

## Building Holistic Character in Independent Curriculum-Based Education in the Digital Era

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the importance of building holistic character in education through Merdeka Curriculum in the digital era. The author emphasizes that current technological developments and social dynamics require an educational approach that focuses not only on knowledge transfer, but also on comprehensive skill development, including psychological, social, and emotional aspects. Character education is expected to form individuals with integrity and responsibility, and be able to face the challenges of the times. The Merdeka curriculum is designed to develop students' potential by emphasizing Pancasila values and good character. The research method used is a literature review, which shows that holistic education can help students adapt to rapid changes in the digital era. In addition, this article highlights the importance of character education in developing 21st century skills, such as creativity, collaboration and problem-solving. Teachers are expected to adapt to new technologies and learning methods, such as blended learning, to create an effective learning environment. Despite challenges such as online safety and plagiarism, digital learning also offers opportunities to improve the quality of character education. By combining tradition and modern technology, holistic education prepares students to face future challenges with ethical values and relevant skills. The implementation of a developmentally appropriate curriculum is crucial to achieving this goal.

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### INTRODUCTION

As the digital era evolves, technological changes have a huge impact on many aspects of life, including education. Some of the challenges we face are related to various factors, such as technological advances, globalization, and changes in socio-economic dynamics. Therefore, education needs to adapt and innovate to keep up with current developments. Education is very important in shaping each individual to meet the demands of the ever-changing times. These changes are inevitable in many walks of life and are caused by tsunami-like advances in science and technology that are not controlled by any group. This development does not take into account the social status of the community such as low level, high level, underdeveloped level, rural, but it is more widespread to reach the local rural level (Hermansyah, dkk, 2021).

Today, when the world situation has become more complex due to technological development and the advancement of the digital era, traditional skills alone are no longer enough. Therefore, in order for individuals to keep up with the digital era, it is necessary to adapt to the advancement of digital technology. Problem

solving, creativity, digital literacy, and the ability to collaborate to succeed and remain relevant in an environment influenced by the dynamics of the digital age. This creates a need not only for traditional knowledge transfer, but also for more comprehensive and holistic skills, and today's education focuses not only on information transfer, but also on training personnel with relevant knowledge can guess. Skills meet the needs of the times. This situation shows the need for holistic education as a comprehensive means to ensure that students not only have knowledge, but are also able to apply these skills in daily life. The greatest benefits of a holistic approach are not only related to intellectual development, but also include psychological, social and emotional growth. Therefore, holistic education that not only pays attention to academic lessons but also social, emotional and spiritual life is very helpful in developing 21st century skills (Gol, 2018).

Character education aims to make students as the nation's successors have good deeds and morals, to create a fair, safe and prosperous nation. The purpose of education in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System which states that "National education functions to develop the ability and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to educate the nation's life, aims to develop the potential of students to become human beings who are faithful and devoted to God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent and become democratic and responsible citizens" (Nasional, 2003).

Today the government introduced a government program called Strengthening Character Education (PPK), PPK is an effort to cultivate character education in schools. The PPK program will be implemented gradually and as needed. The PPK program aims to encourage quality and moral education that is evenly distributed throughout the nation. The issuance of Presidential Regulation number 87 article 2 of 2017 concerning Strengthening Character Education (PPK), PPK has the following objectives:

1. Build and equip students as Indonesia's golden generation in 2045 with the spirit of Pancasila and good character education to face the dynamics of change in the future.
2. Developing a national education platform that puts character education as the main spirit in the provision of education for students with the support of public involvement carried out through formal, non-formal, and informal education by taking into account the diversity of Indonesian culture and
3. Revitalizing and strengthening the potential and competence of educators, education personnel, students, communities, and family environments in implementing PPK (Presiden, 2017).

Every era requires improvement, and every curriculum needs to answer the needs of the times. The Merdeka Curriculum enhances the development of student character education with a six-dimensional Pancasila student profile consisting of faith, devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

In order for the character education curriculum in madrasas to remain able to answer the problems of the times, it is necessary to implement the Merdeka curriculum. This study describes character education implemented through the development of the Merdeka Belajar intensive curriculum. The focus of this study is closely related to how the character education curriculum is developed in response to the demands of the times, with reference to the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, in the future, several Islamic educational institutions will become references in further development and implementation in their respective madrasas.

## METHOD

This article is prepared using the literature review method approach, where data is collected through a process of in-depth analysis and systematic survey of various literatures relevant to the research topic. The data collection process is carried out by referring to a number of national and international journals that have a direct relationship with the issues raised in this scientific work. This research took place over a period of time, starting on October 15, 2024, and ending with the conclusion of the results on October 25, 2024. During this period, the author analyzed and reviewed 26 references, which included various types of sources, such as laws, policies related to the Merdeka Curriculum, and relevant scientific articles. Through this approach, the author ensures that the study is comprehensive and able to provide an in-depth perspective on the research topic. The results of the analysis of the various literature become the main basis for the discussion of this article, resulting in a significant contribution to the development of scientific discourse in the field discussed.

## RESULTS

### Character Education

Character education refers to any effort made to influence the character of learners. Character education is a conscious effort to help people understand, adhere to, and practice basic ethical values. Starting from this definition and thinking about what kind of character we want to instill in learners, at this point we should be able to help them understand these values and pay deeper attention to the truth of these values and let learners do what they believe in, even if it means they have to endure challenges and pressures from both external and internal sources. In other words, to practice these values, we have the “consciousness of self-imposition” (Lickona, 1991).

Character education not only means understanding ethical values, but also emphasizes the practice of these values. Character education should not only be memorized, but also encouraged to be applied in daily life. However, character education must be comprehensive and contextual. The education process must take into account that each individual may face different situations that affect his or her ability to apply the values.

Character is defined as a way of thinking and behaving that is unique to each individual, whether in a family, community, state or nation. People with good character are able to make decisions and are willing to take responsibility for the consequences of those decisions. Character can be seen as the values of human behavior towards God Almighty, self, fellow human beings, the environment, nationality, and it is based on religious norms, laws, customs, thoughts, attitudes, feelings, words, which appear in daily actions. Based on culture, customs, and aesthetics (Samani dkk, 2013).

Good character helps a person to be able to deal positively with the environment, both in family and social situations. Character consists of three interrelated parts: moral knowledge, moral emotions, and moral behavior (Zubaedi, 2011). Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. In this case, habits of mind, habits of action, and habits of behavior are needed. Character education aims not only to produce competent graduates, but also to form individuals with integrity and responsibility (Mulyasa, 2013). This is a long-term investment for a better future.

### Holistic Character Education

The character-based holistic education model is an educational philosophy that assumes that all people are endowed with character, intelligence, and creativity, capable of becoming true learners and finding identity, meaning, and purpose in life. The purpose of the character-based holistic education model is to form humans with holistic character, which optimally develops the physical, emotional, social, creative, spiritual, and intellectual aspects of lifelong students. Holistic education is education that harmoniously (integrated and balanced) develops the potential of all learners, including intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual potential. All possibilities must be developed harmoniously. People who are able to develop all their potential are holistic people, who are always aware that they are part of a holistic system of life and therefore want the people around them to make the most positive contribution (Miller dkk, 2005).

The purpose of holistic education is to help develop individual potential through the experience of facing the environment in a more pleasant, democratic and humanistic learning environment. Through holistic education, learners are expected to be able to be themselves (learn), gain psychological freedom, make the right decisions, and learn in a way that suits them. The principles of holistic education are:

- 1) Centered on God who creates and maintains life
- 2) Education for transformation
- 3) Relates to the development of the whole person in society
- 4) Valuing the uniqueness and creativity of individuals and communities based on their interconnectedness
- 5) Enabling active participation in society
- 6) Reinforcing spirituality as the core of life and at the center of education
- 7) Promotes a praxis of knowing, teaching, and learning.
- 8) Relate and interact with different approaches and perspectives (Schreiner, 2010).

Holistic education that focuses on individual differences, inclusive development, lifelong learning, and enhanced creativity brings great benefits to students, teachers, and society. Furthermore, in addressing the rapid changes and complexities of the digital age, integrated education provides a solid foundation to face the challenges of the present and supports the development of learners to prepare for the future. Holistic education in the digital age blends educational traditions with modern technology to create a comprehensive learning environment (Widyastano dkk, 2012).

Within comprehensive development are moral values, social skills, empathy and caring, resilience and independence. Holistic education gives learners the foundation to adapt and develop their creativity.

### **Character Education Based on Independent Curriculum**

Minister of Education and Research and Technology Nadiem Anwar Makarim has officially launched the new name of the prototype curriculum called the independent curriculum. The independent curriculum was developed as a curriculum framework that is more flexible and centers on fundamental material and develops the uniqueness and abilities of students. "The Ministry of Education and Culture stated that there are 4 ideas of change that support the existence of independent learning, the program is related to the National Standardized Test (USBN), the National Examination (UN), the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), and the Zoning New Learner Admission Regulation (PPDB)" (Mustagfiroh, 2020).

The Ministry of Education and Culture defines independent learning as a learning process that gives freedom and authority to each educational institution to be free from complicated administration. The main assumption of independent learning is giving trust to teachers so that teachers feel free in carrying out learning.

In the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, educational institutions not only need old literacy skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic, but also new literacy skills. The new literacies needed by educational institutions can be divided into three areas. The first is data literacy. This refers to the ability to read, analyze and use information in the digital world (big data). The second is technical skills. This competency understands how machines and technology applications work (Coding Artificial Intelligence & Engineering Principles). Third, human literacy. Literacy takes the form of strengthening humanities, communication, and design. These different reading and writing activities can be done by students and teachers." (Yamin dkk, 2020).

The curriculum update addresses five key characteristics of successful students: versatility, flexibility, confidence, skills, and continuous improvement. Teachers must be computer-using, PC-savvy, and have no academic discomfort" (Ibda dkk, 2018).

By applying the concept of active, innovative and comfortable learning methods, students must be able to adapt to the needs of the times and the industrial era 4.0. To achieve our educational goals: to develop students who are critical thinkers and problem solvers, creative and innovative, with communication and collaboration skills, and with character. Therefore, in carrying out learning activities, it is necessary to be able to overcome challenges and take advantage of educational opportunities in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. And since teachers are the key to the success of the education system, they must be able to adapt to the new education system and develop their competencies and skills. Empowering teachers' new literacy skills is key to change, including reviving literacy-based curricula and strengthening the role of digitally competent teachers (Muis dkk, 2019).

Blended learning method is the best learning method for self-learning education system. Because in learning new reading and writing skills, the education system must still build character by using traditional teaching methods such as classes combined with face-to-face classes." (Wulandari dkk, 2019).

Character education does not only happen through specific subjects, but also through daily tasks and interactions at school. The unique primary school curriculum uses a holistic assessment approach that supports students' personal development. Character education is an important part of this curriculum that helps students develop positive values and good behavior in daily life. However, there are still some challenges to overcome during implementation. One of them is the need to train teachers to consistently integrate character education into learning and assessment. With proper training, teachers can understand and implement character education approaches effectively, thus positively impacting the overall development of their students (Mustoip, 2023).

### **Holistic Character Education in the Digital Age**

Developing 21st century skills through holistic education is important, especially as the digital era changes the learning paradigm and the need for digital skills, problem-solving skills, creativity and collaboration becomes more urgent (Mardhiyah, 2021).

In the 21st century we do not rely on skills alone, skills also play a role in learning. The most important skills to develop are the ability to learn and innovate.

In the digital age of rapid change and increasing complexity, comprehensive education provides a solid foundation that prepares individuals to adapt, create and gain a deep understanding of their surroundings. Holistic education through its principles actively contributes to the development of human beings who are ready to face the challenges of their times (Pare & Sihotang, 2023).

In the 21st century all sectors have adapted to technological advances including in education. Hence the importance of preparing learners to deal with change. When facing various situations, forming social responsibility, judgment skills to evaluate and make effective decisions on ethical and legal issues related to the education ecosystem. Holistic education plays a role in integrating digital literacy as an integral part of learning, ensuring that learners not only possess technological capabilities, but also adopt the necessary attitudes, values and social responsibility in interacting with the dynamic digital ecosystem.

Given the dynamics of the digital age, there is an urgent need to develop skills for the 21st century. Holistic education is an effective approach to help students not only know how to use technology, but also

integrate the values, skills, and attitudes they will need to successfully adapt and thrive in the ever-changing digital ecosystem (Rianawaty dkk, 2021).

### **Character Education Opportunities in the Digital Age**

Digital character learning is very helpful for students in mastering the skills provided. However, teachers' understanding of digital learning is still lacking. Digital character learning is often simply translated as learning using digital tools. This is a conceptual simplification and lack of understanding. Digital learning is not just about using digital tools in the classroom, but about improving the quality of learning. Therefore, digital learning is not a tendency to use digital tools, but a responsibility to improve the quality of learning.

The concept of digital character learning is complex as there are too many variables at play. In short, digital character learning enhances the learning experience, saves teachers time, allows teachers to tailor learning to student needs, tracks student progress, and improves the learning process for everyone involved.

Digital learning provides a great opportunity for success in character education. There are several opportunities in digital learning compared to traditional learning,

First, digital learning can alleviate many of the constraints of wide geographies. Students can now access online videos that provide instruction on a variety of topics at different skill levels, and participate in video conferences with teachers who are in different places.

Secondly, the advent of touchscreen technology has made it possible for very young children to engage in technology-assisted teaching. Before tablets, it was difficult for preschoolers, kindergarteners, and even early elementary students to learn with educational software because they needed to use a mouse or keyboard. Now there are hundreds of apps that can effectively expose children to early literacy and numeracy skills.

Third, advances in artificial intelligence technology now allow teachers to differentiate instruction, providing extra support and developmentally appropriate materials to students whose knowledge and skills are well below or above grade-level norms. The latest "intelligent" tutoring systems are not only able to assess students' current weaknesses, but also diagnose why students make certain mistakes. This technology can allow teachers to better reach out to students who are far from average in their classes, potentially benefiting students with weaker academic abilities (Triyanto, 2020).

### **Character Education Challenges in the Digital Age**

The challenges of character education in the digital era, especially in Indonesia, are currently being discussed not only on classic themes such as equality, access to education, and infrastructure enrichment, but also on the quality of graduates who are able to meet the demands of current development. Therefore, teachers must first acquire skills in order to adapt to the changing times and adjust to their students. Not only students, educators are also expected to master digital technology. Therefore, educators are not only learning facilitators, but also mentors who help students develop the skills they need in the digital world, such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and adaptability to technological change (Oktarina dkk, 2021).

In terms of safety, teachers need to be aware that their online behavior can put themselves and others at risk. Safety considerations include protecting one's own privacy, respecting the privacy of others, and identifying inappropriate online sites (such as sexual content and other resources not intended for children). Online security is a challenge that can determine the stability and smooth running of the system itself. Despite increased sensitivity and vigilance towards internet use, lack of knowledge, information and awareness exposes users to risks ranging from data loss to digital identity theft. Training programs are needed to reverse this situation and encourage good habits in using technology and networks.

The aspect of cyberbullying requires educators to know the potentially disruptive effects based on cyberbullying & how it violates the ethical principles of exclusive integrity, compassion, and responsible conduct. Cyberbullying both in and out of school, through technology, allows the privacy of the bullied child or teen to be monotonously invaded. Both the recipient and the perpetrator are victims of various forms of online bullying (including cyberbullying, sexting, trolling, & happy slapping) that disrupt their psychological and personal development (Patchin, 2006).

Copyright and plagiarismaspects Teachers should teach respect for the intellectual property rights of others and consider the legality and ethics of using online materials without permission. Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas, words, or work as if it were one's own. However, plagiarism is not always intentional or malicious. In some cases, it happens unconsciously and is caused by a lack of prior knowledge. Some students admit to plagiarism and other forms of misconduct and warn against it as it can be the start of long-term misconduct in their careers (Agud, 2014).

The importance of digital character learning as a solution to educational challenges and the increasing number of students learning online increases the need to further examine the factors that influence student character learning in digital education (Cavanaugh, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

Character education is not only about understanding ethical values, but also emphasizes the real action of these values, character education is not just to be memorized but also has the drive to be applied in daily life. However, character education should also be inclusive and contextualized. The teaching process needs to consider that each individual may face different situations that affect their ability to apply the values. Character education does not only happen through specialized subjects, but also through daily tasks and interactions at school hence the importance of implementing a curriculum that is relevant to the times. In addressing the rapid changes and complexities of the digital age, holistic education proves its relevance by providing a solid foundation to address the challenges of the present and support the development of learners to be future-ready. Holistic education in the digital age combines educational traditions with modern technology to create a comprehensive learning environment.

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