



Teachers' Roles in Developing Students' Cognitive, Ethical, and Moral Competencies in Primary Education

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Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' cognitive abilities related to ethics and morality at the elementary school level through meaningful, character-based learning. This study aims to examine the role of teachers in instilling ethical and moral values through Pancasila Education. The research begins with the identification of issues related to students' limited understanding of ethics and morality, followed by data collection using a descriptive qualitative approach through observations and interviews. The collected data were analyzed to describe teachers' roles in the learning process. The findings indicate that teachers function as role models, mentors, and facilitators in developing students' moral understanding through the integration of ethical values into instruction, the habituation of positive behaviors, and the reinforcement of school culture.

Keywords: teacher role; cognitive abilities; ethics and morality; Pancasila Education; character education; elementary school

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INTRODUCTION

Pancasila Education in elementary schools aims to instill Pancasila values from an early age as the foundation for students' character development. This learning emphasizes the understanding of values, attitudes, and behaviors through activities that are developmentally appropriate, supported by teachers' role modeling, and reinforced through the application of Pancasila values in students' daily lives at school.

According to Nurfirdaus and Risnawati (2019), teachers consistently strive to habituate students to positive behavior by guiding, engaging, advising, motivating, and providing exemplary conduct. Through these efforts, expected social behaviors and habits can be effectively developed, thereby supporting the achievement of educational objectives.

Zubaidah (as cited in Nasihah et al., 2024) emphasizes that cognitive ability is a key indicator of learning success, as it enables students to absorb and understand learning materials more effectively. Students with higher cognitive abilities tend to comprehend instructional content more easily and apply their knowledge efficiently in real-life situations. To address

diverse learning challenges, teachers are required to move beyond conventional teaching methods and consider students' characteristics as the basis for selecting appropriate learning models.

Furthermore, Rachma et al. (2024) highlight that the development of students' ethics and morals is a crucial aspect of education, which extends beyond academic achievement to include character formation. In an increasingly complex and dynamic social context, the need for education that instills moral and ethical values has become more urgent. This aligns with the broader role of education in fostering responsible, ethical individuals with strong moral foundations. Effective education should therefore create a conducive environment for students' moral development, where human values are not only taught theoretically but also practiced in daily interactions and real-life situations within the school environment.

According to Subur et al. (as cited in Sari & Puspita, 2019), character refers to patterns of thinking and behavior that distinguish individuals in their ability to live and collaborate within family, society, and the nation. Character can also be understood as a set of values underlying thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Individuals with strong character are those who are capable of making decisions and are willing to take responsibility for the consequences of those decisions.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to examine the role of teachers in shaping students' cognitive, ethical, and moral development in the elementary school environment. A qualitative approach was selected as it enables an in-depth and contextual understanding of educational phenomena, particularly those related to attitudes, behaviors, and social interactions between teachers and students. In this study, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, directly engaging in the field to observe and interpret reality as it naturally occurs without intervention.

Data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews to obtain a comprehensive understanding of character education practices in elementary schools. Data analysis was conducted continuously through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, allowing for a thorough interpretation of teachers' roles in shaping students' cognitive, ethical, and moral development. This approach is expected to provide meaningful and in-depth insights for the advancement of character education practices in elementary school settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers are professional educators responsible for planning instruction, guiding the learning process, and conducting evaluations. As key agents in education, teachers play a decisive role in determining the success or failure of educational practices. Therefore, quality education is characterized by the upholding of ethical standards and a strong sense of responsibility in its implementation.

Cognitive development focuses on thinking skills, including learning, problem-solving, reasoning, and memory. The development of cognitive skills is closely interconnected with other domains, such as communication, motor, social, emotional, and adaptive skills. In other words, an individual's cognitive abilities develop progressively from early childhood through continuous interaction with their environment.

Ethics and morality play a fundamental role in shaping students' character and personality development. The primary objective of ethical and moral education is to develop individuals who possess noble character and a strong sense of responsibility. This form of education extends beyond the transmission of norms and values, encompassing practical experiences and self-reflection that contribute to moral development.

Pancasila Education in elementary schools can leverage technology to create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences. For example, digital simulations on democratic decision-making, online discussions on cultural diversity, and collaborative projects across schools using digital platforms can be implemented. Through such approaches, values such as mutual cooperation, justice, and tolerance are not only taught theoretically but also practiced through authentic learning experiences.

The concept of character originates from the Greek term *to mark*, referring to the application of moral values in actions and behavior. In Latin, character denotes distinguishing traits, psychological attributes, and moral dispositions. Character can thus be understood as a set of psychological and moral qualities that distinguish one individual from another. Individuals with strong character are those who are capable of making decisions and taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

The Role of Teachers

Teachers are professional educators responsible for planning instruction, guiding the learning process, and conducting evaluations. As key agents in education, teachers play a decisive role in determining the success of educational outcomes. Therefore, quality education is characterized by adherence to ethical standards and a strong sense of responsibility in its implementation.

Yestiani and Zahwa (2020) emphasize that teachers play a crucial role in fostering students' character development. The use of varied teaching methods to create engaging learning environments, along with involvement in extracurricular activities, enables teachers to build closer relationships with students and effectively instill positive character values. Teachers serve as role models, and the success of character education largely depends on their influence during the learning process.

Mutiaramses et al. (2021) further distinguish between educating and teaching. Educating refers to the process of instilling character values, while teaching involves delivering instructional content to achieve learning objectives. Additionally, Jenetta et al. (2023) highlight that teachers, as mentors, guide students not only academically but also in their intellectual, emotional, and moral development. Teachers are expected to exemplify good behavior, as students tend to imitate their actions, reinforcing the notion that teachers are figures to be "trusted and emulated." Empirical findings indicate that teachers who demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors significantly influence students' moral conduct both in the classroom and in the school environment.

In conclusion, teachers play a vital role in educational success, particularly in character formation. Beyond delivering academic content, they function as mentors and role models in instilling ethical and moral values.

Cognitive Ability

Cognitive ability refers to thinking skills, including learning, problem-solving, reasoning, and memory. Cognitive development is closely linked to other developmental domains, such as communication, motor, social, emotional, and adaptive skills. In essence, cognitive abilities develop progressively from birth through continuous interaction with the environment.

Neviyarni and Aniswita (2020) explain that cognition relates to the processes of acquiring, organizing, and utilizing knowledge. It encompasses mental activities centered in the brain and is associated with intention (conation) and emotion (affection). Piaget's theory of cognitive development provides a foundational framework, consisting of key concepts such as schema, assimilation, accommodation, organization, and equilibration.

Similarly, Darouich et al. (as cited in Basri, 2018) assert that cognitive development involves thinking skills that evolve alongside other developmental aspects. Thus, cognitive

development is a gradual process shaped by interaction with the environment and interconnected with multiple dimensions of human development.

Ethical and Moral Development

Ethics and morality play a fundamental role in shaping students' character and personality. The primary goal of ethical and moral education is to develop individuals who possess noble character and a strong sense of responsibility. This form of education goes beyond the transmission of norms and values, incorporating practical experiences and self-reflection that influence moral development.

Febriyani et al. (2024) state that ethics and morality encompass behaviors that reflect human values. Ethics focuses on how individuals ought to behave based on moral principles. These values serve as a foundation for shaping individual character and maintaining social harmony.

Ixfina and Rohma (2022) highlight that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides a balanced approach to moral and intellectual development. Through methods such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL), students engage in real-life experiences such as environmental care and social collaboration that foster responsibility, honesty, and cooperation.

In conclusion, ethics and morality serve as essential foundations for character development, guiding individuals in distinguishing right from wrong and fostering moral awareness.

Pancasila Education

Pancasila Education in elementary schools can leverage technology to create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences. For instance, digital simulations of democratic decision-making, online discussions on cultural diversity, and collaborative projects across schools can be utilized. These approaches allow students to practice values such as cooperation, justice, and tolerance in real-life contexts.

Nurgiansah (2021) explains that Pancasila Education is a compulsory subject at all educational levels and serves as a medium for instilling moral values and national identity. It functions not only as knowledge transfer but also as a means of shaping students' character.

Mulyani et al. (as cited in Hidayat & Putro, 2024) emphasize that Pancasila Education is a key pillar in character formation and national identity development. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for schools to design contextually relevant learning experiences tailored to students' needs.

Thus, Pancasila Education plays a significant role in shaping students' character through contextual, value-based, and experiential learning.

Character Education

The term "character" originates from the Greek word to mark, referring to the application of moral values in behavior. In Latin, it denotes distinguishing traits, psychological attributes, and moral dispositions. Character can be understood as a set of moral values reflected in an individual's thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

Solisa et al. (as cited in Mustoip et al., 2023) define character education as a process of developing students' ability to make ethical decisions and practice positive behaviors in daily life. Effective character education integrates cognitive, affective, conative, and psychomotor aspects.

Dishon et al. (as cited in Cahyanto et al., 2022) highlight that character education should be integrated across all subjects and educational levels. One key dimension is religious character, which reflects faith and moral values. Schools are expected to develop character based on moral principles and societal values to achieve educational goals.

In conclusion, character education aims to develop individuals who are capable of making responsible decisions and embodying moral values through integrated and culturally aligned educational practices.

CONCLUSION

The success of education in elementary schools is largely determined by the role of teachers as educators, mentors, and role models in the learning process. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering academic content but also for instilling moral, ethical, and character values through their attitudes, behaviors, and exemplary conduct. In addition, the development of students' cognitive abilities serves as a fundamental basis for shaping their ways of thinking, understanding knowledge, and solving problems, which evolve progressively through interaction with their environment

The formation of ethics and morality, supported through Pancasila Education, plays a crucial role in shaping students' personalities in accordance with Pancasila values. Character education constitutes the core of the overall educational process, as it aims to develop individuals who possess noble character, responsibility, tolerance, and the ability to apply positive values in their daily lives as future members of society. Therefore, the effectiveness of elementary education is strongly influenced by teachers' capacity to function as educators, mentors, and role models for their students.

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