

The Role of Character Education in Building Ethics and Morality among Students in the Digital Age

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Abstract. This investigation aims to analyze the role of character education in fostering students' ethics and morality within the digital era. Utilizing a qualitative approach, this study explores the experiences of educators, students, and parents in implementing character education within formal educational environments. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The findings indicate that character education exerts a substantial influence in enhancing students' ethical awareness and moral reasoning, particularly in navigating ethical challenges stemming from digital technology exposure. Nevertheless, the study also uncovers significant barriers to this goal, including the lack of value-based technology support and time constraints. The study's findings suggest that a collaborative effort among schools, families, and communities is essential to maximize the impact of character education in the digital era.

Keywords: *ethics, education, morality*

I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital technology has precipitated profound transformations across myriad facets of life, encompassing social interaction patterns, cultural practices, and educational paradigms. The proliferation of technology, exemplified by social media, the internet, and smart devices, has engendered substantial opportunities for students to interface with the external world, access information, and cultivate skills. Nevertheless, these advancements concomitantly introduce substantial challenges, particularly with respect to ethical and moral concerns. Students are now confronted with a multitude of ethical dilemmas, including instances of cyberbullying, which can severely harm their social and psychological well-being. Plagiarism, on the other hand, undermines fundamental values such as honesty. Moreover, unethical consumption of information can adversely impact students' cognitive development. This scenario underscores the necessity for a balanced and judicious engagement with digital technology, as a lack of oversight can serve to obfuscate the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Sharmila et al., 2024).

In this regard, character education emerges as a strategic solution to establish a robust ethical and moral foundation in students, aiming to instill noble values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and respect, and to cultivate critical thinking skills that are essential to navigate challenges in the digital era. For instance, students are instructed to evaluate information, discern the ethical ramifications of their actions, and formulate responsible decisions in both virtual and physical environments. The integration of character education instills not only an understanding of moral values but also the ability to apply them in daily life, including in the digital realm (Tiara Ramadhani et al., 2024).

This research is centered on the role of character education in fostering students' ethical reasoning and moral decision-making in the digital era, where such challenges are becoming increasingly intricate and multifaceted. It investigates the extent to which character education exerts an impact on student conduct and the effectiveness of implementation strategies. In light of the pivotal role that collaboration between schools, families, and communities plays in nurturing character education, this research endeavor aspires to offer profound insights into the methodologies that could be adopted to fortify students' moral reasoning and decision-making in the face of the ever-evolving digital landscape. The integration of values and critical thinking skills is anticipated to furnish students with robust ethical guidance across real and virtual domains (Wandira et al., 2024).

II. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive design to deeply understand how character education is integrated in the context of learning in the digital era. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore experiences, perceptions and practices related to character education in a holistic and in-depth manner. The research subjects included 10 teachers, 10 students and 10 parents from SMP Muhammadiyah 2 in Jogja. The selection of these

subjects was based on a variety of relevant social contexts and backgrounds to gain comprehensive insights into the implementation of character education in formal education settings.

Data Collection

Data collection techniques were conducted through three main methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observation and document analysis. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 teachers and 10 parents to explore their understanding of character education, the challenges faced and the strategies used in building students' ethics and morality. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to explore the respondents' views in a flexible manner while still focusing on the research objectives. Teachers were selected based on their experience in teaching and implementing character education, while parents were selected to understand their views on the influence of character education on children's behavior at home.

Participatory observation was conducted to see first-hand how character education is integrated into the learning process in the classroom. Researchers observed learning activities involving values such as responsibility, empathy and honesty. This observation includes observing the interaction between teachers and students, the teaching strategies used, and students' responses to character-based learning. Researchers also noted classroom dynamics, such as group discussions, problem solving, and collaborative projects, designed to instill character values.

Document analysis was conducted to evaluate the supporting documents of character education, such as curriculum, syllabus, and learning materials. This analysis aims to assess the extent to which character education has been formally integrated in the learning system, including the types of values emphasized and the teaching methods. These documents provide a structural picture of the character education approach in schools.



Fig 1. Qualitative Research (Source: pennypaper)

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was conducted using the thematic analysis method. The first stage was data coding, where researchers identified key points from interviews, observations and documents. After that, key themes relevant to the research objectives were identified, such as "character education strategies," "challenges in implementation," and "impact of character education." The final stage is the interpretation of the results, where researchers relate these findings to character education theory and relevant literature. This approach ensures that the data collected is analyzed systematically and in-depth, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the role of character education in building students' ethics and morality in the digital era.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Integration of Character Education

In the digital era, there is a necessity for an adaptive approach to character education, one that integrates values such as responsibility and empathy into the learning process. Research results indicate that this integration of character education is accomplished through various creative methods, including digital case discussions, role plays, and collaborative projects. The following section contains a detailed description of each approach, accompanied by tables and graphs that support the analysis (Ainnin & Ismail, 2024).

Digital case discussions entail the utilization of authentic or simulated case examples from the digital realm, such as instances of cyberbullying, plagiarism, or fake news (Špadina & Ljubić, 2024). This pedagogical approach is designed to equip students with the following competencies:

- Analyze the situation based on facts.
- Identify relevant moral values, such as honesty and responsibility.
- Devise ethical solutions to solve the problem.

Table 1. Digital Case Discussion Stages

Phase	Description	Character Value Developed
Case Introduction	The teacher presents a video- or article-based digital case	Responsibility, critical thinking
Group Discussion	Students are divided into groups to discuss cases	Empathy, cooperation
Solution Presentation	Each group presents their solution	Confidence, responsibility
Reflection	The teacher and students together reflect on the proposed solution	Discretion, self-evaluation

Role-playing is used to simulate real situations that require ethical decision-making. For example, students can play the role of:

- An online forum moderator to stop negative comments.
- A content manager who verifies the authenticity of information before it is published.

Table 2. Role Play Scenario and Character Values Developed

Scenario	Activity Description	Character Value Developed
Dealing with Cyberbullying	Students play the victim, perpetrator, and mediator to resolve the conflict.	Empathy, cooperation
Verification of Information	Students verify the veracity of news articles before sharing them	Honesty, responsibility
Conflict Resolution in Online Learning Groups	Students look for conflict solutions related to group assignments on digital platforms	Communication, cooperation

B. Impact of Character Education

The study found that character education has a significant impact on improving students' ethical awareness, especially in two main aspects: the ability to recognize false information and avoid plagiarism. Here is a full breakdown of the findings:

I. Ability to Recognize False Information

With the increasing use of social media and access to digital information, students are often exposed to invalid or false information. Character education integrated with digital literacy helps students develop critical skills to evaluate information sources (Akpojotor & Okonkwo, 2024).

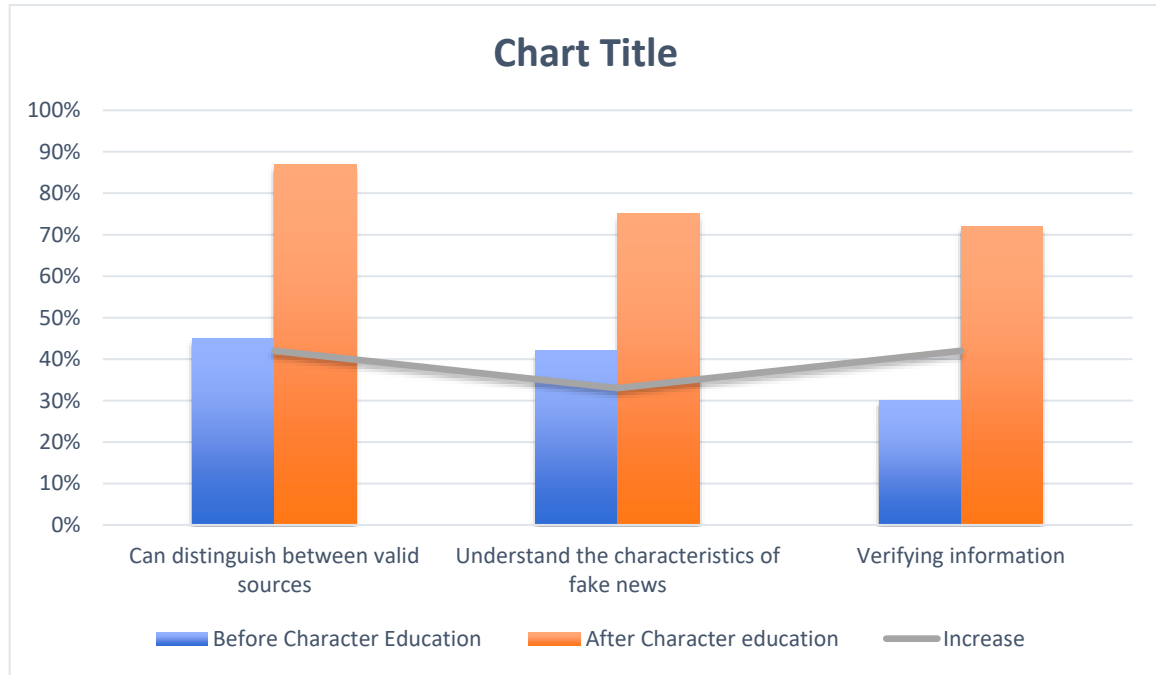
Indicators of Increased Awareness:

- Analyze Information Sources: Students can distinguish between reliable sources and unreliable sources.
- Fake News Understanding: Students are able to identify the characteristics of fake news, such as exaggerated claims, lack of supporting data, and partisanship.
- Proactive Attitude in Seeking Truth: Students show a habit of verifying information through various sources.

The following table shows the results of interviews and observations related to students' ability to recognize fake information before and after character education:

Table 3. Students, Teachers and Parents ability to recognize false information before and after character education

Indicator	Before Character Education	After Character education	Increase
Can distinguish between valid sources	45%	87%	42%
Understand the characteristics of fake news	42%	75%	33%
Verifying information	30%	72%	42%



Graph 1 . Students, Teachers and Parents ability to recognize false information before and after character education

II. Ability to Avoid Plagiarism

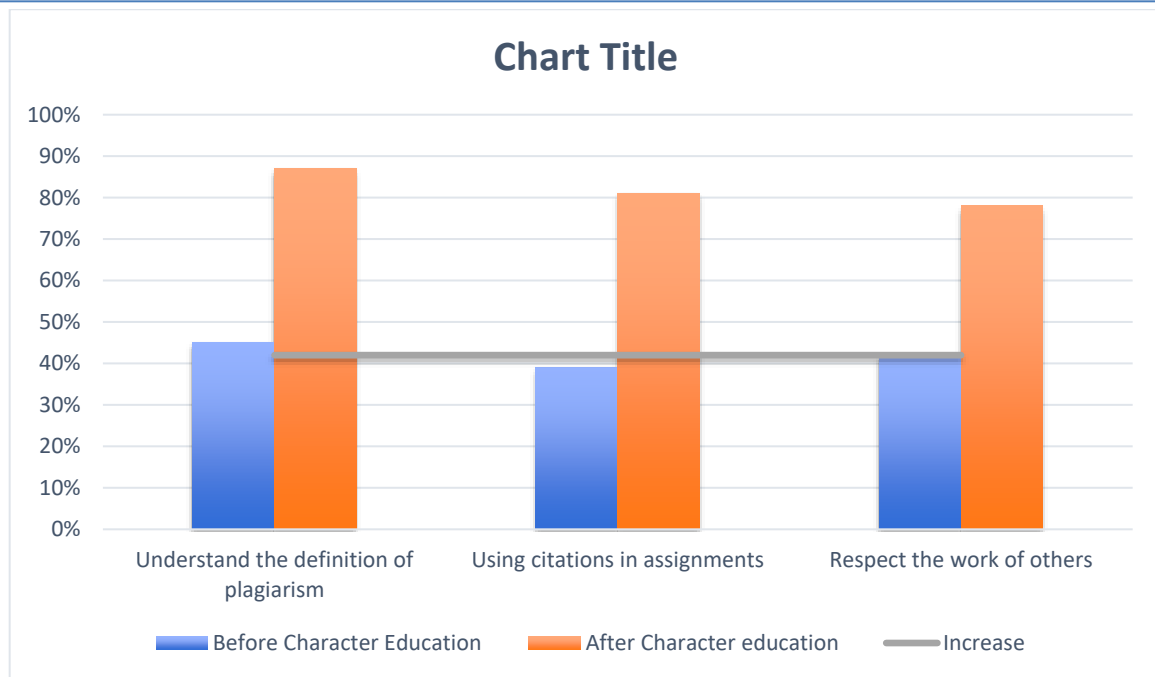
Plagiarism is one of the ethical challenges that often occur in educational settings. Character education encourages students to understand the importance of academic honesty and respect for the work of others (Heryadi et al., 2024).

Indicators of Increased Awareness:

- Understanding of Plagiarism: Students understand the definition and forms of plagiarism.
- Correct Use of References: Students begin to use citation techniques correctly in academic assignments.
- Respect for Others' Work: Students show increased awareness of the importance of respecting copyright.

Table 3. Students, Teachers and Parents ability avoid plagiarism before and after character education

Indicator	Before Character Education	After Character education	Increase
Understand the definition of plagiarism	45%	87%	42%
Using citations in assignments	39%	81%	42%
Respect the work of others	42%	78%	36%



Graph 2. Students, Teachers and Parents ability to avoid plagiarism before and after character education

C. Barriers to Character Education Implementation in the Digital Age

Character education faces a number of challenges in its implementation, especially in integrating ethical values and morality into the formal learning process (Hermawan & Kusniasari, 2023). The following is a more detailed description of the barriers found in this study, namely time constraints and lack of training on value-based technology (Farwati et al., 2023). Time Constraints in Integrating Character Education

Teachers often face pressure to complete the syllabus on schedule, resulting in limited time allocation for character education. Based on interviews with teachers, this constraint can be broken down as follows:

- Academic Priorities: The main focus of learning is often on achieving cognitive competencies, such as exam results, so affective aspects are given less attention.
- Teacher Workload: Teachers have to fulfill administrative and extracurricular demands, which limits time to design and implement character education activities.
- Lack of integration guidelines: Teachers find it difficult to integrate character education directly into core subjects, such as math or physics, without compromising the effectiveness of content learning.

Lack of Training on Value-Based Technology. Technology can be an effective tool to support character education, but many teachers do not have sufficient skills or training to make optimal use of this technology. These barriers include:

- Digital Skills Gap: Teachers lack confidence in using digital platforms designed for value-based learning, such as digital ethics simulations or character development apps.
- Lack of Resources: Schools often do not provide specialized software or training focused on integrating moral values in learning technology.
- Lack of Policy Support: Not all schools have policies that encourage teacher training in values-based technology, so learning remains traditional.

Solutions to Overcoming Barriers. To overcome these barriers, here are some recommendations:

- Increase Time Allocation:
 - Provide dedicated hours in the curriculum for character education, separate from main lessons.
 - Integrate character education into interdisciplinary projects that cover various subjects.
- Teacher Training in Value-Based Technology:
 - Conduct regular training for teachers on utilizing digital applications that support character education, such as character-building games or ethics simulations.
 - Provide value-based platforms specifically designed for learning, such as apps that encourage ethical discussions through case-based scenarios.
- Strengthening school policies:
 - Promote policies that require the integration of technology-enabled character education in lesson plans.
 - Increase budget for value-based education software.

D. Discussion

The findings indicate that character education plays a foundational role in fostering students' ethical and moral development in the digital era, where ethical challenges frequently manifest as increasingly intricate and multifaceted. In

this context, character education provides a robust foundation for students to cultivate moral awareness, critical thinking skills, and an ethos of responsibility when confronted with perilous digital scenarios, such as the propagation of false information, plagiarism, and cyberbullying (Cinta Tri Andalis Mendrofa, 2024). The integration of experiential learning methodologies, such as case discussions and simulations, has been demonstrated to foster ethical awareness in students. However, the efficacy of character education is contingent upon a collaborative effort among stakeholders, namely schools, families, and communities (Muhammad Bustomi et al., 2024).

Collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community is necessary to establish an ecosystem that consistently supports character education in the school environment and at home (Darna & Suci, 2024). Teachers function as facilitators, integrating character values into the curriculum, while parents are responsible for strengthening the implementation of these values in the family environment. However, a significant challenge is the limited time and resources available to teachers for effective integration of character education into main subject matter. Furthermore, many teachers express a perceived lack of competence or training in utilizing value-based technology as a tool to strengthen character education (Isroani & Huda, 2022).

The utilization of value-based technology is emerging as a pioneering solution to surmount these obstacles (Ishida, 2024). These technologies encompass learning applications designed to promote ethical behavior, platforms that facilitate discourse on moral cases, and educational games that instill character values. Nevertheless, the adoption of these technologies necessitates extensive training for educators to comprehend how to most effectively integrate these technologies into the learning process. Moreover, the government and educational institutions must provide comprehensive policy support to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of this value-based technology implementation (Sarabdeen, 2024).

In the long term, character education supported by technology and cross-sector collaboration can provide a robust foundation for students to confront digital challenges with sound ethical values. However, implementing this strategy necessitates substantial investment in training, resource development, and policy design oriented towards value-based learning. Consequently, the success of character education in the digital era demands a comprehensive approach involving all stakeholders to cultivate a generation that is not only intellectually proficient, but also possesses strong moral integrity (Adawiyah, 2023).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Character education plays a fundamental role in shaping students' ethics and morality in a digital era full of challenges and opportunities. With the rapid development of technology, students face situations that require value-based decision-making, such as how to filter valid information, avoid plagiarism, and maintain ethical behavior in online interactions. Character education provides a solid foundation to help students understand and internalize values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy and respect. This not only builds their ability to deal with ethical dilemmas, but also strengthens students' capacity to be individuals of integrity in both the real and digital worlds. The success of character education cannot be achieved in isolation. It requires synergistic and comprehensive support from various parties, including schools, families and communities. Schools act as formal institutions that provide character education through structured learning, extracurricular activities, and value-based school culture. Teachers spearhead the implementation of character education through teaching methods that integrate ethical values in every subject. Meanwhile, the family plays an important role as the first and main moral shaper for children, especially in modeling daily behavior in accordance with character values. The community also has the responsibility to create an environment that supports the implementation of these values, including through social activities that engage students in value-based activities, such as volunteer work or digital awareness campaigns. The implementation of character education in the digital age faces significant challenges. Lack of training for educators to integrate technology in value-based education is one of the main obstacles. In addition, limited time to teach character education in the midst of a busy curriculum is also an obstacle. In this context, the use of value-based technologies, such as learning apps designed to instill character through simulations and educational games, can be an innovative solution. These technologies not only capture students' interest, but also provide immersive learning experiences that are relevant to situations they face in their daily lives.

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