction. One that influences the formation of attitudes is the emotional factor within the individual.[16] Discussion and storytelling will shape the child's reaction and attitude toward an object. One of the attitude components formed is the affective component. The affective component involves feelings or emotions. Our emotional reaction to an object will form a positive or negative attitude toward the object. Many of these emotional reactions are determined by a belief in an object, namely the belief that an object is good or bad or useful or not useful.[16] Thus, discussion and storytelling activities make children recognize various good characters. This approach is in accordance with the moral approach by Durkheim, which is often called character education, which emphasizes direct teaching about virtues and exemplary character traits, exemplary, and reinforcement of good behavior.[17]

Habituation of SCE in stunted children: Teachers or educators set an example by showing habituation of positive emotions when acting and communicating, for example, by not labeling children negatively and praising children's behavior when they do good and giving character praise to children.

Children build moral understanding through the social interactions they experience.[18] Habituation of a good attitude through social interaction will lead to good behavior and character. Attitude has a target, direction, and intensity. The target is an object, activity, or idea that is the target of an attitude. The attitude direction is the attitude orientation, which can be positive or negative, while the intensity is the degree or strength of attitude.[19] Attitudes toward an object can be very strong, for example, very fond of beautiful works or very hateful of bad deeds. The direction and intensity of that attitude can be described as a continuum. The midpoint of the continuum distinguishes positive and negative directions, while the distance from the midpoint indicates the intensity of the attitude.[16] Thus, the habit of good deeds in children will direct the intensity of the child's attitude and character in a positive direction.

According to Pavlov in the theory of classical conditioning (classical conditioning), learning is a process of change that occurs because of the conditions (conditions), which then cause a reaction (response). To make someone learn must be given certain conditions. The main thing in learning according to conditioning theory is that there are continuous (continuous) exercises. This means that learning will occur automatically because of continuous activities. Classical conditioning includes the theory of behaviorism, which is a view that states that behavior must be explained
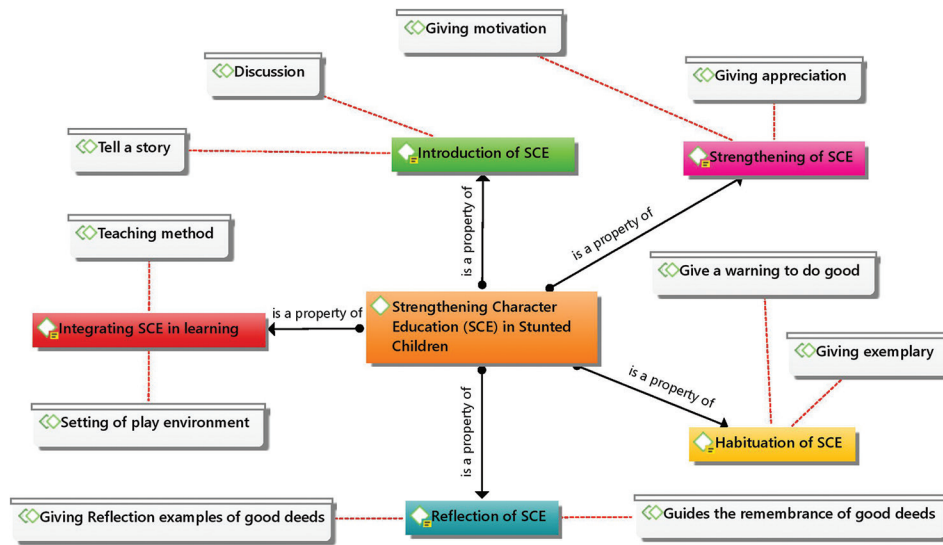
Figure 1: Strengthening character education in stunted children

through experience that must be observed, not by mental processes. According to behaviorists, behavior is anything that is done and can be seen directly.[20]

Strengthening of SCE in stunted children: Teachers or educators motivate students to always behave well, appreciate children when they do good, and explain the benefits of their good deeds. Children's character is formed as a result of understanding the relationship with oneself, relationship with the environment (social and natural surroundings), and relationship with God Almighty (triangle relationship). However, the biggest child's character development is influenced by the environment, especially from parents. That is, the role of parents and teachers is very important, especially in early childhood.

Strengthening the teacher as a motivator is very influential in shaping the character of children.[14] Callahan and Clark suggest that motivation is the driving or pulling force that causes behavior toward a certain goal. Therefore, educators as motivators must be able to generate learning motivation (growing in learning motivation) in students so that the objectives of the teaching and learning process can be achieved (to accomplish the teaching–learning process). With the motivation given by the teacher to their students, it will add enthusiasm to children in instilling character education at school.[14] Children being praised by teachers after doing good deeds is a form of motivation from teachers to their students to develop even better. Even though the child failed to run, the teacher still encouraged the child not to be afraid to try again.[21]

The role of the teacher is very important, especially in making activities that can help achieve the goal of

forming good character through activities that are of value and lead to a sense of God, respect, love, responsibility, discipline, independence, honesty, humility, caring, happiness, cooperation, confidence, creativity, hard work, tolerance, freedom, peace, and a sense of unity.[21,22]

According to Piaget and Durkheim, moral behavior requires cognitive understanding and acting according to his will, not just imitating a role model or ideals of virtue. Therefore, reinforcement by imitating role models is very important in shaping character values in children.[17]

Reflection of SCE in stunting children: The reflection method approach in character education is very important for teachers to do, but some teachers do not understand the benefits of reflection on understanding in building children's character. Teachers are often trapped only by the advice given to students, in one direction, viewing the experiences of students only as something isolated, not as something that needs to be explored and interpreted.[23] Reflection is often understood simply, not as a learning opportunity. Even reflection is often simplified to provide "instant solutions" to experiences, feelings, passive consideration, or contemplation. As a result, teachers do not reflect on students what they have learned or experienced during the learning process.[24]

One of the character education strategies in schools is carried out reflectively, not with assumptions, unconsciously and reactively. The goal is for students to understand (cognitive/mental skills) about what is right and wrong, able to feel (affective/attitude/self) good values, and habituation (habituation) to do so (psychomotor/manual or physical skills (skills). Regarding the character education method, Pius

Pandor proposes five character education methods (in application in school institutions), namely teaching/ teaching, exemplary, setting priorities, priority praxis, and reflection. One potential responsive way is to use the reflection method.[24]

A teacher must encourage students to reflect on each learning process that will guide and make them have their own views, not the views of the teacher. A reflective teacher means that teacher invites students to see what values can be drawn from a learning experience and what is the use for their lives and the lives of others. Students are assisted by the teacher to experience something in pursuing learning at school. From that experience, students are helped to reflect on what is found in the lesson experience. This is what underlies the very important role of a teacher, so that the good experience gained in learning will be embedded forever.

According to Donald Schon, the method of reflection has roots in the philosophical thought of Socrates, otherwise known as the "Socratic method," namely forms of reflective questions that aim to develop the abilities of his gifted student, Plato. This method of reflection is also supported by the Greek philosopher, Sophocles, whose approach uses observing and describing human actions.[24] Other research also shows that feedback from the training program indicated that it increased participants' ability to bring about changes in their beliefs about their attitudes and behaviors.[25]

Limitation and recommendation

The limitation of this research is that information on SCE still applies to all early childhood children in general, both for children who are stunted and not, as a recommendation to schools and education policymakers to immediately create a model of SCE specifically for children who are stunted, because stunted children need more attention both to the school environment and to their family environment. The school also needs to provide understanding to parents of children who are stunted so that SCE is built in the family environment.

Conclusion

From the results of the research above, we can conclude that providing character education to children from an early age, especially for children who are stunted, is something that needs to be done. Thomas Lickona explained that character education is related to moral knowing (introduction, knowledge, and understanding of morals), moral feeling (feelings about morals), and moral doing (deeds, actions, and moral actions). The targets are cognitive aspects, affective aspects, and psychomotor aspects.

Character education can not only be obtained from the family, but also be obtained from other developmental environments such as schools. So, choosing a school that is suitable for early childhood is very important. Basically, every school for early childhood has a learning program that focuses on developing children's abilities in terms of motor, cognitive, social–emotional, language, and religious and moral values. However, not all schools have adequate character education programs.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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