

CHARACTER EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION OF QUALITY LEADERS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Character education plays a crucial role in shaping ethical and high-quality leadership in Indonesia. This study explores the impact of character education on leadership quality using a qualitative method based on a literature review. The findings show that the integration of character education into leadership development programs significantly strengthens moral awareness, accountability, and commitment to public service among leaders. These results emphasize the importance of incorporating character values into educational curriculum to develop visionary and ethical leaders who can face the nation's future challenges. The study also highlights the need to integrate local cultural values, such as cooperation, tolerance, and deliberation, in leadership education to foster leaders who are not only skilled but also sensitive to societal needs. The implications of these findings are significant for policymakers and educators in developing leadership programs that prioritize ethical and culturally relevant character education.

Keywords: *Character Education; Quality Leadership; Leader Integrity; Development; Character Values*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia currently faces complex leadership challenges amidst a moral crisis, weak public integrity, and declining public trust in the governing elite. The phenomena of corruption, abuse of power, and low accountability are often linked to the failure to develop leadership character from an early age. In this context, character education is a strategic issue that requires in-depth study as a crucial foundation for developing leaders of quality and integrity. Character education serves not only as a means of shaping individual morals but also as a long-term investment for sustainable national development. As emphasized by Lickona (1991) Character education encompasses the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, all of which are essential for developing a well-rounded personality. In the context of leadership, character is an essential aspect that differentiates leaders who are merely intellectually intelligent from those with high moral integrity. (Komalasari, K., & Saripudin, 2018). The urgency of this research lies in the fact that many formal education programs in Indonesia still prioritize cognitive aspects, while character development is often symbolic or ceremonial. Yet, a nation's success is determined not only by the intellectual intelligence of its leaders, but also by strong character in the face of pressure, conflicts of interest, and ethical dilemmas. Therefore, analyzing character education as a foundation for leadership is crucial for strengthening the foundation of public ethics in Indonesia. Character education holds great potential for developing leadership that is not only intelligent but also responsible and imbued with integrity. However, while character education has been recognized as a fundamental aspect of leadership development, numerous challenges remain that hinder its effective implementation. What will happen if we don't address this issue immediately? Indonesia will continue to be plagued by a leadership crisis, with leaders unable to carry out their mandates with high morality, ultimately leading to a decline in the quality of governance and a crisis of public trust in the nation's leaders. Suboptimal character education will produce leaders who are intellectually competent but weak in integrity, responsibility, and the ability to make ethical decisions when faced with various moral dilemmas. This phenomenon is highly relevant to Indonesia's situation, which is frequently plagued by issues of corruption and abuse of power. If these issues are not addressed immediately, the nation's future of justice, prosperity, and high competitiveness will be elusive, as low-quality leadership will

impact all aspects of national life, including public policymaking and public service. Therefore, strengthening character education as the primary foundation for developing quality leaders is urgently needed. Research shows that character education in schools faces significant challenges, especially in implementation and integration across educational levels. Susilo, H., Rachmawati, S., & Prayogi (2022) highlights that while character education is embedded in national policies, its implementation often remains limited to moral aspects, neglecting critical dimensions such as social responsibility and empathy, which are essential for holistic character development. Effendi, R., & Sahertian (2022) emphasize the importance of transformational leadership in enhancing character education, but their findings are limited to secondary education, leaving a gap in understanding its broader implications for leadership quality in government and organizational contexts. In addition, studies by Yamin, M., & Sudrajat (2020) revealed that effective character education requires a comprehensive approach that integrates civic values and addresses internal and external challenges, including curriculum synchronization and the influence of technology. Overall, a more cohesive and multifaceted strategy is needed to promote character development in educational settings. (Yamin, M., & Sudrajat, 2020), Wibowo, A., & Hidayat, 2022).

The weakness of previous studies lies in their limited scope and approach. These studies generally only view character education as an element within the formal education curriculum without considering its integration into leadership development across various sectors. Furthermore, although several studies highlight the importance of transformational leadership, no research has comprehensively linked character education to leadership quality in the Indonesian government context. This research gap highlights the need for more in-depth and comprehensive research to explore how character education can directly contribute to the formation of quality leaders with integrity, not only in formal education but also in government and organizational settings. This study aims to fill this research gap by further examining how character education can shape leadership quality in Indonesia, both at the educational level and in the government sector. Using a qualitative approach based on literature review, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between character education and leadership quality, as well as to formulate practical recommendations for educational policy and leadership development in Indonesia. This study also provides novelty by viewing character education as a key capital in developing ethical and visionary leadership, which focuses not only on moral aspects, but also on forming leaders with high integrity and capable of facing future national challenges. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution in strengthening the foundation of character education as a basis for producing quality leaders, especially in facing global challenges and improving the quality of governance in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach based on literature review to examine and analyze the relationship between character education and quality leadership in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning contained in existing literature and theoretical and practical perspectives related to character education's influence on leadership quality. This approach allows researchers to gain a deeper and more interpretive understanding of a complex topic. (Creswell, 2016). In addition, this approach provides the flexibility to explore in-depth insights related to abstract and complex concepts that are difficult to measure with a quantitative approach. (Patton, 2002).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Results

a. Character Education as the Foundation of Visionary Leadership

The findings of this study indicate that character education plays a crucial role in developing visionary leaders in Indonesia. Visionary leaders are those who rely not only on intellectual abilities and technical skills but also possess strong moral values that guide their actions and decisions. Based on the findings of the literature review, character education integrated into the leadership curriculum strengthens leadership qualities that prioritize not only operational effectiveness but also ethics and fairness in decision-making. The emphasis on moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action as the main dimensions of character education, as stated by Lickona (1991), This study demonstrates that these three dimensions are highly relevant in shaping leaders with long-term vision. Moral knowing teaches leaders to recognize what is right and wrong; moral feeling involves feelings about moral actions; and moral action is the application of this knowledge and moral feelings in concrete actions. Leaders educated in a system that emphasizes these three aspects will be better prepared to face future challenges with a vision oriented toward sustainable development and the welfare of the people.

b. Strengthening Character Values in the Context of Local Culture

Another important finding is the importance of strengthening local culturally based character values in leadership education in Indonesia. Values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, deliberation, and local wisdom have been proven to strengthen the character of leaders who are inclusive, adaptive, and responsive to community needs. Indonesia, with its social and cultural diversity, needs leaders who understand and integrate local values into every decision-making process. Local culture-based character education not only strengthens personal character but also enriches leaders' abilities to make decisions relevant to the social and cultural context of Indonesian society. This aligns with Lickona (1991) which states that local cultural values are crucial for creating leaders who are not only capable of carrying out their duties efficiently but also possess a strong social sensitivity. These findings suggest that leaders with local character traits will be more easily accepted by the public because they have a strong connection to local culture and values.

2. Discussion**a. The Relationship of Findings with Character Education Theory**

The findings of this study indicate that character education integrated into leadership programs has a significant impact on the quality of leaders in Indonesia. This aligns with the character education theory proposed by Lickona (1991), which states that character consists of three main dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These findings reinforce the importance of developing these three dimensions in character education to shape leaders who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess high moral integrity. In the Indonesian context, which frequently faces moral and integrity crises, the implementation of comprehensive character education is highly relevant. The emphasis on moral knowing teaches leaders to recognize what is right and wrong in every situation. Moral feeling relates to how a person feels about a moral action, such as guilt when acting unethically or pride when acting correctly. Meanwhile, moral action emphasizes the ability to act based on this moral knowledge and feelings in real situations. These findings indicate that leaders who receive comprehensive character education tend to be more responsive to their social responsibilities and have a strong moral commitment in decision-making that leads to the common good.

The importance of integrating character values into education to develop quality leaders is further reinforced by the theory of quality leadership explained by Northouse (2018). Northouse emphasizes that quality leadership relies not only on managerial skills but also on moral integrity. Leaders with high moral qualities are better able to make ethical decisions, lead with a sense of responsibility, and navigate ethical dilemmas wisely. In this regard, sound character education serves as a foundation for developing leaders who are not only technically skilled but also ethical. With these findings, this article broadens our understanding of how character education can improve leadership quality. This study fills a research gap, particularly in the Indonesian context, where there is limited research linking character education to leadership quality in government and community sectors. These findings suggest that character education should not be merely an element of the formal curriculum, but rather a deep foundation for developing ethical and visionary leaders.

b. The Importance of Integrating Local Cultural Values in Character Education

One of the key findings of this study is the importance of strengthening local culture-based character values in leadership education in Indonesia. Values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and deliberation, which are part of local wisdom, have been shown to strengthen the character of leaders who are more inclusive, adaptive, and responsive to community needs. These findings confirm that local culture-based character education needs to be prioritized in the Indonesian character education curriculum. Research by Wibowo (2013) and Yamin & Sudrajat (2020) also shows that integrating local cultural values into character education can create leaders with high social sensitivity and build stronger relationships with the community. These findings demonstrate that leaders with local character are not only capable of effective leadership but also possess the ability to align policies with the social values valued by the community.

In the context of character-based leadership theory, Zenger and Folkman (2019) explain that leaders with strong moral integrity and the ability to empathize with others are crucial for building successful leadership. This finding reinforces the argument that local cultural values such as mutual cooperation and deliberation can be tools for building strong social relationships between leaders and the community. This aligns with Bass and Avolio's (1994) transformational leadership theory, which states that leaders who can inspire and motivate their followers to transform toward greater goals will be more effective in addressing existing social and cultural challenges. By integrating local cultural values into character education, we not only create more competent leaders but also leaders who are deeply connected to their people. This will foster more effective social collaboration, which is crucial for Indonesia's progress in facing global and local challenges.

c. Implications of Findings for Leadership Development in Indonesia

The findings of this study have significant implications for leadership development in Indonesia. Leaders with strong character, who integrate intellectual intelligence with high morality, will be better prepared to face the significant challenges facing Indonesia. These findings align with the primary objective of the study, which is to explore how character education can contribute to improving the quality of leadership in Indonesia, both in the education sector and in government. Character-based leadership, which integrates moral and social values, will help create leaders who are not only effective in managing organizations but also able to adapt to ever-evolving social and cultural changes. Therefore, integrating local culture-based character education into leadership training programs is crucial to creating leaders who are responsive to the needs of the people and sensitive to prevailing social values.

Overall, character education should be the primary foundation for leadership development in Indonesia. The findings of this literature review confirm that character education not only serves to shape individual morals but also plays a crucial role in developing leadership based on moral integrity and long-term vision. Character education that integrates local cultural values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and deliberation can strengthen leaders' character and help them make more inclusive and adaptive decisions to meet community needs. By integrating local culture-based character education with character-based transformational leadership theory, Indonesia can develop leaders who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess high moral integrity and are capable of facing the complex social and political challenges of the future. Therefore, character education must be a priority in leadership development in Indonesia, so that the country can produce quality leaders who can lead Indonesia towards a brighter future.

CONCLUSION**a. Conclusion**

This research demonstrates that character education plays a central role as a foundation for developing quality leaders in Indonesia. Through a literature review and a literature review, it was found that character values such as integrity, responsibility, honesty, empathy, and critical and collaborative thinking skills are key attributes that shape effective and visionary leadership. Instilling character from an early age through both formal and non-formal education systems has been proven to produce a generation that is not only intellectually competent but also morally and ethically mature. Character education, when integrated systematically and sustainably, will strengthen socio-political structures and support the realization of good and accountable governance in the future. This research shows that character education plays a crucial role in developing quality leaders in Indonesia. Character education integrated into the education system can produce leaders who are not only intellectually intelligent but also morally and ethically mature. These findings confirm that character education, encompassing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, will strengthen a leader's character, facilitate more ethical decision-making, and enhance their integrity in facing various challenges. Furthermore, character education based on local cultural values, such as mutual cooperation and deliberation, can enrich leadership with values relevant to the social context of Indonesian society. Character education, systematically implemented and integrated into the leadership curriculum, will create leaders who not only possess long-term vision but are also able to adapt to social change and build strong relationships with their communities. Therefore, character education must be the primary foundation for developing quality leadership in Indonesia.

b. Suggestion

The recommendations proposed in this study cover several important aspects that require attention to improve the implementation of character education in Indonesia. Educational institutions, from elementary to higher education levels, are expected to integrate character education into every subject and learning activity. Emphasis should be placed on strengthening moral values and leadership skills based on integrity. A curriculum that emphasizes the concepts of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action will help students understand the importance of ethics in decision-making and equip them to become leaders who are not only competent but also highly ethical. Educational institutions are also advised to involve families and communities in the character education process. By involving these parties, character education will not be limited to the classroom but will also permeate the daily lives of students and the community, creating harmony between the values taught in school and those applied in their social environment. *For the government*, The suggestion is to develop a more in-depth policy to support the implementation of local culture-based character education in the national education curriculum. Values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and deliberation are highly relevant for developing leaders who prioritize collaboration and inclusivity in a pluralistic society like Indonesia. Therefore, national education policy needs to strengthen the teaching of these values to ensure that character education focuses not

only on moral aspects but also on the application of social values that are highly valued in Indonesian society. The government also needs to ensure the availability of character-based leadership education at the professional level, such as in training for public officials and regional heads, to improve the quality of leadership in the government sector. Leaders with integrity and a strong understanding of character will be better able to bring about positive change, increase accountability, and maintain public trust in the government. *For Researchers and Academics:* Researchers in the fields of education and leadership are advised to conduct further research on the long-term impact of character education on the performance and integrity of leaders in the public sector. Such research can provide empirical data to support the development of more effective character education policies in the future. Overall, consistent implementation of character education based on strong moral values and local culture will have a positive impact in shaping leaders who are not only competent, but also have high integrity, who can face the major challenges in the future and lead Indonesia in a better direction.

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