The Significance of Environmental Contents in Character Education for Quality of Life

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Abstract

The environmental awareness is expected to be a part of the characters of young people. This study aims to explore college students’ opinions regarding the environmental contents in the subjects to contribute in improving the comfortable living in Jakarta. This study used qualitative methods of interviewing technique to 33 students from different majors. The results of this study show that 91% students agreed to the holding of courses that include environmental contents, while the rest 1% not agreed. For the relationship aspect of improving the comfortable living, 76% students agreed, while the remaining 21% students not agreed.

Keywords: Environmental content; character education; comfortable living; quality of life

1. Introduction

Environmental issues have been a trending topic nowadays. This is even more as many recently occurring disasters in Indonesia are getting higher, as the country is located in the Ring of Fire area. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are the two examples of potentially occurring disasters for a country located in the area. Besides the natural hazard typical of a country located in a circum-Pacific belt, there are also human-instigated disasters, like forest fires, floods, and landslides. The last two examples are due

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to the absence of trees in stabilizing the slopes, one of which is to maintain the amount of water infiltrating the soil, and thus, to prevent the slopes from sliding down to the lower-level land.

Considering the fact that many natural disasters occurred due to environmental damaging behaviors, it is imperative for the society, or at least the intellectual group, to have a good understanding of the significance of environmental preservation. Because of this, our university had included some environmental contents into our general subjects, the character building (commonly called CB in short) subjects serials. The inclusion of the contents is intended to improve the students’ environmental awareness, considering that environmental issues are rarely put into the lecture materials, but it is very important for socialization and internalization in the character building. For our latest revision of CB subjects, the environmental education here has dual purposes. First is to increase the students’ environmental awareness for preventing environmental damaging behaviors and natural disasters. Second is to develop their understanding that environmental preservation and improvement of environmental quality will lead to the comfortable living, which eventually improves the quality of life in the society as well. The environmental education here consists of increasing the environmental awareness in an individual’s everyday life, and as a group, in business and professional practices.

Since the subjects are aimed to improve the students’ personalities, the CB subjects get revision periodically. The periodic revision aimed to fulfill the requirements suitable to any circumstances at those points. In enhancing the curriculum revision process of the current CB subjects, the authors tried to find out how far students agree with some environmental education contents in the subjects. Getting the assents from the students regarding of environmental contents of the CB subjects is quite a matter for authors. Since the authors’ experiences in facing apathy toward environmental issues in the society, the authors do not want the students to be apathy themselves.

One of our major problems is that environmental issues have not been a concern in the education the education of Indonesia, whereas there are lots of environmental damages. Therefore the objective of our research is to get opinions from our students about the significance of environmental contents in the CB subjects, to increase the environmental awareness as part of our characters, and the significance of the environmental awareness to increase the comfortable living for our quality of life.

Relevant research relating to environmental education performed by Safa ÖZGÜRLER and Arzu CANSARAN, Amasya University, Turkey, which was published in the International Electronic Journal of Environmental Education Vol.4, Issue 2, 2014, 71-83. The aim of their study is to explore the level of environmental literacy of the graduate students in Amasya University; their approach to environment and environmental issues; and to investigate their beliefs about the sustainable development. The sample of the study is 5 graduate students studying at Amasya University, 3 female and 2 male, in 2012-2013 academic year. The data collected was analyzed by using content analysis. According to the findings, environmental knowledge of graduate students is not at a high level but their approach to environment and environmental issues, interest of environmental education is at a high level. In addition, they have positive awareness about sustainable development. Graduate students are the teachers or the academics of the future. Therefore, these students’ environmental knowledge and attitudes towards environment, sensitivity and interest have a great importance with regard to the solution of environmental problems. With this in mind, further studies like this might be conducted. This study is significant to prepare a background for the studies in this field and to make contribution to the literature.
2. Methods

2.1. Participants and research design

Participants in this research were 33 students of semester 6 (18 males and 15 females, with a range of age between 19 and 20 years), and they were all residents in Jakarta. Their educational backgrounds were of accountancy department (16 students), and of Information System department (17 students). The technique used in sampling is random sampling. The research was conducted at a private university in Jakarta in January 2015.

The method used in the research is quantitative approach with survey instrument to get the illustration of students’ opinions about the significance of environmental contents in the CB subjects to increase the students’ environmental awareness and the significance of the environmental awareness to increase the comfortable living, using the closed questions (yes or no questions).

2.2. Interview structure and data analysis

The selected participants were interviewed for two issues. The first one deals with the significance of the environmental concern as part of character education. The second one asks about the relationship between the contribution of environmental education and the degree of comfortable living as part of the quality of life.

3. Results

From the research results, it was found that out of 33 students, 30 students agreed that CB courses should include environmental contents, one student did not agree that environmental education should be included in the courses, but agreed that it should only be integrated in the program, and two students did not agree that the environmental contents should be included in the courses. According to both students’ opinion, environmental education is more suitable to be given to primary and secondary school students. For the relationship between the education and the comfortable living improvement, 26 students agreed that this education could improve the comfortable living in Jakarta, while the remaining 7 students stated that this has no relation to the improvement of the comfortable living in Jakarta.

The results are shown in this chart below:

![Fig.1. The comparative percentages of the number of students who agreed and disagreed with environmental contents in character education](image-url)
After sorting the interview results, researchers did the mixed analysis. They are hands-on analysis and content analysis for the data gathered. Mostly researchers used the hands-on analysis, but content analysis method was also used in sorting and classifying the results.

4. Discussion

4.1. Character education

Megawangi stated that based on Socrates’ philosophy, the most fundamental purpose of education is to transform a person to become good and smart individuals. An educated man should be a wise person, who can make use of his knowledge for good deeds, and finally lead a discreet life in all aspects of family, neighborhood, society, and country settings. Therefore, a successful education system is the one that could equip its members with good characters highly needed in establishing a respected nation-state (Megawangi, 2010).

Character education is principally the education of values that involves aspects of knowledge (cognitive), feeling, and actions (Goleman, 2001). Lickona in Setiawan (2013) stated that in any character-generating value education, it consists of three components of good characters, which are: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, as clearly seen in picture 1. The three components (picture 1) must be correlated to each other in the implementation of character education. Moral knowing, which includes moral awareness, knowledge of moral values, foresight, moral reasoning, decision making, and self awareness, is the essential thing that students need to have.

However, character education limited to moral knowing is not adequate. It needs to proceed to moral feeling, which includes: conscience, confidence, empathy, kindness, self control, and humility. It further goes to the most important stage, which is moral action. It is critical because at this stage the driving motives of a person for good behaviors can be seen from his competence, desire, and habit performances. The construction of the three intertwined moral components is the requirement of the character education implementation in developing the students’ moral intelligence.
Character Building (CB) subject is aimed at improving the quality of its students’ personality, so that they are ready to contribute to the society after graduation, by allowing them to apply many important values in life, including caring, honest, and responsible attitudes, disciplines, and tolerance given throughout the subjects. The subjects are given to two freshmen cohorts, and consist of three courses, which are CB-Pancasila (CB-The Five Principles), CB-Kewarganegaraan (CB-The Citizenship), and CB-Agama (CB-The Religion). The three courses are the curriculum revision of previous CB courses, which are CB-Self Development, CB-Spiritual Development, CB-Interpersonal Development, and CB-Professional Development. The four courses were previously delivered to three freshmen cohorts studying in the university. Topics of environmental education were inherent in the previous courses of CB-Spiritual Development and CB-Professional Development. As for the new CB courses, these topics are planned to be integrated in one of the three courses of CB-Pancasila, CB-Kewarganegaraan and CB-Agama.

4.2. Environmental contents in character education

The environmental education is very important because as the society acquires the education, their awareness for environment could grow and develop well, so that a change of attitude and mindset toward better environment is expected to happen. The true purpose of environment education is to allow the society members to be aware and sensitive to the environment and its problems, as well as to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivation, and willingness to work together as an individual and a group.
toward the preventive actions and solution of environment complexities (Karim, 2003: 46).

Environmental contents inherent in CB-Spiritual Development were given in the fifth meeting, with the theme of Caring for the Natural Environment. The topics listed in the meeting are as follows: Interdependency between human and natural environment, understanding the natural environment, religion and spiritualism for natural environment: the importance of eco-spiritualism for natural environment and the universe as the representation of divine presence, caring for the natural environment: religious-spiritual imperative, ways to develop caring for the natural environment, and the fruitage of nature caring. As for CB-Professional Development, the environmental contents were in the eleventh meeting, with the theme of Challenges of Natural Environment Sector. The topics listed in the meeting are: ethical theories of natural environment, biocentrism, earth as the ecosystem unity, deep ecology, modern challenges of natural environment, moral responsibility for attitude change, sustainable development paradigm.

Men with peaceful, honest, responsible, caring attitudes for the environment and other moral qualities are those living with clear conscience, so as to select the good and right things, to control greedy drives, to think critically, to be creative, to perform high-quality work, to be proactive in doing good deeds, and to push themselves harder for better results. This needs a well-founded structure to generate people with honorable characters. The foundation can be established by a well-structured character education. Through character education, a person could acquire knowledge in developing better characters. A successful education system is the one that could develop people with characters required for establishing a respected nation-state (Megawangi, 2010).

Ninety one percent of the selected students to be the participants in this research gave their agreement on the importance of environmental contents in the character education. Only nine percent of them disagreed. From the results, it can be stated that most of the participants were aware of how important environmental contents contribute to the character education.

Character education is essentially the education of values that includes aspects of knowledge (cognitive), feeling, and actions (Goleman, 2001). This is in accordance with Lickona’s statement that in any character-generating value/moral education, there are three components of good characters, which are: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, as seen before in picture 1. The three components in picture 1 must be linked to each other in the implementation of character education. Moral knowing, which includes moral awareness, knowledge of moral values, foresight, moral reasoning, decision making, and self awareness, is the essential thing to be taught to students. Furthermore, it needs to proceed to moral feeling, including: conscience, confidence, empathy, kindness, self control, and humility. It further goes to the most significant stage, which is moral action. It is crucial because at this stage the driving force for a person in doing good things can be seen from his abilities, wants, and practices. The synergy of the three interlinked moral components is the implementation requisite of the character education in developing the students’ moral intelligence. Both Goleman and Lickona realized that character education is the integrated unity of foundation aspects for a student. Environmental contents become an important aspect in character education, as through it, the objectives of the environmental education can be achieved, which is to establish the fully aware and sensitive society toward environment and its complexities, as well as to allow them to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivation, and willingness to work together as an individual and a group toward the preventive actions and solution of environment problems (Karim, 2003: 46).

In the new CB courses, there have been learning activities designed not only to provide students with knowledge through materials learned in every meeting’s topic, but also to assign them final projects to accomplish. This is intended to allow the students acquire all the aspects needed to apply the learned
values in their life. Moral education limited only to knowledge and concepts would not succeed without the necessary applications of its learned behaviors, for further daily implementations in the long run.

Materials related to environmental contents are given in topics, in which during learning in class, they are delivered in a variety of interesting activities. In every meeting, students in groups discuss about the current and phenomenal topics. A variety of environmental issues is discussed as the trending topic in the class. Short movies on environmental issues can be used to support the learning activities in the class.

The group work along with its final project allows students not only to acquire knowledge-based learning and feel the experience, but also to act on it. The tasks are designed for students to mingle in the society and participate in the environmental caring activities. Some projects conducted are, for example, bio pores making, sink making at elementary schools, sanitary ambassadors with social service activities, including information sharing on health and sanitation to the community, etc. This way, students gain lots of valuable experiences by doing the task. By having access to a variety of social realities, students could enhance their character learning process. In the end, it is expected that students develop their awareness for better and healthy environment by having a change of mindset and attitudes toward better environment. As discussed before, the environmental education is one essential contribution in decreasing the damages on environment, as well as the important means to produce manpower with strong principle of sustainable development (Pratomo, 2008: 26).

4.3. Environmental awareness to increase comfortable living for quality of life

“The individual’s behavior in relation to his environment and the spontaneous adjustment to the environment to improve comfort must also be considered as important factors in the attainment of ideal conditions. Thus, concepts of environmental numbness and environmental awareness were created to demonstrate the users’ possible reactions to the environment. The environmental comfort itself was determined by the design of the building, the activity was exercised by the users in the place, and specifically related to thermal comfort, and the clothes were used by the occupants” (Gifford, 1976; Hawkes 1997 in Kowaltowski et al, 2004). The definition is used in the context of an urban life in big cities with typically high rise buildings and limited open space reserves. Normally, at tertiary education level, the environmental comfort as a knowledge is specifically given as part of the core subjects in the departments of architecture, landscape architecture, and environmental engineering. Some parts of it are related to physical environment which directly supports our life, and thus, the contents should be integrated into the curriculum of general subjects given to all departments. These are in agreement with theories that say that “environmental numbness, or apathy toward the physical environment, causes a type of paralysis in the individual, where the user rarely exercises any attitude in relation to unpleasant situations” (Gifford, 1976 in Kowaltowski et al, 2004). “With environmental awareness, or active perception of the physical environment, the opposite happens. The environment has attractions and proper configurations for its manipulation; it evokes the user's perception. The importance of his/her participation for the efficient operation of the space is conceived. Adaptation to the place occurs. Potentialities of architectural elements are perceived and are generating a compromise between user and environment” (Sommer, 1972 in Kowaltowski et al, 2004). This perception of space should be considered “dynamic, coming from action in a given space” (Hall, 1966 in Kowaltowski et al, 2004).

Referring to the theories, it turns out that environmental education could lead to the individual’s increased spatial ability. By having the final project and doing physical activities for the physical environment in groups, students are expected to improve their spatial abilities as teamwork. This could result in the increased tolerance and solidarity among themselves. Their increased spatial abilities, teamwork, tolerance, and solidarity would surely improve their quality of comfortable living, and eventually affect their quality of living in general.
This research also aligned the comfortable living with the quality of life. The quality of life itself defined as individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns by the WHO. It also stated that the quality of life is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person’s physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and their relationship to salient features of their environment. Therefore, the quality of life can be divided into six domains, they are (1) physical health; (2) psychological; (3) level of independence; (4) social relationships; (5) environment; and (6) spirituality/religion/personal beliefs. The domain environment has facets incorporated within, and they are : (1) financial resources; (2) freedom, physical safety and security; (3) health and social care : accessibility and quality; (4) home environment; (5) opportunities for acquiring new information and skills; (6) participation in and opportunities for recreation/leisure; (6) physical environment (pollution/noise/traffic/climate); and (7) transport (WHO, 1997). Discussing the fourth facet, home environment is an important factor for many people to be considered for their comfortable living. According to Tao (2014), living conditions are the most important factor in people’s lives. He stated that residents today are conscious about their living conditions. Moreover, the residents prefer good quality of houses. He even clearly stated in his research that good life cannot be achieved without having good living conditions.

Referring to this domain and the facets, it is clearly stated that the higher the quality of our environment, the higher the quality of life we can get. Related to this research, the most related one is the sixth facet, physical environment. The second related one is the fourth facet, home environment. It is supported by a research said that residents today are conscious about their living conditions. Moreover, this research considers the three other domains, physical health, psychological, and social relationships, also relate to the comfortable living. They have their own facets. The facets of physical health domain are (1) energy and fatigue; (2) pain and discomfort; and (3) sleep and rest. The facets of psychological domain are (1) bodily image and appearance; (2) negative feelings; (3) positive feelings; (4) self-esteem; and (5) thinking, learning, memory and concentration. And the facets of social relationships are (1) personal relationships; (2) social support; and (3) sexual activity (WHO, 1997).

5. Conclusion and recommendation

From the data analysis above, it can be seen that most participants representing the students would agree that environmental contents should be integrated into the curriculum of character education in general subjects. Considering the many benefits of character education inherent with environmental contents, it can be concluded that environmental contents are highly relevant and effectual if used as one of the supporting components for character education, because the contents are beneficial for improving students’ abilities. Environmental awareness could also improve comfortable living, because as an individual performs this practice, he or she tends to maintain the sanitation, balance, and preservation of the physical environment around him or her. The factor of comfortable living is highly influential for improving the life quality of the individual and society.

Based on the conclusion, the researchers recommend keeping the environmental contents in general subjects for character education at tertiary level. To make the program effective, it is suggested that the frequency of environment-related activities should be increased beyond class hours.

Further research is expected to investigate how far the environmental contents should be integrated into character education in relation to the existing psychological, educational, and sociological aspects. Considering the current situations in Indonesia in general and Jakarta in particular as the hazard-prone areas, the researchers state that this has become the urgency in our educational contexts.
References