

# Teachers' Role in Building Students' Character through English Language Teaching Classroom

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# TEACHERS' ROLE IN BUILDING STUDENTS' CHARACTER THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CLASSROOM

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## Abstract

Teacher plays an essential role in education process. The success of a learning process in changing students behavior depends on how well the teacher treat the students. The teachers also have to be a good model for the student in every classroom interaction. Teaching English will be meaningful when the teacher can integrate the teaching process into the development of students' character. When the students behave with proper manner in society, the education process can be said meet the goal of education. Any subject matter in education needs to concern about this issue, especially in English language teaching. The students are not only taught about the linguistic structure of the language but also how their character can be built through the classroom interaction. This paper aims to give an overview about the teachers' role in building student's character through English language teaching classroom. It is dealing with what is the nature of character and its importance in education. It also describes the roles of teacher as character educator and how to integrate character education into English language teaching which can be done through some way, such as habituation, integrating character education into English material, cooperative learning in English teaching classroom and Instructional Media of English Teaching.

**Key Words:** Classroom Activities, Character, Character Building, English Language Teaching.

*"Character isn't inherited. One builds its daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, actions by actions (Helen G. Douglas)"*

## Introduction

Globalization era brings positive and negative impact in our social life. It can not be denied that there is a change in how people live in this era. The influence of technology such as internet has brought human to the new era of life. It is also influence student which naturally the generation of the nation. It brings the change toward their behavior where they can get the information easily but do not filter which is good or bad for them. It is because the nature of students are easily imitate and try the new thing that they get. As the result, social problem that happen in our environment recently mostly about the students behavior and it is often related to the failure of education that naturally happen in school. Simply to put, globalization has brought our generation into the new world which causes weak character among young generation. It also

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results many implication in our social life where there are many social issues that related to moral virtue of the students come along through this technology era.

The social problem that found in our society recently, mainly which is related to students like bullying, cheating, violence are often related to the failure of character building in education process, especially teaching and learning process that happen between teachers and students. According to Adi (2011:401), social problem and moral issues in today's society such as corruption, students' riot, social horizontal conflicts, or drug abuse are often associated with the moral and character education and building. Furthermore Melinda and Amir (2013:187) explain that the lack of attitude among students happens due to several factors, first is lack of attention from parents at home, second is about financial problem and the last is the educator itself or the teacher who does not give the attention to the students so they are free to do what they want without obeying the rules that they have to pay attention. The role of the teacher in classroom is not only about transferring knowledge through the material or the lesson but more that that they have responsibility to make a change in students' behavior or to build students' character into the good way. But this main goal is not as easy as it sounds, score oriented where the students attending school only for preparing themselves for national examination and get the mark at the end of school year so that they can get a job and also dealing with the problem that most of the teacher only teaching without educating seem like the big issue that our education world faced today.

Dealing with these problems, Aunillah (2011:9) states that since 2010 the government through the Ministry of National Education Affairs established the application of character education in all levels of education in Indonesia. In addition, Suardana (2012:1) also stated that based on Indonesian national education system law number 20 year 2003, chapter 3 states that the goal of national education is to develop educated people with life skill and good character building, therefore all levels of education should integrate character education into curriculum, syllabus, lesson plan and also in teaching and learning material. Integrating character education into every subject in classroom activities is assumed can be one of solutions for such problem, including in English teaching in school. In line with this issue, Erlinda (2013) proposes the integrating of character education in teaching literature. She promote the use of narrative text as the material of English teaching that provide character education. it is beacuse the narrative stories provide both entertainment and moral values from the fictinal charactes in the stories.

However, the successfulness of the teacher in building character of his or her students depends on how well the teacher maximizing his or her role in teaching and learning process. Consequently, this paper aims to explore several points related to the role of teacher in character building through English language teaching classroom which are; (1) What is character and character education?, (2) The importance of character building, (3) Teachers' role as character educator, (4) Character Building and English Language Teaching and (5) Building character through English language learning classroom.

### **1. What is Character and Character Education?**

Before talking more about integrating character building into English language teaching, it is important to understand what is meant by character and what are the forms of character that would be discussed. Character means the individual's inner make up as a well-established structural whole as manifested in the individual's actions habits and mode of thought, as well as in the human sphere of the emotions (Adi, 2011:401). Character refers to Samani and Harianto (2012:41) is the way of thought and act which is uniquely belongs to somebody for living, cooperating within family, society, and nation. Wynne in Huitt (2004) claims that generally

character bad or good is considered to be observable in one's conduct. In addition Tadzikoratun Musfiroh in Aunillah (2011:19) states that character is the compilation of attitudes, behaviors, motivations and skills. In other word, character viewed as someone's action which is the manifestation of their thought and conduct. Someone who has good character would have deep awareness about his potential and would act appropriately based on that potential and someone with positive character would do the best in every step of all the way but in the good way. In building someone's character can be done instantly but it need a process because as said by Helen G. Douglas Character isn't inherited. One builds its daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, actions by action.

Regarding character in term of education, character education defines as the process of engrafting the moral virtues into students' life that includes knowledge, individual awareness, willpower and actions that implemented into their life, for god, them selves, other people, environment and country (Aunillah, 2011:18). For simple definition the character education refers to Samani and Harianto (2011:43) is any single positive thing that done by the teachers that has influence into the character of their students. Character education has become a trend issue in our education world today. It is a movement that done by the government and school to overcome social problems that happen recently, mainly which is related to students; behavior.

Related to the character and character education, there are some pillars of character that can be reference in implementing character education and integrating character into classroom activities. According to Smith in Meladina and Amir (2013:188) there are several traits that will be learned in character education, firstly is responsibility which is the basic belief that each of us has mutual agreement with those around us to do our part, to carry our fair share of the load and to accept the consequences of our action, secondly is honesty, honesty is telling the truth or conforming our words into reality, thirdly is integrity which is about conforming our reality into the words or in other word keeping promise and filling expectations, the next is respect which is based on the social groups, believe in religion and culture for example respect to self and others and the last, caring which means showing understanding of other by treating them with kindness, compassion, generosity and forgiving spirit. At least these five pillars of character can be implemented by integrating it into classroom activities, especially in English language teaching classroom but it depends on how teacher can plan the lesson or activities that will be done in the classroom.

## **2. The Importance of Character Building**

Character is an important aspect in developing human resources in a country (Muslich, 2011:35). The quality of human resources depends on how well the character of the citizens. Character building is really needed to face the globalization era. As Stated by Tantra in Saputra, Nitiasih and Putra (2013) there are five important reasons why education should be based on the character education: first, education is a process of acculturation of the most effective character education. Second, education has a very long time span. Third, education can be believed to be able to overcome negative tendencies and behave badly. Forth, the ministry of education and culture of republic Indonesia intends to create and develop the potential of human learners to become Indonesian which has a character education. Fifth, character education is an investment system values to educators, learners, and education both formal, non formal and informal.

Regarding the aim of character education, Sahrudin in Aunillah (2011:105) claims that there are three important points why character building through character education is needed in our country; first character education is needed to develop basic potential of the students so that they can grow up and become someone who has good personality, bright thought and nice act,

second it is needed to consolidate and build multicultural society behavior, and the last character education can improve the civilization of a nation that can compete in the world association. In addition, Schwartz in Samani and Harianto (2011:16) states that in its relation to school community, character education has functions as follow; (1) it helps the student to achieve the successful in school and in life, (2) it helps the students to face any challenge in their life, (3) it improves positive attitude and behavior of the students and decrease the possibility of doing negative actions, (4) makes everyone at school act based on the moral virtues and the last (5) it makes the learning process easier and more efficient.

It is clear that character education plays an important role in building civilization of a nation. It influences almost all the component of human life where it is the pointer of the successful of a nation in the world association and the root of this goal is the students or the youth, so by improving the character building for students which are naturally the next generation of a nation in their learning process or in other word, integrating character building through subject matters that students will get in the classroom in needed to answer this challenge.

### **3. Teachers' Role as Character Educator**

The role of teacher in English Language Teaching Classroom is not only about teaching the linguistic structure of language but more than that the teacher has main role as character educator. How the teacher educates the character become another issues, but the best way that the teacher can do is to be a role models in teaching characters and moral virtues to the students. As explain by Harmer (2004:1) a good teacher is the on who has personality and doesn't hide it from the students so that she or he is not only a teacher but a person as well and it comes through the lesson. It means that teachers in the classroom has a position not to be only a teacher but the way she or he acts in from of the students play crucial point in building students character or in other word the students like the teacher who has good personality and can imitate their teacher easily.

According to Lumpkin (2008:47) a teacher's integrity is observed by the students and they evaluate the character of their teacher based on how they are treated and taught. There are five major moral virtues that teacher can models in classroom for the students which are honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Furthermore, she explains these five points as follow. First, *honesty*, teacher displays honest by telling the truth and acting in an honorable way which includes fulfilling the promises and commitments such as maintaining the confidentiality of the student records. It also includes not lying, cheating or stealing as teachers fulfill their professional responsibilities. For example, when the teacher promises the students about submitting the assignment in certain time and will give the feedback of students' work in given time, she or he has to make it happen, it is a simple model that teacher can give to the student to filling up honesty as character to the students. Second, *trust*, an honest person can be trusted. Trust is belief in others that develop whenever people fulfill their promise and commitments. Take the example in giving students' mark; the teachers have to have their own grading rubric, so that every single assessment that they do and the students' achievement can be well recorded, when the students asking their point, teacher can explain where it comes from.

Third, *fairness*, it requires that all students have same opportunity to meet the standards in skill test and receive an appropriate grade; it is related to the trust of the students to their teachers. When the teacher has his own grading rubrics and assessing the student in the same way, teachers will have explanation when the students ask about their achievement, but although the students have same opportunity to get a good grade, it still depends on how well the students trying to get the best. In other word, the students still have possibility to receive a different grade.

The next is *respect*. Respect means the teachers care for the students as unique individuals. Developing a respectful sense of community within the class is vitally important, the teacher who model respect will always appreciate each individual students, even when the behavior of some may be less than worthy of this respect. The last is *responsibility*. Teachers demonstrate responsibility by being morally accountable for their actions and fulfilling their duties. Responsible teachers are well prepared for each class and provide prompt and constructive feedback to students to help facilitate the learning process.

Integrating character into education, especially into learning process and in this case into English language learning is needed and has to be integrated into curriculum, syllabus, lesson plan and teaching learning material. But before, the role of teacher as model in teaching character and moral virtues has to be maximized, because the first thing that students easily imitate in classroom is their teacher. Teacher has crucial role in classroom, when it has well-began by the teacher in modeling character, the planning of the lesson or the material that has been well prepared which is integrated into character would easily executed as well.

#### **4. Character Building and English Language Teaching**

Character building can be integrated into every subject matter in school, including into English language teaching. Language has a central role in the development of the intellectual, social, and emotional students and is supporting the success of the study all subjects (Melinda and Amir, 2013). English language courses equip learners the ability to communicate in their daily lives in accordance with the global demands, and equip learners to develop communication to improve the high standard. According to Sukarno (2012:205) integrating values education gives teachers another vision of their pedagogical work and it has to be planned as a school project, integrated into every aspect of the curriculum, pedagogy and activities and it can be separated from teachers' role. Teachers have their own duty to establish the suitable form of character education that they can be implemented into their classroom activity and the appropriate plan in lesson that they can deliver to their students.

Integrating character building into language learning activities should take into account the principle of language learning that appropriate in integrating character building into language teaching (Vale, D., Scarino, A. and McKay P in Adi, 2011:405). Those principles are; (1) the learner-centered principle, (2) the active involvement principle, (3) the immersion principle, (4) the focusing principle, (5) the socio-cultural principle, (6) the awareness principle, (7) the assessment principle and (8) the responsibility principle. Regarding these eight principles, Vale, D., Scarino, A. and McKay P in Adi discuss it as follow: *The learner-centered principle* means every class will be composed at individuals each with their own mix of variable such as the following, cognitive, affective and social maturity. It can be very helpful to plan for a small number of notional sub-groups which are broadly based on the common learner difference. *The active-involvement principle* means learner learn how to use language purposefully only for being provided with a range of variety of opportunities to do so. *The immersion principle* means learner will learn best in an environment where they are surrounded by a range of variety of spoken and written language. They include teacher talk, other classroom talk, audio and video types, specially-prepared written information and reality ad written texts fro outside the classroom. *The focusing principle* means in order to bring about an effective communicative ability in the relatively limited tie that is available in school language learning, learners need to focus at appropriate time on language form as well as on the skill and strategies that will help them cope with a restricted language resources.

*The socio-cultural principle* explains that language do not exist in a vacuum, they are linked with the cultures which they reflect. It is important to value the cultural experiences which they bring to their learning and to foster direct involvement in the target culture. *The awareness principle* is language awareness activities can enable learners to become aware to the roles of language as a means of gaining access to other people, ideas and ways of thinking. *The assessment principle* is an awareness of progress can be an incentive for further learning, so it is important that learners can be provided with regular and appropriate feedback about their progress. It is equally important that the feedback that learners are given is realistic. The responsibility principle means all school learning, including language learning, should equip learners with the insight and skills to enable the to take increasing responsibility for their own learning, to learn how to learn and how to learn a language. By considering these principles, it is expected that the integration of character building into English language learning will be running well, because a good character is not constructed automatically but it is developed over a period of time through a process of teaching.

### **5. Building Character through English Language Learning Classroom**

The main question that comes up related to this issue is how to integrate the character education into language learning activities. English has been taught in Indonesia as foreign language and in teaching language as foreign language; the predetermined objectives must be that the students are able to communicate using the target language, English. The teacher plays a role as transmitter of social and personal values, it can be done through teaching technique, strategies, models and skills (Nucci in Huitt: 2004). According to Saputra, Nitiasih and Putra (2013) an education process generally can be divided into three main activities, namely: planning, implementation, and evaluation. The integration of the character values within the education process should be done in those three activities.

The integration of character into English language teaching can be done through several ways; first thing that the teacher can do is through habituation where the teacher models the good habituation while gathered in the classroom with the students. Second, it can be done through learning material which can be developed and designed by the teacher, character education also can be taught through classroom activities where all student taking part in every activities and also through the use of instructional media to give a model to the students whether it is good or bad for them.

#### *a. Teaching Character through Habituation in English Teaching Classroom*

Teacher can begin to teach character to the students through the simplest way. It begins since the first time teacher walk in to the class. The way teacher greet the students for example as a good Muslim we are supposed to say “Assalamualaikum” when meet somebody else would make students aware that to say salam is a part of Muslim’s life and at the end of the class the teacher lead the students to pray or at least say “Hamdallah” is also important. It is a good habit to build up their belief in god and their faith.

Other simple good habit that teacher need to teach is discipline. It will raise students’ awareness to have responsibility and respect about the time. When the teacher always come to the class on time, the students’ would follow it or at least because of the rule that teacher established about on time they will be discipline to attend the class. Make them learn to love their environment, especially their classroom. Students will realize the important of keep the cleanness when the teacher leads them to do it. Warn the students about the harmful of rubbish

and lead them to put away the rubbish into the place will teach them about caring to the environment and also responsibility.

Teaching character to the students can not be done only in one night, it needs everybody's effort. In the classroom, teacher is the center, teacher is the model and in teaching character the teacher can start from the simplest thing. When the student makes such a simple good thing to be their habit, the character will be build by itself and as the teacher, they have a responsibility to build their students character more that just teaching knowledge.

*b. Integrating character education into English material*

English, as other language, consist of merely symbols, grammatical rules, pattern and skills which can not be studied without content, therefore one of its content can be local cultures comprising of local wisdom which are relevant to students' real life situation and meaningful for character building (Sukarno, 2013:203). In teaching English, there are several texts that will be learned by the students. One of them is narrative text. Narrative text is viewed as a text that can be a good resource for building students' character. According to Yeasmin, Azad and Ferdous (2011: 288), stories can both entertain and educate for learners. The aim of a narrative story is not only to amuse or entertain but it is also a good media in teaching moral to the students.

The teacher has to design an appropriate learning material through lesson plan, choose the appropriate story that can teach the student about the moral value. The text chooses which is closely to the local cultures would be a good way to introduce the students about the local wisdom which can be build their character. Take an example of Minang culture. Using a narrative story in teaching English can be through the local story, because one of kinds of narrative story is folktales. The story of Malin Kundang which is the famous story in Minang society can be taught to deliver moral value about the bad children, so that the students know that the behavior of Malin is not a good example.

**The Legend of Malin Kundang**

A long time ago, in a small village near the beach in West Sumatra, a woman and her son lived. They were Malin Kundang and her mother. Her mother was a single parent because Malin Kundang's father had passed away when he was a baby. Malin Kundang had to live hard with his mother.

Malin Kundang was a healthy, dilligent, and strong boy. He usually went to sea to catch fish. After getting fish he would bring it to his mother, or sold the caught fish in the town. One day, when Malin Kundang was sailing, he saw a merchant's ship which was being raided by a small band of pirates. He helped the merchant. With his brave and power, Malin Kundang defeated the pirates. The merchant was so happy and thanked to him. In return the merchant asked Malin Kundang to sail with him. To get a better life, Malin Kundang agreed. He left his mother alone. Many years later, Malin Kundang became wealthy. He had a huge ship and was helped by many ship crews loading trading goods. Perfectly he had a beautiful wife too. When he was sailing his trading journey, his ship landed on a beach near a small village. The villagers recognized him. The news ran fast in the town: "Malin Kundang has become rich and now he is here".

An old woman ran to the beach to meet the new rich merchant. She was Malin Kundang's mother. She wanted to hug him, released her sadness of being lonely after so long time. Unfortunately, when the mother came, Malin Kundang who was in front of his well dressed wife and his ship crews denied meeting that old lonely woman. For three times her mother begged Malin Kundang and for three times he yelled at her. At last Malin Kundang said to her "Enough, old woman! I have never had a mother like you, a dirty and ugly woman!" After that he ordered his crews to set sail. He would leave the old mother again but in that time she was full of both sadness and angriness. Finally, enraged, she cursed Malin Kundang that he would turn into a stone if he didn't apologize. Malin Kundang just laughed and really set sail.

In the quiet sea, suddenly a thunderstorm came. His huge ship was wrecked and it was too late for Malin Kundang to apologize. He was thrown by the wave out of his ship. He fell on a small island. It was really too late for him to avoid his curse. Suddenly, he turned into a stone.

(Source: <http://understandingtext.blogspot.com/2009/05/narrative-analysis-on-malin-kundang.html>)

The other kind of narrative story that can be used by the teacher is fable. Fable is the story which roles by animals. For example the story of the grasshopper and the ant.

#### **The Ant and the Grasshopper**

One summer's day, a merry Grasshopper was dancing, singing and playing his violin with all his heart. He saw an Ant passing by, bearing along with great toil a wheatear to store for the winter. "Come and sing with me instead of working so hard", said the Grasshopper "Let's have fun together." "I must store food for the winter", said the Ant, "and I advise you to do the same." "Don't worry about winter, it's still very far away", said the Grasshopper, laughing at him. But the Ant wouldn't listen and continued his toil. When the winter came, the starving Grasshopper went to the Ant's house and humbly begged for something to eat. "If you had listened to my advice in the summer you would not now be in need," said the Ant. "I'm afraid you will have to go supper less to bed," and he closed the door.

(It is best to prepare for the days of necessity)

The student can directly learn from the story, the story about animal is also entertaining and interesting for the students. Their attention would easily be gathered by the teacher. When delivering a narrative story to the students, the teacher has to design an appropriate classroom activities which can go directly to the goal of lesson and also joyful for the students. So, they will enjoy the class and learn something from the story which is good for their character. When choosing the story, the teacher also need to consider the level of difficulty of the story and the level of students ability, so that's the story can be working out in the classroom activity which can also build students' character through the moral virtues of the story.

#### **c. Cooperative Learning in English Teaching Classroom to Build Students' Character**

Classroom activities also provide an opportunity to the teacher to develop students' behavior. It can be done through cooperative learning. According to Lie (2007:17) cooperative learning is really close to Indonesian culture and through appropriate classroom activities, it can be also as a media in building students' character.

There are several models of cooperative learning that can be used by teacher in classroom activities, for example "*Inside Outside Circle*" which provides the student an opportunity to sharing anything with their friends in the circle, it will build up students' respect to others students, because they will meet their unexpected friend through the circle, it will avoid the feeling of unwillingness to share and cooperate with certain students among the class participant.

Other activity that also useful to builds students is "*two stay two stray*" which divides students in a group consist of four. Every group has to discuss certain topic and group and has own responsibility about their own topic. Once, two out of four students in the group should move to other group and share their discussion result into their new group, this activity is really useful to build up students' responsibility. Playing "*make a match*" in English classroom activities can also teach the students how to be honest, trust and fairness. When the students have to find their partner which has same topic with them, no matter who are their partner, each pairs has to be honest in showing their topic and trust each other in matching their idea, because everyone would get one partner, it will make them learn how to live in fair.

Classroom activities that the teachers choose have to be suitable with the material that will be delivered. The three types of cooperative learning that discussed above can be an option for the teacher to integrate the character building through English language learning classroom.

*d. Character Building through Instructional Media of English Teaching*

Students can easily learn from what they see and hear. It is also a good way to provide the opportunity to the students to see which the good and bad thing is for them through what they can see and hear. In classroom activity, the use of instructional media not only can help the students to understand the lesson but they also can learn something from what they see and hear. The teacher creativity to make the classroom to be meaningful they have to consider the use of instructional media. According to Ruis, Muhyidin and Waluyo (2009:1) Media is really useful in helping to achieve the learning goals and the teacher should use the media in teaching because of several reasons, they are because media can; (a) solving the lack of the learners' experience, (b) reaching everything out of the class, (c) creating possible direct interaction between the learners and their environment, (d) producing some observations, (e) keeping the basic, concrete and real concepts of the teaching, (f) arousing students' motivation and (g) integrating the experience from the concrete things to the abstract one.

Many kinds of media that teacher can use in the classroom activity, one of them is visual media. The use of visual media can be through picture, chart, drawing or the most familiar visual media recently is power point. When teaching descriptive text for example, in describing someone, the teacher can show two picture of a famous figure which one of them is famous because doing something good and another one is famous because doing something bad. By showing the two contrasted pictures, the students would know what the good thing that they can imitate is and what is the bad thing that they should avoid related to the person in description, it will make them learn how to be a good person like the one who has already described. Another media which is also interesting and meaningful is the use of audio visual media, for example video recording. Besides showing a picture motion, video recording also provided a sound to make it more alive. In teaching English, the teacher can also use this kind of media, for example in teaching news item. The teacher can show the students a short video about students' violence and what is the effect of that situation. The students can easily get the idea of the text while they also learn that the violence is not a good habit, so they have to avoid it.

The use of media in English teaching classroom has to be appropriate to the students' ability, occasion, time and material. The teacher can design the media s creative as she or he can but still need to be related to the learning goals. Because, media is not only has a role in gathering students' attention but also it is a medium to teach them about the good and bad thing around the world so they can imitate the good one and avoid the bad one till it growing up inside them as a character.

**Conclusion**

The basic concept of education is not only about transmitting knowledge, but how the character of the student can be built is also need to be taken into account. Character viewed as someone's action which is the manifestation of their thought and conduct. To build someone's character can not be done only in one night, it needs process and also times. Because it is not something that can we say "instant" but it is something that need to be accustomed and modeled. Students can easily imitate what they see, so the teacher can maximized this condition to make them learn from what they see, hear and do. Teacher is a good model in teaching character, but their personality is the guaranty for this problem. The teachers have to be able to be a good model for their student. The integration of character education into teaching learning process can be applied in all subject matters, including English. Character education has to be integrated in all activities of education process which are planning, implementing and evaluating. In integrating character education into language learning activities there are several principles which is needed to be

followed, they are the learner-centered principle, the active-involvement principle, the immersion principle, the focusing principle, the socio-cultural principle, the awareness principle and the assessment principle, but the teachers' creativity in designing the best classroom activities for the student is the most important point at all. Integrating character education into English language learning classroom can be through material and activities. One of the best materials to teach character is through the narrative story. It provides not only entertaining story but also a meaningful line which has a lesson on it. The classroom activity can be also a good media for the teacher to teach character to their students. One of them is though cooperative learning which can enrich students' honesty, trust, respect, fairness and responsibility. It can be done through inside outside circle, two stay two stray and make a match. So, the teacher can do a lot more than just transferring the knowledge to the students, they have responsibility to make student learn, especially how to make a change into their behavior which is definitely making them can behave in good way. Character building is very important for a nation' future, everyone has responsibility to build up this nation. But, it can be done instantly, it needs process. With everyone's effort this great goal would be achieved at the end.

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