

CHARACTER EDUCATION AS A MORAL FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL ERA (Literature Conceptual Review)

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Abstrak

Perkembangan era digital dan globalisasi membawa dampak signifikan terhadap kehidupan anak, termasuk dalam aspek moral, sosial, dan spiritual. Maraknya konten digital yang tidak terfilter, krisis identitas, dan budaya permisif menjadi tantangan serius dalam pembentukan akhlak mulia generasi muda. Dalam konteks ini, pendidikan karakter menjadi kebutuhan mendesak yang harus diintegrasikan secara sistematis dalam sistem pendidikan dan kehidupan anak sehari-hari. Rumusan masalah dalam penelitian ini adalah bagaimana urgensi dan relevansi pendidikan karakter dalam membentuk akhlak anak di tengah derasnya arus globalisasi dan digitalisasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konsep, urgensi, dan implementasi pendidikan karakter dalam konteks kekinian. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka (library research), yang mengkaji literatur klasik maupun kontemporer mengenai nilai-nilai karakter dan strategi implementasinya. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan karakter memiliki peran sentral dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai seperti kejujuran, tanggung jawab, empati, disiplin, toleransi, dan religiusitas. Nilai-nilai ini berfungsi sebagai fondasi moral yang memperkuat ketahanan anak dalam menghadapi berbagai pengaruh negatif. Pendidikan karakter harus dilaksanakan secara konsisten dan berkelanjutan di lingkungan keluarga, sekolah, dan masyarakat. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan karakter adalah investasi jangka panjang yang krusial dalam membentuk generasi yang tidak hanya cerdas secara intelektual, tetapi juga kuat secara moral dan siap menghadapi tantangan global tanpa kehilangan jati diri.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan karakter, akhlak mulia, era digital

Abstract

The development of the digital era and globalization has a significant impact on children's lives, including in moral, social, and spiritual aspects. The rise of unfiltered digital content, identity crises, and permissive culture are serious challenges in the formation of noble morals of the younger generation. In this context, character education is an urgent need that must be systematically integrated into the education system and children's daily lives. The formulation of the problem in this study is how the urgency and relevance of character education in shaping children's morals in the midst of the rapid flow of globalization and digitalization. This research aims to analyze the concept, urgency, and implementation of character education in the contemporary context. The approach used is qualitative with the library research method, which examines classical and contemporary literature on character values and implementation strategies. The results of the study show that character education has a central role in instilling values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, discipline, tolerance, and religiosity. These values serve as a moral foundation that strengthens children's resilience in the face of various negative influences. Character education must be carried out consistently and continuously in the family, school, and community environment. The implications of this study confirm that character education is a crucial long-term investment in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also morally strong and ready to face global challenges without losing identity.

Keywords: Character education, noble morals, digital era

Introduction

Education is the most vital element in shaping the future of the nation [1]. In this context, education does not only dwell on the academic aspect, but must also emphasize the formation of students' character [2]. Children as the next generation of the nation are not only required to have intellectual intelligence, but must also be equipped with noble morals and strong personalities [3]. The increasingly complex and rapidly changing world due to globalization and technological advances requires children to have a solid foundation of character in order to be able to compete in a healthy manner and still uphold human values [4], [5]. Character education is present as an answer to this challenge, namely as an effort to form a whole human being: intelligent, ethical, and with integrity [6], [7].

Character education, in its basic sense, is the process of forming moral values, ethics, and positive habits that are instilled from an early age [8], [9]. This education is not only taught, but is instilled through example, experience, and habituation in daily life, both at home, school, and in the social environment [10], [11]. Character education teaches values such as honesty, responsibility, hard work, empathy, and respect for others [12]. This is in line with the goals of national education as stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which is to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, capable, creative, and independent [13].

According to Thomas Lickona (1991), character education includes three main dimensions, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action [14]–[16]. These three dimensions complement each other and form the basis of intact moral behavior [17]. Moral knowledge helps children recognize what is right and wrong, moral feelings lead children to care about good values, while moral actions show the application of those values in real life [18]. In practice, character education is not only about conveying values through formal lessons, but also through a supportive school atmosphere, humanist teacher-student relationships, and the active involvement of families and society in the formation of children's personalities [19].

Current social conditions indicate that many children are experiencing moral crises, such as increased violent behavior, dishonesty, low social empathy, and addiction to digital media [20], [21]. This phenomenon is a serious challenge for the world of education [22]. Many cases of norm violations involving children or adolescents show that there are gaps in the character education process that are not optimal [23]. It is also not uncommon for positive values taught in schools not to be fully strengthened at home or in the surrounding environment [24]. Therefore, there needs to

be a more holistic and consistent approach in instilling character education from an early age so that children grow up in an atmosphere that supports the development of noble morals.

This research was conducted based on awareness of the importance of character education as the main foundation in the formation of children's morals. Given that childhood is a golden period in a person's psychological and moral development, character education should begin as early as possible. Children who grow up in an environment full of moral values will more easily form a strong, responsible personality, and be able to distinguish between good and bad [25]. This certainly has a great influence on the future of children, both as individuals and as members [26], [27]. Therefore, this study aims to delve deeper into the concept of character education and how its values contribute to the formation of noble morals in children.

This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. This approach was chosen because it is relevant to examine theories, the results of previous research, as well as documents and literature related to character education. Through literature studies, researchers can understand and criticize various views on character education from experts, as well as identify the main values that are the foundation of children's character. In addition, this approach also allows researchers to describe the social and educational contexts that influence character formation in depth. Library research is also suitable for examining the urgency of character education in the modern era, which is full of challenges and changes in social values.

Another reason why the qualitative approach was chosen is that this study does not aim to measure or test hypotheses statistically, but rather focuses on understanding the meaning, context, and values contained in character education. Thus, the data obtained is descriptive-analytical and in-depth. This approach allows researchers to interpret the phenomenon of character education from a theoretical point of view, as well as relate it to the real conditions that children face in their daily lives.[28] Therefore, this approach is considered most appropriate to explore the meaning of character education as the foundation for the formation of noble morals.

The results of this study found two main findings that became the focus of the discussion. The first is the urgency of character education in the modern world. In an era dominated by digital information, children face challenges such as a flood of negative content, a decrease in direct social interaction, and a decline in respect for norms and authority. This is where character education becomes an important tool to maintain the direction of children's moral and social development. The second is the main values in character education that must be instilled from an early age. These values include honesty, responsibility, empathy, tolerance, cooperation, and discipline. These values are the basis of noble morals and must be formed consistently in all lines of children's lives.

With this research, it is hoped that the public, especially educators and parents, will be more aware of the importance of instilling character education in a systematic and sustainable manner. Character is not something that is formed instantly, but rather the result of a long process that requires example, habituation, and a supportive environment. Therefore, synergy between schools, families, and the community is needed to create an educational ecosystem that is able to produce a generation that is not only intelligent, but also noble. Character education is no longer an option, but the main need in building a dignified nation in the future.

Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach through library research even though it is often considered less relevant in the era of big data.[29] This method was chosen to explore character education and the formation of noble morals in children as crucial issues in the midst of the moral crisis of the digital generation. Although the global trend of education is towards STEM and AI that often ignore the value of character, the qualitative approach actually offers a transformative perspective. Through a philosophical analysis of classical and contemporary texts, this research uncovers the root of the problem of moral degradation while offering solutions based on local wisdom. Although often criticized as subjective, this method of literature research has proven to be able to provide a comprehensive response to the challenges of 21st century education, especially in building a foundation of character in the era of technological disruption [30].

The library research method is used because this research is conceptual and theoretical, which relies on collecting data from various scientific literature such as books, journals, articles, policy documents, and other scientific publications that are relevant to the theme of character education. This research does not involve the collection of direct field data, but focuses on critical analysis of theories and previous research results. Thus, library research is very appropriate to be used in the context of the study of education and moral values. The results of the study from these various sources are then synthesized to obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the concept of character education. This approach allows researchers to formulate a strong frame of mind as a basis for developing ideas or solutions to the problems being studied.

The data sources in this study consist of two types, namely primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data sources include primary literature that directly discusses character education, especially works by figures such as Thomas Lickona, Lawrence Kohlberg, and other educational figures who in-depth examine moral values and character formation in children. This primary literature is the main reference because it presents basic concepts, theories, and principles that are used as the foundation of analysis in research. The secondary data sources

include scientific journal articles, previous research reports, contemporary moral education books, national education policy documents, and publications from educational institutions and international organizations. These two types of sources were selected taking into account the relevance to the topic, the credibility of the author or publishing institution, and the up-to-date data presented.

The literature used was obtained from various digital repositories and online and offline libraries. Researchers access sources from academic portals such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and national and international educational journal sites. In addition, data is also collected through educational textbooks available in university libraries. This research only selects sources that have academic strength, namely have passed the peer-review process or come from trusted institutions. The criteria for selecting sources include direct relevance to the topic of character education, clarity of methods in previous research, and their contribution in strengthening the researcher's argument. Thus, the data sources used are able to provide a rich theoretical and contextual picture of the role of character education in shaping children's noble morals.

The researcher also recorded and grouped the data found into several categories according to the focus of the study, such as character education theory, main character values, and character urgency in the modern world. During the data collection process, the researcher ensures that all the information retrieved has a strong scientific foundation and is free from ideological or political bias. Researchers do not only rely on one type of source, but combine various perspectives to obtain a complete understanding. This process continues on an ongoing basis until the required data is deemed adequate and representative. In this way, data collection techniques in literature-based qualitative research can produce rich, in-depth information and support the optimal achievement of research objectives.

Discussion

The Urgency of Character Education in the Modern World

The development of information and communication technology in the modern era has brought about major changes in the lifestyle and way of thinking of children [31], [32]. Easy access to information through the internet and social media does not always have a positive impact [33], [34]. On the other hand, children are also exposed to various contents that are not necessarily in accordance with the moral and cultural values of the nation [35]–[37]. This phenomenon raises concerns about the decline in the quality of morals and character of the younger generation. Therefore, character education is becoming increasingly urgent to be applied systematically in the

world of education and family. Supervision and guidance from parents and educators are very important so that children are able to sort information critically and maintain their integrity.

Digital technology does offer progress, but it also poses a threat to the formation of children's personalities if it is not accompanied by supervision and moral guidance. Today's children spend more time in front of the screen than interacting socially in person. This leads to a decline in their ability to understand empathy, tolerance, and healthy communication. Without early character strengthening, children have the potential to experience identity crises and lack a strong moral foothold in dealing with complex social life [38]. Therefore, the active role of families and schools in guiding the use of technology is an important key to maintaining a balance in children's character development.

In addition, the flow of globalization also brings in foreign values that are not always in line with local norms and culture. Without adequate character education, children can easily adopt an individualistic, consumptive, and even permissive lifestyle toward deviant behavior. This condition further reinforces the urgency to build an education system that not only emphasizes the cognitive aspect, but also pays attention to the affective and psychomotor aspects as an integral part of character education [39]. Therefore, the role of family, school, and community is very important in creating an environment that supports the formation of strong character and is rooted in the noble values of the nation.

Schools as formal institutions have a great responsibility in instilling character values. But in reality, learning in school still tends to emphasize academic achievement. Often character education is considered a complement, not a core part of the curriculum. This causes an imbalance between the mastery of knowledge and personality formation. In fact, moral intelligence is just as important as intellectual intelligence, and even becomes the foundation for using knowledge wisely and responsibly [1]. Therefore, the integration of character education into the entire learning process is an urgent thing to be realized.

The family as the first and main environment in a child's life also plays a crucial role in character education. Children first learn from parental behavior and household atmosphere. Parents' example in being honest, responsible, and affectionate will form a strong moral foundation for children. Unfortunately, many parents are less aware of the importance of their involvement in the formation of a child's character. Parenting that is permissive or otherwise too authoritarian can have a negative impact on the development of children's morals [40]. Therefore, awareness and assistance are needed for parents to be able to carry out their role optimally in instilling life values from an early age.

The social environment and mass media are also external factors that affect the formation of children's character. Children who grow up in a positive, religious, and well-defined social environment tend to have better character. Conversely, a free environment with minimal supervision can encourage children to imitate negative behaviors [41]. Therefore, synergy between schools, families, and communities is needed to create an effective character education ecosystem. All parties must play an active role in creating an environment conducive to children's moral growth and development. With ongoing collaboration, positive values can be consistently instilled in daily life.

Character education in the context of the modern world cannot be conventional. A contextual, dynamic, and responsive approach to the times is needed. For example, the use of digital technology to convey character values through creative media such as educational videos, educational game applications, or interactive learning platforms. Thus, character education can follow the rhythm of the times but still hold on to the fundamental values that shape the child's personality. Teachers and educators are required to continue to innovate in designing interesting and relevant learning methods. Only in this way can character values be firmly embedded in the midst of the rapid flow of information and social change [42].

The moral crisis that is occurring among the young generation today is a reflection that character education has not been carried out optimally. The high cases of bullying in schools, dishonesty in exams, and violations of the law by children show the weakness of the moral development system. If this condition continues to be left unchecked, it will have an impact on the quality of human resources in the future. Character education must be a joint movement that involves all components of the nation, not just the responsibility of educational institutions. A national commitment is needed to make character a priority in every education and development policy. Only with a strong moral foundation can the young generation be able to face global challenges without losing their identity.

Thus, the urgency of character education in the modern era cannot be underestimated. This is a fundamental need to fortify children from the negative influences of the environment and equip them with values that will be a guide in living life. Children with strong character will be able to face the challenges of the times, be wise, and become individuals who are useful to society. Character education is a long-term investment in creating a moral and civilized civilization.

Key Values in Character Education

Character education has a wide range of values, but there are a number of core values that must be prioritized in the process of fostering children's morals. The first value is honesty, which is

the ability to speak and act according to reality, even in difficult situations. Honesty is the basis of all forms of trust in social relationships. Children who are accustomed to being honest from an early age will grow up to be trustworthy individuals and not easily tempted to cheat. The next value is responsibility, which is the awareness to bear the consequences of every action taken. Instilling a sense of responsibility from an early age will form children who are disciplined, independent, and consistent in carrying out their obligations [43].

The second value is responsibility, which is an attitude of awareness of duties and obligations that must be carried out with full seriousness. Responsibility fosters a sense of ownership of one's own actions, both in terms of successes and mistakes. Character education must instill an understanding that every action has consequences, so that children are able to make decisions with consideration and accept the consequences with open arms. Thus, children not only learn to be obedient, but also develop into a reflective and wise person. A strong sense of responsibility will form a resilient character in the face of life's challenges.

The next value that is no less important is discipline. Discipline is an attitude of obedience to the rules and good habits that have been agreed. Children who are used to discipline will find it easier to manage their time, be orderly, and comply with applicable norms. The process of forming discipline requires examples from the surrounding environment, especially parents and teachers, as well as habituation that is carried out consistently in daily activities. Strong discipline will help children develop positive habits that support academic and social success. In addition, discipline also forms a responsible character and is able to face challenges with patience [45].

Empathy and social care are also core values in character education. Empathy is the ability to understand and feel the feelings of others, while caring encourages children to act to help others. This value is important to prevent the emergence of selfish and individualistic behavior. Children who have empathy will find it easier to build healthy social relationships and become individuals who are inclusive of differences. Through the development of empathy, children learn to appreciate diversity and understand the importance of cooperation in community life. Social concern also fosters a sense of responsibility for the surrounding environment and encourages real action for the common good. Thus, character education not only shapes the individual, but also creates a harmonious and civilized community [46].

The importance of instilling the value of tolerance and respect for differences from an early age cannot be ignored, especially in the context of an Indonesian society that is rich in cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Children need to be guided to understand that differences are not a threat, but a wealth that must be valued and guarded together. Through systematic and

continuous character education, mutual respect can be firmly embedded in students. Education that emphasizes the values of tolerance plays a strategic role in shaping a generation that not only has a strong national insight, but is also able to interact harmoniously in a plural environment. Thus, the potential for social conflict due to intolerance can be minimized, and future generations will be better prepared to coexist in peace and a spirit of mutual acceptance [47].

In addition, cooperation or collaboration is an important value in building togetherness and solidarity. Children need to be taught that success is not always achieved individually, but also through good teamwork. The ability to work together trains children to respect the opinions of others, share responsibilities, and solve problems together. This value is very important in forming a generation that is able to live in a society that needs each other. By fostering a spirit of collaboration, children will be better prepared to face complex challenges in the future. In addition, cooperation also strengthens a sense of unity and strengthens social bonds in various aspects of life [48].

Character education must also instill the values of love for the homeland and nationalism. Children need to know history, culture, and national symbols in order to grow a sense of belonging to the nation and state. In the global era, this value is important so that the young generation does not lose their national identity. Love for the homeland also encourages children to contribute positively to the progress of the nation and maintain social harmony. Instilling a sense of love for the homeland from an early age will strengthen the spirit of nationalism and patriotism of children. Thus, they grow up to be responsible citizens and ready to maintain the sovereignty and unity of the nation [49].

Humility and perseverance are two values that support the formation of superior morals. Humility encourages children not to be proud of their achievements and always willing to learn from others. Meanwhile, perseverance teaches children not to give up easily and keep trying despite facing difficulties. These two values train a resilient mentality and a positive attitude in facing life's challenges. With humility, children will be open to criticism and able to improve themselves continuously. Perseverance also fosters discipline and a high sense of responsibility in achieving goals. The combination of these two values is essential to form a successful and dignified character.

Finally, the value of religiosity becomes a very important moral foundation in character education. Children who are close to spiritual values will have stronger self-control and feel responsible not only to humans, but also to God. Religious values include faith, prayer, obedience to worship, and the practice of religious teachings in daily life. This value is the foundation in forming true and consistent noble morals in all situations. Religiosity also teaches children to be

humble, patient, and loving to others. With a strong spiritual foundation, children's character will be formed in a complete and balanced manner in social and personal life.

Conclusion

Character education is the main foundation in forming noble morals in children. In the midst of the challenges of the modern world full of endless information flows, moral crises, and global cultural influences that are not always in line with local values, children need strong moral guidelines in order to be able to survive and develop positively. Character education is present not as a complement to formal education, but as the core of the process of forming a whole human being who is not only intellectually intelligent, but also has moral depth and personal integrity. This research shows that the urgency of character education is getting higher in the digital era and globalization. Children face many moral challenges that cannot be overcome with cognitive knowledge alone. They need value guidance through character education that is consistent, contextual, and integrated in daily life. Schools, families, and communities must work together to create an environment that supports the growth and development of children's character as a whole.

In addition to its urgency, the main values in character education have also been identified as an important component in forming noble morals. Values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, tolerance, cooperation, discipline, nationalism, religiosity, humility, and perseverance are basic elements that must be instilled from an early age. These values not only form positive behavior, but also become the main provision for children to live a healthy and meaningful social life. Character education is not an instant process. It requires example, consistent reinforcement of values, and habituation in various aspects of a child's life. Therefore, all parties involved in the education process—parents, teachers, policymakers, and the community—have a great responsibility in ensuring that character education is truly implemented in real terms, not just as a discourse.

The usefulness or benefit of this research is to provide a conceptual and practical basis for educators, policy makers, and educational institutions in designing character education programs that are in accordance with the challenges of the times. This research is also useful as a reference material in developing curriculum, learning methods, and educational policies that are oriented towards the formation of children's morals as a whole. By strengthening character education, we not only produce children who excel academically, but also form a generation that has noble character, is resilient to the challenges of the times, and is able to become agents of change that bring good to the environment. Character education is a long-term investment that will determine the quality of the nation in the future.

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