MASS MEDIA ROLE IN DEVELOPING CHARACTER EDUCATION: A DEBATE

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the most influential thing in character education development is media. All the more various programs in television or radio show an effort of media industries to reach their market entirely. As the result, media often provides unqualified content of programs. Many electronic cinemas, reality show, even cartoon programs present sexuality, violence and harshness. Previous research has proved that television influences negative effect, such as some children committed suicide after watch a certain program. Moreover, the development of media is not merely about the content but also the improvement of media shape. New media or internet, for example, gives a significant impact on how students behave. They would rather send a 'sms' to communicate to their teacher than directly come. This facts remain us to the theory of 'Hypodermic Needle' or 'Media Effect' which convince that media has direct effect for its audience. Yet, 'Uses and Gratification' perspective explain that audience posses a control of using media. Either media effect or uses and gratification approaches drive us to an understanding that media plays a debatable role, particularly in character education. Observing some cases on children's character problem, the focus of this paper is to describe the process of how mass media (media), with all of its potential negative impacts will still play positive role in character education. This paper tries to prove that the debatable role of media cannot be circumvented. Thus, this study provides a recommendation of how to take advantage of media to develop character education trough media literacy.

Keywords: media, debate, role, character education, media literacy

INTRODUCTION

A compete people without good character is the biggest problem of a nation (Yayasan Jati Diri Bangsa, 2001: 18). For many years, Indonesian people have tried to reach its freedom trough developing its people competency. Unfortunately, the only one thing which made the freedom come was the successfulness of its people to build a power trough character education. Character education is a key to make a breakthrough. Yet, good character is not formed automatically, it is improved overtime trough a sustain process of teaching, learning, and practice.

It is necessary to have intentional development of character education in today's society since our youth face many dangerous problems due to unavoidable change of technology development. Nowadays, students prefer to use hand phone or email to ask something to their teacher instead of directly come. Moreover, previous studies show that children spend only 38.5 minutes a week in meaningful conversation with their parents, while they spend 1,500 hours a year or 28 hours a week watching television (American Family Research Council, 1990, and Harper's, November 1999 in Character Education Partnership). In a conversation with a student appeared that he was so proud that he has many accounts on facebook and email. He admitted that all these personal accounts in new media are used to communicate wider with his friends from various backgrounds. The result is that he is not able to practice face to face communication normally, even with his parent or friend. The study of Robert Hancox explained that 5-15 age children watching television more than 2 hours a day show that they will have health problem 10 years later without considering whether they enjoy television after adult or not (Lancet: A Weekly UK Medical Journal, 2004 in Kadia Magazine, Ed VI/III, 2006 in Mahayoni and Lim, 2008: 60). Person who is not prepared with a good character education will find difficulties to cope with media impact development.

For millennia, media has played important role in influencing human life. So, media also plays important role in developing character education. Some reviews said that media is the cause of the character decreasing; others convince about media's bad impact. Hypodermic needle theory as well as cultivation perspective (media effect perspective) have given a clear understanding in how media injecting certain clout on people. On the other side, for a long time, uses and gratification (UG) theory has clarified an insight about how people have their own will to select and receive media. By referring to the concept of media effect and UG approaches, this paper will focus on describing that practically media has both positive and negative influence in developing character education. Some cases, particularly the author's experience in interacting with children will be engaged to elucidate the idea of this paper that media role in developing character education is still a debate. Therefore, people can apply a proper way when using media to develop character education.

MEDIA AND THE PROBLEM OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

Character education becomes an interesting issue during the growth of mass media. Starker's (1989) noted that study regarding media which perceived negative influence on youth has been repeated numerous times in the last 75 years (Kirsh, 2010: 2). Whereas, according to Hancox study, children in 5-15 years old are the most potential target to be affected by media. What is the part of children fazed by media? Undoubtedly, the answer is their character. Character includes attitude such as desire to do one's best and being concerned about the welfare of others; intellectual capacities such as critical thinking and moral reasoning; behavior such as being honest and responsible; and standing up for moral principal in the face of injustice; interpersonal and emotional skills that enable us to interact effectively with others in a variety of circumstances; and the commitment to contribute to one's society and community (Battistich). While Battistich defines character education as deliberate use of all dimensions of school life to foster optimal character development (*ibid*). Character education is functioned to prevent more various social problems among youth. Unfortunately, as media has been developed, many challenges have to be faced by character education. As noted above, media is suspected as the main destroyer of children character.

The author experience in teaching *Rumah Belajar*[1] showed that children age is the best age to be influenced by mass media, especially television. Children is easily adapt a bombastic visualization trough television. In an observation, the increasing of *dangdut*[2] popularity which performed sexually erotic both in visual image and lyric in television was very attractive to children. They memorize the music program schedule on television every day. After school, they switched on television on that program and enjoy *dangdut* while imitate the artist. When the author was at their house to observe, a 4 years old girl was using satisfactory clothes like the *dangdut* artist. She began to dance as the singer of *keong racun*[3] danced. Her mother said that this girl ask for her to buy *keong racun* clothes[4] in the market. She likes to be a star by using that kind of clothes. Actually this is improper clothes for such age. Moreover, this girl also fluently simulated the lyric of the song such as:

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[1] An alternative school for children in fisherman village, Nambangan, Kenjeran, Surabaya, Indonesia (now is closed)

[2] Dangdut is a kind music genre which has 'malay' tone

[3] A phenomenal *dangdut* song popularized instantly by *youtube* site

[4] A clothe which represent the singer/ artist of *keong racun* song

Dasar kau keong racun
Baru kenal kok ngajak tidur

(translation)

You are poisoned slung
You've just known me and ask for sleep together

When the author tried to ask what the meaning of the song, they could explain it although in incomplete way. She exactly remembered the lyric and tried to behave like the artist. Furthermore, when she amplified the volume of her television, others girls came, danced and sang with her. They know the visualization (sexuality, dirty lyric) without understand the meaning. As the result, they consider the artist behavior (in clothing and singing adult song) as something common in their life. They become adapt with this sexual behavior. Whereas, the goal of character education is to raise good children who understand, care about, and act in core ethic values (Battistich: 3).

Figure 1. Students in Rumah Belajar Play A Game

The purpose of character education is opposite with the effect of media development. In television, for example, there are a problem raise by television rating. Television rating is the average of audiences during the program show. It illustrates percentage from total potential audiences (Mahayoni and Lim, 2008: 6). Rating becomes a trusted indicator for advertising industries to decide the potential television station for their promotion. Thus, television stations compete to reach the highest rating. In Indonesia, the increasing of television station causes unhealthy competition. Unfortunately, the cost of television production is not cheap. Consequently, television stations try to catch the audience attention with haphazard program as long as it attract audience interest. According to previous study done by Mahayoni and Lim (2008), it is said that Indonesia's television is dominated by violence, mysticism, sexual exploitation, gossip, and other programs which are not proper in character building.

Therefore, it cannot be avoided that mass media, primarily television, being potent to raise negative impact on character.

Contemporary, one of the greatest threats in children appears to be from the internet, with sexual predators lurking in chat rooms meant for children and pornography merely a click away (Kirsh, 2010: 2). Previous research in this topic had been done repeatedly. Additionally, internet offers immediate and rapid method for complex process. A high school student in the author's class sent his assignment via *facebook*. On that message he commented, "Miss, it means that my assignment has been complete, doesn't it? So I need not to submit the paper tomorrow". He made the decision by himself trough an understanding that doing assignment by social network media can be the same with submitting paper in class. I did not answer my student at that time for the rule of assignment has been clearly instructed. Surprisingly, he bombarded me with the same comments which ask for sure that I had allowed him sending the assignment by *facebook.* Kirsh (2010: 42) explain the mechanism behind the reduction hypothesis on academic achievement related to media, in this case internet, consumption. The time displacement hypothesis posits that media use takes time away from activities that are intellectually challenging or related to school performance, such as homework and studying for test (Kirsh, 2010: 42). Submitting paper trough social network like *facebook,* are perceived to be a much more enjoyable than facing the teacher to submit the paper and presenting it. Unluckily, it reduces the process of school related tasks, which at times can be tedious, difficult, and boring. Hence, due to media use which displaced learning process, current and future academic achievement suffers.

Beside time displacement hypothesis, Kirsh also said that the mental effort/ passivity hypothesis contends that media use leads to mental laziness (2010: 43). In the case mentioned before, the student who sent the assignment by *facebook* although the teacher did not ask for is shaped by internet impact according to mental passivity hypothesis. The hypothesis proposes that media consumption "spoon feeds" information to the brain, requiring little mental effort on the part of the user (Kirsh, 2010: 43). Different with television, the problem emerged by internet usually penetrate the urban children or they who have well technological access.

By reviewing the evident of media impact, obviously mass media is potential to disturb character education process, especially for children. Media exactly become an enemy for character education. Table 1 show us in how mass media's, particularly television (represent traditional mass media) and internet (represent new media), negative impact influence character education.

Mass Media	Hypothesis	Evident of Effect on Character Education
Television	Adapt bombastic visualization	Imitate artist's performance
		wear improper clothes
		talk impolite words from the song
		being adapted to sexuality exploitation, harshness and violence.

Internet	Time-displacement	Not interest with cognitive/ academic process
		Negate critical thinking
		Reduce moral reasoning
		Reducing process, instantly doing
	Mental passivity	No interpersonal and emotional skills
		Reduce various circumstances

Table 1 The evidence of mass media's negative impact on children character education

This sub chapter specifically describes negative impact of media which opposite with the purpose of character education. Even though, to producing negative effects, media also has the potential to positively influence children's character education. It can be clarified by the two main perspectives on media.

MASS MEDIA: THE TWO PERSPECTIVES

De Fleur and Dennis said that mass communication differs from face to face communication and from mediated interpersonal communication not only because it involves more complex media, but also because the audience is large and diverse (De Fleur and Dennis, 1994: 30). Therefore, mass media is very potential to be a means to influence society. In addition, McQuail states four main roles of mass media in society, there are to inform, to educate, to entertain, and to persuade. This statement support the argument that media has positive purpose in its nature. The two perspectives of mass media will explain the debate of media role.

Media effect perspective emphasize that media have impact on its users. In previous researches, media effect perspective usually use to analyze negative impact of mass media. The first theory presented is *hypodermic needle or magic bullet theory.* This theory states that media consumption affects everyone, and everyone is affected by media in pretty much the same way (Sparks, 2001 in Kirsh, 2010). According to this theory, media is like a hypodermic needle injecting its messages into consumers or a magic bullet that upon hitting its target creates uniformity in thought and action. Today, the magic bullet theory is thought to drastically oversimplify the manner in which media influences infants, children, and adolescents (Sparks, 2001 in Kirsh, 2010). Moreover, numerous studies have shown that media does not influence everyone in exactly the same way (Kirsh, 2006 in Kirsh, 2010). As such, this theory is no longer considered a valid media effect theory.

On the opposite, according to the 'uses and gratification' perspectives, enjoyment is the key to understand media consumption. Although the needs of youth are many and varied, multiple "uses" and associated "gratification" of media consumption have been identified. The most frequently cited uses and gratification include arousal, companionship, escape, habit, learning, passing time and relaxation (Sparks, 2001 in Kirsh, 2010).

THE DEBBATE AND THE KEY

Both 'media effect' perspective and 'uses and gratification' perspective has explain that media actually is something that can be controlled, both by the owner, to give

certain impact to the audiences, or by audiences, to obtain their gratification. Although, research on media effect so far cited that media influences negative impact, according to uses and gratification theory, media still have good impact if they are well controlled.

Media effect theory and its researches have proved frequently that media is an agent which its role is to influence bad impact on children's character. When children are on their age, primarily 5-15 years old, they easily imitate what is on media. Even, they try to identify themselves with figures on media. Unfortunately, the competition of television stations to grab attention from audiences results unplanned and unqualified program to be learnt by children. This problem becomes more complicated when we realize that children's time on television is extraordinary in quantity. For many children, television consumes more time than any other activity except sleep (Comstok & Paik, 1991 in Pecora, Murray, and Wartela, 2007). Even with the proliferation of new electronic media, television is a strongly preferred leisure activity for many children, and understanding patterns of its use is essential to understanding development. Although, television program has been design with age group as its target audience, such as cartoon for children under 5 like *Teletubbies, Dora,* etc; or *Bocah Petualang* for 5-10 years old children, it is still recommended for parent to completely prohibit television viewing for children this young for television content is still improper for their age.

Researches has proved that cartoon program includes violence which are attracted the attention of children. Like Wright, Huston, and Vanderwater, *et al* (2001 in Pecora, Murray, and Wartela, 2007) said, "Television violence is often linked to features on the medium that attract young children's attention. In cartoons design for children, both humor and violence are seamlessly merged with quick pace and animation to ensure the most attention and attraction to the images. As children age, they move away from cartoons, but continue to be attracted comedy and to violence". Moreover, Huston said that children who watch a lot of cartoons in the early years watch more action-adventure in later years (1990 in Pecora, Murray, and Wartela, 2007). Thus, television can be like a addiction for children which its effect has to be carried until they are adult.

Different from television, trough media effect perspective, internet has infiltrate more gentle impact on children character and behavior. Research has showed some hypothesis that beside extent human hand, internet also offer time displacement of learning process and mental passivity. Cultivation theory has explained this process, more children interact with internet, more they feel passive in their social activities.

Television and internet are the kinds of media which suspected to be danger for character education. It is potential to break the *Character Education Partnership's Eleven Principle of Effective Character Education:*
1. *Promotes core ethical value*
2. *Teacher student to understand, care about, and act upon these core ethical values*
3. *Encompasses all aspect of the school culture*
4. *Fosters a caring school community*
5. *Offers opportunity for moral action*
6. *Support academic achievement*
7. *Develop intrinsic motivation*
8. *Includes whole staff involvement*
9. *Requires positive leadership of staff and students*
10. *Involve parents and community members*
11. *Assesses result and strive to improve*

Instead of supporting these principles, mass media apparently become the enemy which the role is to break the purpose of character education. For instance, if the character education require a caring school community, television and internet exist to displace that community and increase unsocial behavior of children. Thus, the role of mass media is accused to be the foe for character education.

While mass media still have good and bad effect, some others research have demonstrated the positive role of media in character education development. Uses and gratification perspective has explain this argument. In 'uses and gratification', children are seen as they have right to decide what they will use and what they will get. Pecora *et al* (2007) said that they make decisions about when, how, and what they watch. At a microscopic level, they make moment to moment decisions about when to attend, when to look away, and when to monitor sound for interesting moment. They integrate and interpret content according to the intellectual skills and schemata that they posses.

Mass media, especially television, is a medium presents information in particular forms and format. Stated by Dennis Mc Quail that the natural roles of media are to inform and entertain. These are good character of media, aren't it. Research has proved developmental changes in learning educational content from television. When the children can choose the program suited to their need and filter the other content which not proper at their age, then the positive role of mass media in character education is proved. Mass media, especially television and internet, can be a good and smart partner to teach character education for teacher and parents. They have acceleration on information which shape children's critical thinking on their intellectual ability. The problem is that at many time information in television is presented at a rapid pace that cannot be altered by the viewer. Moreover, qualities of the medium lead to visual information processing that interferes with language development. All needed to cope with this situation is how to teach children to learn from media.

Media Literacy: A Key to Break the Debate

The debate of mass media role in character education development cannot be averted. All needed both for parents and teacher to accomplish character education is to equip the children with literacy on media. *Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter* (Potter, 2008). Children build perspectives from knowledge structures. To build knowledge structure, they need raw material. The raw material comes from mass media content; and media literacy skill is the tool to cultivate that information to be meaningful knowledge to develop children character. This perspective convinces that children have their own skill in filtering media's content for their character development.

On the typology of media literacy, it is said that there are some stages, such as acquiring fundamentals things about human, shape, color, movements on mass media; language acquisition, such as recognize speech and sound, reproduce speech and sound; narrative acquisition, like develop understanding of differences, fiction or nonfiction; developing skepticism, discount claims made in ads, sharpen difference between like and dislike; intensive development; experiential exploring; critical appreciation; and social responsibility (Potter, 2007). These stages are important to be learnt by teacher or parents to guide their children having a good program in television. Moreover, this is a good method to develop character education because it lets children interact directly with something that potential to be their peril.

Media literacy advantages on character education will be the key to break the debate of negative and positive roles of mass media. Media literacy grows one's appetite for a wider variety of media message. Children can received many message

from many perspective in many ways, still they can select the best one since they know what needed and what is not. Second advantage is that media literacy give children knowledge about how to program their own mental codes. Third, it provides people with more control over media.

CONCLUSION

This study has showed that mass media still play a debatable role in character education building. The two perspectives of mass media, 'media effect' and 'uses and gratification' perspectives convince that the two sides of mass media cannot be separated. 'Media effect' perspective gives us more understanding in how media infiltrate a negative impact on character education. Even, mass media is suspected as the most dangerous enemy of character education. It breaks the principles of building children character trough community and intellectual thinking. On the other side, 'uses and gratification' perspectives has taught us that actually children has the control of mass media. Therefore, they can make mass media useful for themselves. From this perspective, media become the most effective partner for character education.

Since the development of mass media and the necessary of character building are essential for human life, it is important to look at media literacy as the key to break the debatable role of media in character education. Media literacy is a set of perspective which teach parents, teachers, event the children in how use mass media wisely. It can be a good tool for them to understand and interpret the content of media and use it as a material for character education. Therefore, media literacy is a must to be taught in every school and every home.

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