

Efforts to Instill Character Education in Students in the Digital Era

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Abstract

Character education is a crucial aspect in shaping ethical, responsible, and socially aware individuals within society. In today's digital era, the process of instilling character education has become increasingly complex due to rapid technological advancements that significantly influence students' behavior, learning patterns, and social interactions. Digital technology has transformed the educational landscape by providing easier access to information and new learning opportunities, but it has also introduced challenges such as excessive use of social media, exposure to negative or inappropriate content, declining interpersonal communication, and shifts in moral values among students. This article discusses various efforts to strengthen character education among students in the digital era. The discussion covers the fundamental concept of character education as an essential component of holistic education, the challenges posed by the digital age, and effective strategies for character development. The strategies emphasized include moral knowing, which focuses on providing students with an understanding of moral values; moral loving, which aims to develop emotional attachment and care toward those values; and moral acting, which encourages the consistent practice of character values in daily life. In addition, this article explores the role of educators in implementing character education through exemplary behavior, limiting students' excessive indulgence in digital activities, fostering positive teacher-student relationships, applying learning methods suited to students' needs, and monitoring students' social and digital environments. The analysis employs a descriptive analysis technique to provide a comprehensive understanding of character education implementation in the digital era.

Keywords: Character Education, Digital Era, Character Building Strategies

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Introduction

Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System serves as the primary legal foundation for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of education in Indonesia. Article 3 explicitly emphasizes that national education functions to develop students' potential while shaping dignified character and civilization in order to educate the life of the nation. Education is therefore positioned not merely as a means of intellectual development but also as a moral and ethical endeavor that contributes directly to national development and social harmony (Herak, 2025; Wartinah & Hidayat, 2025). This orientation reflects the belief that sustainable national progress depends on human resources who possess both competence and character.

National education aims to produce individuals who are faithful, morally upright, knowledgeable, creative, and responsible democratic citizens. This objective highlights the importance of integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in learning processes (Siskawati Noi & Lukum, 2025; Nuryani Dwi Astuti et al., 2025). Students are expected to demonstrate broad insight, creativity, innovation, and social responsibility, indicating that emotional intelligence and ethical awareness are as crucial as academic achievement (Boulton et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2020). As such, education must equip learners with the ability to respond wisely to complex challenges in their social environments.

In the context of globalization, character education is increasingly viewed as a strategic necessity. Countries with strong education systems consistently emphasize character formation as a foundation for competitiveness and social cohesion (Ahern & Kowal, 2018; Lundqvist et al., 2021). For Indonesia, character education is particularly important as a means of preparing younger generations to face global competition while maintaining cultural identity, ethical values, and social responsibility (Purba et al., 2024; Sagala & Rantung, 2024).

Character is shaped through a dynamic interaction between innate dispositions and environmental influences, including family, school, and society. It reflects a person's moral and ethical orientation, such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, and respect for others (Lickona, as cited in Wartinah & Hidayat, 2025; Nurdiansyah & Wahab, 2025). An individual is considered to possess noble character when their actions consistently align with moral norms and ethical principles recognized by society (Sholikhah et al., 2025; Putri, 2025).

The importance of character education has increased alongside concerns regarding moral decline in modern societies, particularly among younger generations exposed to rapid technological change (Herak, 2025; Palupi Putri, 2025). Character education aims to develop students' personalities by internalizing positive values that guide daily behavior, such as discipline, honesty, respect, and perseverance (Rahmadani & Rahma, 2024; Mahmuddah & Junaidi, 2024). These values are essential for helping students navigate ethical dilemmas in both offline and online contexts.

Another key objective of character education is to empower students to make ethical decisions and apply moral principles consistently across different settings, including home, school, and community life (Code & Zhang, 2020; Livingstone & Helsper, 2023). Through systematic character education, students learn not only moral knowledge but also moral reasoning and moral action, which together form the foundation of ethical citizenship in a democratic society (Boulton et al., 2021; Lundqvist et al., 2021).

Indonesia's national education system formally integrates character development as a core educational goal. Article 1 Paragraph 1 of Law No. 20 of 2003 defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere that enables students to develop spiritual strength, self-control, intelligence, noble character, and essential life skills. This definition underscores the holistic nature of education, emphasizing the balance between academic competence and moral integrity (Nuryani Dwi Astuti et al., 2025; Wartinah & Hidayat, 2025).

Character education is closely linked to national development objectives, particularly the formation of ethical citizens who contribute positively to society (Sriartha et al., 2025; Purba et al., 2024). Educational institutions are therefore expected to integrate character values into curricula, teaching methods, and school culture, ensuring that moral education is not treated as a separate or supplementary component (Sagala & Rantung, 2024; Nurwiati et al., 2025).

Teachers play a central role in implementing character education, as students often imitate the attitudes and behaviors of their educators. Exemplary conduct, consistency, and moral integrity among teachers significantly influence students' character formation (Ng & Littlejohn, 2023; Martin et al., 2020). Consequently, teacher professionalism must encompass ethical responsibility and moral leadership in addition to pedagogical competence (Ahern & Kowal, 2018; Sugiarto & Farid, 2024).

The 21st century has been characterized by rapid technological advancement, resulting in the emergence of the digital era. Digital technology enables fast access to information, extensive communication networks, and innovative learning models (Ahern & Kowal, 2018; Martin et al., 2020). However, the abundance of information and the complexity of digital

systems also present challenges related to information control, ethical behavior, and cognitive overload (Livingstone & Helsper, 2023; Herak, 2025).

In education, digital technology has transformed learning environments by expanding access to resources, supporting collaboration, and enabling flexible learning opportunities (Boulton et al., 2021; Ng & Littlejohn, 2023). Students can now access academic journals, e-books, and multimedia learning materials through digital platforms, enhancing learning efficiency and engagement (Lundqvist et al., 2021; Sugiarto & Farid, 2024). Nevertheless, digital resources should complement rather than replace traditional textbooks to ensure balanced and structured learning (Purba et al., 2024; Kartika Sagala & Rantung, 2024).

Despite its benefits, digital technology also poses risks to character development, including exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, academic dishonesty, and reduced face-to-face social interaction (Code & Zhang, 2020; Livingstone & Helsper, 2023). Without proper guidance, students may misuse technology in ways that undermine moral values and social responsibility (Herak, 2025; Wartinah & Hidayat, 2025).

Integrating character education into digital learning environments offers significant opportunities to promote ethical awareness, responsibility, and digital citizenship (Boulton et al., 2021; Lundqvist et al., 2021). Digital literacy programs that emphasize critical thinking, ethical judgment, and respectful online behavior have been shown to strengthen students' character development (Nurdiansyah & Wahab, 2025; Sugiarto & Farid, 2024).

Religious education plays a vital role in character formation in Indonesia. Islamic education, for instance, emphasizes moral values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and compassion, which are essential for navigating digital challenges (Astuti et al., 2026; Febrianti et al., 2024). Integrating religious values with digital literacy helps students maintain ethical awareness in technologically mediated environments (Farah Firdausa Muchtar et al., 2024; Sholikhah et al., 2025).

Philosophical perspectives from Indonesian educational thinkers, such as Ki Hajar Dewantara, further emphasize the importance of character education rooted in cultural wisdom and exemplary behavior (Triyaswati, 2024; Sriartha et al., 2025). Education should guide students toward moral independence and social responsibility through culturally grounded pedagogical practices.

Method

In this paper, the library research methodology is used to obtain data and references by utilizing library sources. This approach also includes text studies, which include data collection from a study, of course using several sources including magazines, journals, books, and information needed, and documentation in conducting the observation stage and data collection in the field in the form of photos, notes, or images. In addition, this methodology involves the thoughts of figures relevant to the research topic. The analysis technique used is the descriptive analysis technique.

Results and Discussion

Character Education Concept

Character in Latin is called "character" which means habit, nature, behavior, ethics, morals, and morals. Character can be described as a person's nature, attitude and behavior that can be seen and become a structured habit. Character education itself is how to instill character values in education in order to shape a person's personality well. In terms, character is defined as human traits in general, which can vary depending on the individual's life experiences. Character can be seen from various sides that radiate from within a person such

as in their morals and ethics towards others to become a very clear characteristic. Based on the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), the word character refers to a person's traits related to a person's psychology, attitudes and behaviors that show a comparison between himself and others. It also involves aspects related to innate, heart, soul, personality, morality, behavior, character, personality, nature, nature, temperament, and disposition. Therefore, the term "characteristic" can be understood as having prominent traits, strong personality, good behavior, positive traits, good disposition, and having a good disposition.

Several definitions of character have been proposed by various experts, including the following:

1. Hornby (1987) states that character can be interpreted as "mental or moral qualities that make a thing different from others" meaning "mental or moral qualities of a person that distinguishes him from others".
2. Simon Philips states that character is a set of values organized in a system, which influences a person's attitudes, thoughts, and behavior.
3. According to Alwisol, character is a reflection of behavior that shows values (good or bad) directly or indirectly.

Character education is an effort to develop intelligence, form deep attitudes and apply them in behavior that reflects noble values that characterize one's identity. This is reflected in daily interactions with others, in the realm of religion, social, nationality, and citizenship. The development and internalization of character education in formal and non-formal education is an important need. This is not done without a clear reason, because character education has a noble goal to provide provisions for students to be able to face the dynamics of life with responsibility that is always ready. Character education often produces various perspectives from different people, in the modern world a few people interpret that character education is an education related to various forms of ethics, morals, and principles in forming the personality of someone who is academically intelligent in the educational institution environment as well as ethics and morals towards the surrounding environment.

The general purpose of education is to develop the potential of individuals as a whole, covering intellectual, emotional, social, and physical aspects. Education aims to create individuals who are not only knowledgeable and skilled, but also moral, creative, and able to contribute positively to society. Character education is very important in everyone's life, especially in educational institutions, because through character education, the quality of education in our country will increase and students will have good and strong characters. From the explanation of character education, it can be concluded that character education is an educational effort aimed at forming and enriching positive values, attitudes, and actions in each individual. Character education recognizes that education is not just about gaining academic knowledge, but also includes the formation of a positive personality. This includes providing teaching about universal values such as honesty, responsibility, hard work, empathy, tolerance, cooperation, and respect for diversity.

Challenges of the Digital Era

The digital world is growing, creating challenges to improve efficiency and quality in all areas of life, but also opening up many opportunities and benefits for society and the business world. Advanced technology is basically created to facilitate work and human activities in everyday life, but dependence on mobile phones and computers has become a fairly serious side effect. Digital advances in the education sector allow the use of online education and resource learning. This allows students and students to access learning materials from various locations, resulting in flexibility and a more personalized learning experience. The approach to education is now no longer focused on the role of the teacher,

but more on the student. Along with technological advances, education in the digital era has undergone significant changes. Indirectly, the technology that is currently developing has a significant influence on the learning process in the world of education. The use of various technologies such as computers, the internet, and mobile devices in the education process is one of the most striking changes. Overall, there are many opportunities and challenges that come with education in the digital era. The presence of digital era technology, especially computers, has changed the pattern of interaction between individuals, especially in people whose economy is financially stable. This is because the freedom of the world of information technology provides the freedom to interact and communicate freely with anyone, anytime, and anywhere. The moral degradation that has occurred recently in society is often experienced by the younger generation who are still teenagers and students, so that it becomes a fairly serious social problem when looking at the changes that are happening today.

There are several other challenges that must be faced so that the use of technology in education provides maximum benefits. Inequality in access to technology is one of the main problems. Many students and educational institutions still lack adequate hardware and internet connections, even though digital technology offers many opportunities to improve education. This can lead to more disparities in schools because students from disadvantaged families cannot get access to the digital resources needed to support their education. In the digital era, character education raises many issues that need to be considered carefully. Because of the influence of various areas of life that can cause changes in various aspects, the challenges faced in the field of information technology in the digital era are increasingly complex. In the age of information technology, children and adolescents are often exposed to various digital influences that can affect the formation of their character. The issues are mainly related to digital ethics, as apathy towards privacy, the spread of false information, and inappropriate behavior can easily affect the mindset of children who are still developing. This indicates the need for a careful approach in integrating character education with the use of digital technology, as well as efforts to increase understanding of digital ethics and responsibility among the younger generation. In addition, dependence on social media can also cause problems related to self-perception and the desire for online validation, which can endanger one's identity. As a result, to face the challenges of character education in the digital age, individuals must maintain strong moral principles, understand digital ethics, and learn the social skills needed to adapt to the ever-changing digital environment. To create a generation that is not only technologically proficient but also has a strong personality to face the complex moral challenges of the digital age, a holistic approach is needed that combines character learning with digital literacy.

Strategies for Instilling Character Education in Students in the Digital Era

Character education is important for all curricula, especially in today's digital era. In this era, the character possessed by students often declines. The decline in morality in children is a problem that has received serious attention from the government and society. However, in today's digital era, with the rapid advancement of information technology, the complexity of the problem is increasing. Uncontrolled media, such as online games, can easily influence children's thinking, making it one aspect that needs special attention in handling this problem. It is rare to see children playing traditional games, which encourage creativity and foster a sense of brotherhood, in today's social media era. Instead, children tend to be involved with technology, such as electronic devices and video games. Time spent on media has also increased, with an average of 3 hours watching TV on school days and 7.4 hours on holidays, and 2.1 hours playing the internet on holidays. To overcome this problem,

parents must apply a digital parenting approach: (1) learn more about the internet and electronic devices, (2) regulate internet access in the family room so that they can see the activities they do, (3) limit the time spent using electronic devices and the internet, (4) tell children about the negative effects of the internet and electronic devices, (5) be firm in prohibiting inappropriate content, and (6) communicate with children openly. The characteristics of the Digital Generation are as follows: (1) They create accounts on social media en masse to show their existence to the world, (2) they tend to be more open, honest, and think more firmly than previous generations, (3) They want freedom and do not like restrictions. They want to control their own destiny, and the internet gives them the freedom to express themselves, and (4) They always access information through Google, Yahoo, or other platforms. Because they have easy access to all information, they can learn faster.

As for educational strategies in the digital era:

- 1) **Moral Knowing Strategy:** this approach is one form of approach carried out through education provided to students in line with the principles in the world of education. Developing this strategy requires students to understand what moral values are and ask them to demonstrate these values through examples they know. Discussions, seminars, or film analysis are some ways to implement this approach. Educators must ensure that students understand the principles of good and bad, and that these principles are useful and relevant in their lives.
- 2) **Moral Loving or Moral Feeling:** This stage emphasizes learning to love and serve others. In addition to instilling a sense of the need for compassion and good character values, the goal is to raise awareness of the importance of helping others. Teachers help students understand their emotions so that students can apply the knowledge they gain from their teachers according to character values. This can be achieved through inspirational stories and real-life examples.
- 3) **Moral Behavior Learning:** This is the highest stage in the development of a successful personality, where students apply character principles in their daily actions. In their daily lives, they demonstrate politeness, friendliness, respect, compassion, and honesty. In facing the challenges of an increasingly advanced era, teachers are required to build better student character than before. Therefore, there needs to be some form of effort or appropriate strategy in overcoming various moral problems of students, because in the era of society 5.0 freedom of information can no longer be contained so that they seem free without rules, some of which are as follows:
 1. **Deepening Character Education:** Students need to be given a comprehensive understanding of character education. They must internalize, understand, and actualize the instilled character values. It is also important to foster good relationships with the surrounding environment so that students can behave and act well.
 2. **Showing Exemplary Behavior:** Teachers must set a good example because in the era of society 5.0, students have access to various internet media. Teachers must realize that they are role models for students, because every behavior they do will be imitated by students.
 3. **Controlling Luxury and Greed:** The impact of technology and information often creates a culture of excessive pleasure. Teachers must provide instructions and instill basic principles and control themselves so that students do not get caught up in a hedonistic culture that can make them lazy and only oriented towards results.
 4. **Building Good Relationships:** It is important for teachers to establish good relationships with students in order to create comfortable communication. Teachers must pay full attention to students and communicate with them using good language and behave well.

5. Choosing the Right Learning Method: An effective learning method is one that is flexible and appropriate to the needs of students. Teachers must combine theory and practice, and encourage students to actively communicate and discuss in a good and respectful manner.
6. Monitoring the Environment: in this era of society 5.0, students not only interact face to face, but with digital technology they often interact in the social media environment that they have. Therefore, it is important to monitor the environment so that students' characters are well maintained.

According to this theory, character education in the 5.0 era is an approach taken in education in order to shape the personality of students in line with the development and changes of the times, so that the rapid flow of information technology can be balanced with the norms that have been in effect at the beginning. This approach includes a comprehensive introduction to character education for students, providing examples and role models by teachers, maintaining good interpersonal relationships with students, and using teaching methods and models that are appropriate to the conditions of students, as well as continuing to foster good character and monitor the surrounding environment. Through this approach, it can facilitate the steps to implement character education in an increasingly advanced and developing era, because the education provided can adapt to the development and changes of the times according to the information technology that will be used based on applicable provisions.

Conclusion

Character education in the digital era faces increasingly complex challenges due to the rapid development of technology, including students' dependence on social media, exposure to negative and misleading information, and shifts in moral values. These challenges demand serious attention from educators, parents, and educational institutions, as digital environments significantly influence students' attitudes, behaviors, and character formation. Without proper guidance, technological advancement may weaken moral awareness and ethical responsibility among students.

To address these challenges, educators must implement comprehensive and well-planned strategies in character education. The application of moral knowing, moral loving, and moral acting is essential in ensuring that students not only understand moral values but also develop emotional attachment to those values and practice them consistently in everyday life. These three components serve as a strong foundation for internalizing character education in both academic and social contexts.

In addition, educators play a crucial role as role models who demonstrate positive behavior, discipline, and integrity. Building good relationships with students, applying appropriate learning methods, limiting excessive indulgence, and closely monitoring students' environments-both offline and online-are important supporting strategies. Through consistent collaboration between schools, families, and communities, character education can be effectively strengthened, enabling students to become morally responsible, ethical, and resilient individuals who are well prepared to face the challenges of the digital era.

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