



---

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT BUILDING CHARACTERS THROUGH EMPLOYING CRITICAL THINKING ACTIONS IN WRITING

Ahmad Heki Sujiatmoko<sup>1</sup>, Sri Rachmajanti<sup>2</sup>, Sari Karmina<sup>3</sup>, Nova Ariani<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Negeri Malang

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Negeri Malang

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Negeri Malang

<sup>4</sup>Universitas Negeri Malang

E-mail: [ahmad.heki.fs@um.ac.id](mailto:ahmad.heki.fs@um.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [sri.rachmajanti.fs@um.ac.id](mailto:sri.rachmajanti.fs@um.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>,  
[sari.karmina.fs@um.ac.id](mailto:sari.karmina.fs@um.ac.id)<sup>3</sup>, [nova.ariani.fs@um.ac.id](mailto:nova.ariani.fs@um.ac.id)<sup>4</sup>

---

### Article History:

Received: 25-05-2023

Revised: 30-05-2023

Accepted: 05-06-2023

### Keywords:

Critical Thinking  
Actions, Writing Skill,  
Character Building.

**Abstract:** *Critical thinking in writing skill has a very good potential to become the access for the students to build their own characters. It is because critical thinking in writing skill leads the students to express their various ideas about the characters that they want to build to form good attitudes. The study was aimed at investigating about the acts of building elementary students' characters through critical thinking in writing. The study used a quantitative approach within the survey design. There were 50 students of Laboratory Elementary School of Universitas Negeri Malang, East Java, Indonesia who participated being the subjects of the study. The results revealed that all students were highly enthusiastic in building their own characters. This could be seen from various types of characters they wanted to build. However, among the various types of characters existing, loving homeland was mostly wanted character type chosen. Hence, it is recommended that the teachers are expected to apply critical thinking actions in writing as one of the best alternative ways to build the students' characters.*

---

© 2023 SENTRI: Jurnal Riset Ilmiah

---

## INTRODUCTION

Character is assumed to be a very important aspect in education. Curriculum 2013, which has been implemented in Indonesia, also promotes not only the hard-skill based learning activities, but also the soft-skill based learning activities held by the teachers. The soft-skill learning activities may lead the teachers to build the students' characters to be a good member of society. Lickona (2012) explains that character building is the conscious efforts to make the learners understand about ethical values. As known that elementary students are crucial with the problems of building characters.

The acts of building character for the students can be done through various kinds of learning activities held. In the EFL classrooms, it is possible that the teachers may lead the students to build their own characters through writing skill. It is because what the students expect to build their own characters can be expressed in writing. In addition, the character-

building values can also be used as the topic that can be inserted in the EFL classrooms as long as they are realistic, relevant, interesting, encouraging, and compatible (Richard & Rodger, 2001).

Writing is assumed to be one of the productive skills in the language learning. This means that in writing what the learners do is concerned with the acts of producing any ideas or expressions put on the paper resulting the literary works. In doing this, there are some processes or steps that need to be paid attention to produce the qualified literary works. Hence, the acts of writing contain about the process and product (Linse, 2005). The process involves some steps of entailing the ideas in the mind, changing the ideas into the words, and arranging the words into good sentences and paragraphs. In other words, the learners need to do several actions such as imagining, organizing, drafting, editing, and rereading to meet the production of writing. Meanwhile, the product refers to the result of what is written in accordance with certain rules, procedures, and criteria to meet a literary work. In this case, it deals with the organization of content, grammar, and other mechanical considerations (Brown, 2015).

Writing is also supposed to be a unique skill in learning language. It is because what happens in doing the writing performed by the children, there exists the process of blending thoughts and knowledge together to produce or create the meaning (Jones, Reutzell, & Fargo, 2010). Even, writing is also identified as a more difficult skill than listening and reading (Berman & Chang, 2010). In line with the statement, Nesamalar, Saratha, & Teh (2001) state that writing has become the least proficient for most learners in acquiring the a new language. Hence, writing is the challenging skill that must be owned and developed by the language learners.

Leading the learners to write and develop their writing skill is not an easy matter. Fu Lan (2006) reveals that the learners' failure to write happens within two common scenarios that are often made by the teachers. First is concerned with telling the learners to write about the specific topic which is not familiar, and second is concerned with the assumption that writing has something to do with the acts of translating. When this happens, the learners will find difficulties to entail the ideas as the basic component for starting to write.

To avoid the problems above, the EFL teachers are claimed to have a good strategy. One of the strategies that can be used by the EFL teachers to lead the students to have a good writing skill is by forming the students' critical thinking. The acts of performing critical thinking may include making judgments, making arguments, asking questions, processing information, solving problems, dispositions, and meta-cognition skills (Geng, 2014). Students are expected to have critical thinking concepts through some processes such as criticizing, analyzing, drawing conclusions, making conclusions about a certain issue (Rezaee & Mubarak, 2018).

Those critical thinking actions are also needed by the students in writing about character building. What the students can produce as their literary works is about the collections of ideas proposed from the critical thinking actions to be written down and developed to result the literary works expected.

That's why, the EFL teachers are expected to participate building the learners' characters through writing. Based on the rational explanation above, the researcher tried to formulate the research questions as follows.

1. How are the students' characters performed in their writings?
2. What is the contribution of character building mind in students' writing?

## METHOD

### Research Design and Participants

The study used a quantitative descriptive approach within the survey design. The study was done at one of the favorite private schools in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. It is Laboratory Elementary School of Universitas Negeri Malang (UM). This school is owned by Universitas Negeri Malang as the exemplified and qualified elementary school in Malang. One of the characteristics is that this school has an intention to promote English for Young Learners (EYL) under the cooperation with Cambridge University to hold the program for improving the learners' English skills at the early age. The participants of the research were 50 elementary students who participated practicing a creative writing program.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Characteristics		F	%
Gender	Male	15	
	Female	35	
Age	11	50	50
	12	50	50
Classes	5	25	50
	6	25	50

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the students joining this research. The students' age ranges between 11-12. There were 35 females and 15 males in the fifth and sixth levels. Each level contained about 25 students in this research. Hence, there were 50 students to be the subjects of the research.

### Research Instruments and Data Collections

There were 2 instruments used to get the data in this research. First was questionnaire containing about some questions concerning with types of characters that could be built and chosen as the writing products for the students. In utilizing the questionnaire to gather the data, it may refer to Tafli and Ates (2016) about the questionnaire's internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.87) which indicates that the items have a high level of internal consistency. In other words, the Cronbach alpha score of 0.815, obtained from this study's instrument, which was completed by 50 respondents, indicates that the instrument is generally reliable. The survey asks 18 questions. The questions have 9 dimensions shown in the following table.

Table 2. Question Dimensions

Dimensions	N. Items
Having social care/ being tolerant and friendly	3
Loving homeland	3
Hard working	2
Being religious	2
Being responsible	2
Being democratic	2
Having environment care	2
Having curiosity	2
Being creative	2

Each item uses 5 points Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (5 points) to strongly disagree (1 point). But the same scoring technique cannot be used with negatively worded questions. Therefore, for the negatively worded questions, the researchers applied reverse coding or reverse scoring. Reverse scoring means that the numerical scoring scale runs in the opposite direction.

Second was interview. The interview was important to get an in depth understanding of the students' opinions about character building. There were 10 students who joined the interview which was done online.

#### Data analysis

The results of the questionnaire were also quantitatively examined (Creswell, 2012). Using descriptive statistics, the researchers examined the degree of environmental sentiments among students. First, the researchers switched the ordinal scale's three categories (high, moderate, and low) for the assessment of the interval scale.

The ordinal scale is fitted with the interval scale so that those who score below the mean minus one standard deviation ( $X(x-1SD)$ ) are at the low level, while those who score above the mean plus one standard deviation ( $X(x+1SD)$ ) are at the high level. The students that fall into any of the two groups are classified as being at a moderate level ( $x-1SD$ )  $X(x+1SD)$  (Azwar, 2012).

#### 4. Findings

##### Students' Character Building Performances

Writing is not only concerned with the language skill that must be owned and developed by the teachers and students. Writing activity or skill can also give another potential to be developed such as the character building. In this case, what students write may contain about various ideas in which they are expected to be able to give some influences or impacts to the readers. Hence, writing is supposed to have great power to build the characters.

The research also revealed that the character building was also something important to be paid attention by the teachers in the school investigated. So that, the teachers committed to do whatever they could in trying to build the students' characters including through writing skill. Even, they felt that writing activity or skill was a good way or effort of which the character building for the students could be developed. In this case, what they could do for building the students' characters was done by leading them to apply the critical thinking in writing.

Furthermore, the research also found that there existed some tendencies of kinds of the characters built through writing by the students. This could be seen in the following diagram.

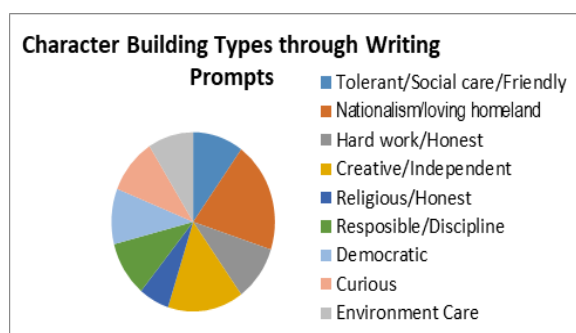


Diagram 1. Students' Character Building Types in Writing

The diagram above showed that some values of character building performed by the students in writing contained about some types such as being religious, honest, tolerant, discipline, hard work, creative, independent, democratic, curious, nationalism, loving homeland, friendly/communicative, responsible, social care, environment care, and rewarding achievement values. Specifically, nationalism or loving homeland was found to be the most value of the character building chosen by the students.

One of the reasons for thinking about the nationalism or loving homeland value as the writing prompt was to make the students realize about the importance of nationalism in the daily lives. And also, the school investigated was supposed to be the state school in which the nation or country was assumed to be the most important thing for conducting the education. Meanwhile, being religious was found to be the least value used. It was because the school investigated was not a religious-based school even though religion was also important for the students.

### **Character Building Mind Contributions in Students' Writing**

Character building has been a great attention in Curriculum 2013. It is expected that the learning activities held by the teachers not only promotes the students' cognitive domains, but also affective domains which can be seen from the students' initiation to build their own characters. To support this, the teachers are claimed to find a suitable learning activity which may lead the students to build their characters. Holding writing activities can be the alternative way for making the students have a good chance for building characters through various ideas to be expressed and written down.

The first findings of the research showed that most of the students investigated felt to get the improvements of their writing skill through using character building topics. The fact could be seen from the statement given by one of the students interviewed as follows.

“...when thinking about building characters, I begin to realize that there is a good way to stimulate the hidden ideas in my mind to come out easily. So that, I can create and use the ideas to support my writing...”

Excerpt (CB-W/In-S(01))

The statement spoken by the student above showed that one of the success of improving the writing skill was the access proposed within the character building topics. It was assumed that the student usually found it difficult to create and develop the ideas for supporting her writing products. By thinking about building characters, she felt to find the key how to create and develop the ideas from her mind. hence, she felt easy to produce the ideas for writing.

The similar statement about the benefit of thinking about building character for writing was also given by another student who said...

“...I cannot imagine that the character building is the bridge to support my mind to think better and create many ideas for writing. I have never done this before and I always think that writing is so difficult for me because I do not know how to create and develop the ideas well...”

Excerpt (CB-W/In-S02))

What had been stated by the student above indicated that the using character building as the topic for writing had given her some great experiences in creating and developing the ideas to support her writing products.

Issuing the ideas from the mind was not an easy matter for her. She had tried a lot about it. However, it was still hard for her to create and develop the ideas in her mind. She

was fortunate when she was asked to think about building character as the topic which could help her find ideas more easily.

Character building topics were assumed to be the new things for most of the students. They had never known before. What they learned revealed that the topic about character building had the uniqueness as the tool to dig their hidden ideas in the mind. This condition had been realized by them as what had been said by one of the students investigated as follows.

“...knowing about the topic of character building makes me realize about something unique which can make me build the ideas in my mind. It seems that I feel to be imaginative for fancying many things that can be the sources of information or references for me to create more ideas for writing. It is so beautiful and exciting a lot...:

Excerpt (CB-W/In-S(03))

From the statement above, it could be revealed that the the topic of building character had power to revive the students' spirit of writing. Specifically, what the topic could do for the students was to lead the them to be imaginative. In other words, the students had been successful to develop the capacity to imagine various things which can be the writing materials to be written down and developed further.

Every student investigated could be imaginative. However, they could not do it by themselves. In this case, they had to find something which could lead them to be imaginative. The topic of building characters had given the access for them to have the capacity to imagine many things. What they imagined could support them to get the inputs or sources of information that they could use for accomplishing their writing. In other words, their creativities for producing the ideas could increase.

The students' capacities to imagine something through the building character topics could give the positive impacts. In this case, the students were also found themselves to have some plans for building the literacy through writing in the class. One of the students investigated said...

“...I am so happy that my writing competence has increased when using the character building topics. It will be the proof that I can not deny. This is also an important thing for me. Hence, I feel motivated to do it for my them...”

Excerpt (CB-W/In-S(04))

The statement above indicated that there existed a good motivation from the students to improve their literacy. That's why, she liked to do many things for making the students improve their writing skill. And she could be motivated because she had had known what to do by looking at her own expriences.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

One thing that is crucial to be considered as one of the requirements for creating the effective teaching and learning activities is concerned with understanding about the students in terms of their growth and development as human beings (Acero, Javier, & castro, 2000). Students are supposed to be the individuals who have different characters which are built from their age resulting the maturity and background knowledge performing the level of understanding or learning capacity owned. In this case, referring to the age, the students can be young and adult. Young and adult learners have their own characteristics. So that, teaching young learners will not be similar to teaching the adult

ones. The strategies and techniques used by the teacher must be different referring to the different characters performed by the young and adult students.

In addition, the students will also feel motivated to improve their academic achievements when the teaching and learning activities conducted by the teacher may work well (Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2010). Hence, the teachers are claimed to have some strategies to make the class get success. One of the strategies for improving the students' academic achievements can be done through writing competence.

Writing skill is supposed to be one of the literacy that must be developed by both the teachers and students. As known that writing is also a difficult skill to be reached. Fortunately, the writing prompts have given the easy access to improve the teachers' literacy. The findings of the research also found that the training about creative writing prompts has given the positive impacts for the teachers to improve their creativities in producing the ideas and to motivate them to improve the students' writing skill.

Writing is assumed to be one of the productive skills in the language learning. This means that in writing what the learners do is concerned with the acts of producing any ideas or expressions put on the paper resulting the literary works. In doing this, there are some processes or steps that need to be paid attention or considered to produce the qualified literary works. Hence, the acts of writing contain about the process and product (Linse, 2005). The process involves some steps of entailing the ideas in the mind, changing the ideas into the words, and arranging the words into good sentences and paragraphs. In other words, the learners need to do several actions such as imagining, organizing, drafting, editing, and rereading to meet the production of writing. Meanwhile, the product refers to the result of what is written in accordance with certain rules, procedures, and criteria to meet a literary work. In this case, it deals with the organisation of content, grammar, and other mechanical considerations (Brown, 2015).

Based on the findings in the research, it can be explained that writing can also be the tool for leading the students to build their own characters. Building the characters is also considered to be one of the targets of education in this country referring to the curriculum used. What can be done through the writing is to lead the students to be creative in finding and developing the ideas. In other words, the writing may function as the stimulus (Hyland, 2003). In this case, the students are expected to create various ideas about the building character values to be written down as the literary works created.

In turn, the character building values can also be used as the topic that can be inserted in the EFL classrooms as long as they are realistic, relevant, interesting, encouraging, and compatible (Richard & Rodger, 2001). This can be done through writing. So that, what the students can produce as their literary works is about the collections of ideas proposed from the writing prompts given by the teachers to be written down and developed to result the literary works expected.

Regarding the information above, writing is not easy to be done. The learners are claimed to know what to do in producing a good literary work. On the other hands, the teachers are expected to have the capacity for helping the learners develop their writing skill. What can be realized by the teachers as the way to improve the learners' writing skill is understanding about what happens in the process of doing and producing the literary works done by the learners. Nunan (2003) states that the acts of writing perform the combination of physical and mental acts. Specifically, what the learners feel in writing as the mental acts is concerned with their efforts to invent the ideas in the mind as the power

to produce the writing or literary works. Then, what the learners feel in writing as the physical acts is related to realizing the ideas in the mind into the real words or sentences written down on the paper.

## CONCLUSIONS

The teachers are claimed to perform well when doing the teaching and learning activities. In relation to the EFL classrooms, it can be done through the improvements of the literacy such as writing. Writing skill can be chosen by considering its unique way through creating, producing, and developing ideas in the mind.

The teachers can create and develop ideas for writing better. It is also useful for making the students to develop their potential for supporting the writing skill. The ideas produced can be various things including the building character values. Building characters for the students in the learning processes has been the target determined in the curriculum used. Hence, the writing skill can be used by the teachers to lead the students to have the ideas about building their own characters by themselves through writing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is fully supported by the Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang for funding in 2021-2022. We thank our colleagues from [UM Laboratory School] who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted the research, although they may not agree with all of the interpretations/conclusions of this paper.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Acero, V.O., Javier, E.S., & Castro, H.O. (2000). *Principles and Strategies of Teaching*. Manila, Philippine: Rex Book Store, Inc.
- [2] Berman, R. & Cheng, L. (2010). English academic language skills: perceived difficulties by undergraduate and graduate students, and their academic achievement. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(1-2), 25-40.
- [3] Brown, H. Douglas. (2015). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York: Pearson Education.
- [4] Creswell, John W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. New Jersey: Pearson education Inc.
- [5] Fu-lan, L. (2006). Using Computer-mediated-communication to overcome the anxiety in ESL Writing. *US-China Foreign Language*, 4(11), 97-101.
- [6] Hyland, Ken. (2003). *Genre and Second Language Writing*. USA: University of Michigan.
- [7] Jones, C. D., Reutzel, D. R., & Fargo, J. D. (2010). Comparing two methods of writing instruction: Effects on kindergarten students' reading skills. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103(5), 327-341.
- [8] Lickona, Thomas. (2012). *Educating for Character* Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.
- [9] Linse, Caroline T. (2005). *Practical English Language Teaching: Young Learners*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [10] Nesamalar, C., Saratha, S. & Teh, S. (2001). *ELT Methodology: Principles and Practice*. Selangor: Penerbit Fajar Bakti.
- [11] Nunan, David. (2003). *Practical English language Teaching*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [12] Richards, Jack C. and Rodgers, Theodore S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in*



- Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press. Second edition.
- [13] Yendol-Hoppey D., & Dana N.F. (2010). *Powerfull Professional Development: Building Expertise Within the Four Walls of Your School*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin-A SAGE Company.