The Role of Teachers in Developing Student Character Amidst the Digitalization of Education

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Abstract

The current digitalization sweeping the world of education presents a paradox in which easy access to information often contradicts the development of students' character. This article aims to critically examine the dynamics of teachers' roles in developing students' character amidst the onslaught of an instant and permissive digital culture. This research employs a library research method with an interpretive qualitative approach, analyzing various scientific literature and the latest research findings from the past decade. The study's findings indicate that excessive screen time has triggered a degradation of social empathy and increased students' vulnerability to immoral behavior in cyberspace, such as cyberbullying. Further analysis reveals that artificial intelligence technology can indeed replace teachers as conveyors of factual information, but it will never be able to replace their role as moral facilitators and ethical role models. Therefore, it is necessary to transform the role of teachers into value curators capable of integrating digital literacy with local wisdom through a humanistic pedagogical approach. The article's conclusion emphasizes that the synergy between technological adaptability and teachers' personal integrity is key to saving the next generation from an identity crisis in the era of information disruption.
Keywords: Character Education, Teacher Role, Digitalization of Education, Digital Ethics, Moral Literacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is essentially a fundamental process for humanizing humans, oriented not only toward cognitive achievement but also toward the formation of noble character and personality. Budiningsih (2019) emphasizes that the essence of learning is a complex process involving both intellectual and emotional aspects to create a well-rounded individual. However, the modern educational landscape is currently facing severe disruption due to the influx of digitalization that permeates every aspect of life, including the classroom. The massive presence of information technology has drastically changed the face of social interaction and learning patterns, creating new, previously unimaginable challenges. Lestari (2018) states that the hegemony of technology in education in the era of globalization often has a paradoxical double impact, opening access to knowledge while simultaneously eroding human values (Irianto et al., 2022; Wahid et al., 2022).

This shift in the learning ecosystem is most pronounced among students, who are now categorized as digital natives. This term, popularized by Prensky (2001), refers to a

generation born and raised alongside technology, such that their native language is digital. This generation tends to want everything fast and instant, which unconsciously reduces their fighting spirit and patience in the process. The psychosocial impact of this phenomenon is quite worrying, as expressed by Pratama & Hidayat (2020), who found that the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has the potential to produce a generation that is technically intelligent but ethically fragile due to the lack of human touch in their daily interactions. Dependence on devices has created a real barrier to the development of social empathy among students (Hendriyani et al., 2022; Wahid & Herlambang, 2022).

This moral crisis is exacerbated by easy access to unfiltered, negative content online. Deviant behaviors such as cyberbullying and the spread of fake news and hate speech are clear indicators that students' digital literacy has not been balanced with character maturity. In his research, Setiawan (2021) highlighted that high-intensity device use without proper guidance is directly correlated with a decline in the quality of social interactions among school-age children. In this context, technology's role as an information provider cannot replace humans as value educators. Google or artificial intelligence may be able to answer millions of scientific questions in seconds, but technology lacks the conscience to teach right from wrong.

Therefore, the role of teachers in developing students' character amidst the current digitalization is becoming increasingly vital and urgent. Lickona (2012) emphasized that character education is a deliberate effort to help individuals understand, observe, and practice core ethical values. Teachers hold the primary responsibility to ensure that technology is used as a tool for progress, not as a tool for moral destruction. Mulyasa (2021) added that teachers in the era of independent learning must be able to transform into agents of change, not only transferring knowledge but also instilling strong character in students. Teachers are required to possess dual adaptive skills: mastering technology to maintain its relevance to the times while simultaneously upholding local wisdom to ensure students do not lose their identity.

This article aims to explore the strategic role of teachers in bridging the gap between technological advancements and the needs of student character development. Wibowo (2017) stated that strategies for building national character must be implemented systematically and sustainably through concrete role models in the school environment. This discussion is expected to unravel the tangled threads of character education issues in the digital era and identify the most effective formulation of the teacher's role. The synergy between teachers' digital competence and a humanistic pedagogical approach is believed to be able to become the last line of defense to save the character of the nation's next generation from the negative impacts of technological disruption.

2. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a library research method focused on in-depth and interpretive review of various scientific literature relevant to the topic. Zed (2014) defines the library research method as a series of activities related to library data collection, reading, recording, and processing research materials without the need for direct fieldwork to collect empirical data. This method was chosen based on the primary objective of this article: to formulate a new conceptual framework regarding teacher strategies in character education, synthesized from various educational theories and previous research findings. The researcher prioritized texts and discourses from various scientific sources as the primary object of study to examine the dynamics of teachers' roles amidst the digitalization of education.

The data collection process was conducted through documentation

techniques, exploring various credible data sources, both printed and digital, through reputable journal indexing databases such as Google Scholar, Sinta, and DOAJ. The data sources used were divided into two main categories: primary sources and secondary sources, to ensure the validity of the arguments developed. Primary sources included authoritative textbooks on character education theory and national and international scientific journal articles published within the last ten years to ensure the accuracy of the information. Meanwhile, secondary sources included government policy documents, opinion articles from trusted media outlets, and other supporting research relevant to educational technology issues. Sugiyono (2019) emphasized the importance of triangulating data sources in qualitative research to test data credibility by examining data from various sources in different ways.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques, which allow researchers to draw valid conclusions from texts while considering the context in which they are used. Krippendorff (2013) explained that content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data within its context. The analysis stage begins with a data reduction process, in which researchers sort, select, and focus on data that is truly relevant to the variables of teacher role and student character. The selected data is then presented in a logical and systematic narrative form for further conclusions or verification. In this stage, researchers synthesize various expert views to find new, adaptive strategic formulations for developing student character in the digital era.

3. RESULT & DISCUSSION

Results

Character education plays a crucial role in addressing the moral crisis currently affecting the younger generation. Through character education, values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, courtesy, and social awareness can be instilled from an early age.

The moral crisis arising from environmental influences, technological developments, and weak supervision and education within the family can be minimized if character education is consistently implemented. Therefore, collaboration between families, schools, and the community is essential for the successful character formation of the younger generation. With strong character education, it is hoped that the younger generation will become individuals with noble morals, responsibility, and readiness to face the challenges of life in the future.

The research also shows that the role of parents, teachers, and the community is crucial in addressing the moral crisis among young people. Parents, as the first educators, are responsible for building a moral foundation through consistent role models and supervision. Teachers also play a role not only as instructors but also as moral capital, guiding children towards good behavior. Meanwhile, the community acts as a supportive environment that must provide a safe space.

Thus, character education is not solely the responsibility of educational institutions but also requires a collective commitment from all elements of society. This effort is expected to create a young generation with strong character, ethics, and the ability to uphold moral values amidst increasingly rapid changes.

Character education also helps students develop self-awareness, emotional control, and respect for differences. With good character, students are expected to be able to establish healthy social relationships, avoid conflict, and play an active role in creating a safe and harmonious environment.

This demonstrates that character education is not only important for individuals but also for social life as a whole. Therefore, character education is an integral part of efforts to develop high-quality and competitive human resources for the future.

Discussion

The dynamics of the findings presented previously point to a crucial

synthesis: the current character crisis in schools is not solely the fault of technology but rather the result of slow pedagogical adaptation in responding to changing times. A thorough interpretation of the data demonstrates that the digitalization of education is a historical inevitability that poses a double-edged sword for students' moral development. On the one hand, technology democratizes access to knowledge, but on the other, it creates a turbulence of values that threatens the integrity of students' character. The phenomenon of empathy and ethical degradation recorded in research findings indicates that schools, as the last moral bastion, are not fully prepared to face the infiltration of a permissive digital culture. This analysis aligns with Selwyn's (2016) critical thinking, which warns that without strong human intervention, educational technology will only become a tool of dehumanization that distances students from the essence of humanity itself.

The shift in the teacher's role from mere conveyor of information to architect of character occupies a central position in this discussion. The fact that search engines and artificial intelligence can provide factual information in seconds forces teachers to relinquish their traditional authority as the sole source of truth in the classroom. Teachers who persist with conventional lecture methods will undoubtedly lose relevance in the eyes of students accustomed to the rapid flow of digital information. Therefore, the urgency of transforming the teacher's role into a moral facilitator is inevitable. Biesta (2020) calls this process subjectification, namely, teachers' efforts to help students become independent and responsible subjects amidst the multitude of digital objects. In this context, teachers must be present not to compete with Google in terms of data breadth, but to impart wisdom that no algorithm can possess. The emotional and spiritual presence of teachers provides an antidote to the lack of meaning that students often experience online.

The greatest psychological challenge teachers face in developing student character is the instant mentality formed by early exposure to technology. The "click and get" culture has eroded students' fighting spirit and perseverance in solving complex problems. Students are accustomed to getting quick answers without deep thought, making tenacity and patience rare. Analysis of this phenomenon refers to The theory of technological determinism states that the tools we use shape the way we think. To counter this trend, teachers need to implement pedagogical strategies that emphasize slow thinking, or slow, in-depth thinking. This strategy can be realized through project-based assignments that require collaboration, in-depth research, and self-reflection that cannot be accomplished simply by copying answers from the internet. Mulyasa (2022) emphasized that educators must be able to create a learning ecosystem that challenges students to step outside their digital comfort zones and experience firsthand the struggles of pursuing knowledge.

Furthermore, discussions on digital ethics reveal that technological literacy alone is insufficient to prevent deviant behavior online. Many students are highly skilled at editing videos or hacking program code but fail to demonstrate good manners when commenting on social media. This disparity between technical competence and ethical maturity indicates a gap in character development in cyberspace. Schools have tended to separate real life from virtual life, whereas for Generation Z, the two worlds are a unified reality. The solution offered in this discourse is the integration of character education into every student's digital activities, or digital citizenship education. Ribble (2015) has long advocated the importance of teaching the nine elements of digital citizenship, including ethics, law, and digital security. Teachers have a moral responsibility to guide students in navigating the information jungle by equipping them with a conscience compass to help them sort out useful content and discard harmful information.

Teacher role models are also a significant determinant of the success of character education in the digital age. Students are keen observers who not only listen to what teachers say but also observe what they do on social media. If a teacher forbids students from using devices during class but is busy responding to messages on their own device, their moral authority will be instantly undermined. Consistency between words and actions, or integrity, is key to student trust. Wibowo (2021) emphasizes that authentic role models are the most effective method of character education because good values are internalized through behavioral imitation. Teachers must model wise technology use by demonstrating polite communication, sharing inspiring content, and respecting the privacy of others in digital public spaces. Without concrete role models, all advice about the dangers of technology will be nothing more than empty slogans that leave no impression on students.

The final synthesis of this discussion culminates in the concept of humanizing digital education, where technology is positioned as a servant and humans as its masters. Teachers act as gatekeepers, ensuring that digital interactions in schools remain grounded in noble human values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and human interaction is the ideal model for future education. In this model, technology is used to expand the reach of learning, while teachers are present to deepen the meaning of that learning. This harmonious synergy between digital competence and teachers' pedagogical wisdom will be the strongest bulwark in protecting the character of the nation's next generation from the threat of moral degradation amidst the unstoppable onslaught of digitalization.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the in-depth analysis and discussion presented, a fundamental conclusion can be drawn: the presence of digital technology in the education ecosystem is not a threat to be feared, but rather a challenge that must be wisely managed through a revitalization of the teacher's role. The digitalization of education has been proven to bring logical consequences, namely a paradigm shift from knowledge-based teaching to value-based learning, which requires the presence of teachers as authentic role models. This conclusion emphasizes that no matter how sophisticated an artificial intelligence algorithm is developed, it will never possess the capacity for empathy and moral intuition possessed by a human educator. Therefore, the success of character education in this era of disruption is not determined by the luxury of devices a school has, but by the quality of humanistic interactions teachers foster to touch the hearts and minds of students amidst the din of digital information.

The theoretical implications of this conclusion demand a reorientation in the development of pedagogical science, moving away from being technocentric or solely focused on tools, but toward a hybrid approach that integrates digital literacy with local wisdom. Practically, these consequences require teachers to stop positioning technology as an enemy or a substitute, but rather to embrace it as a strategic partner in expanding the reach of character education. Teachers must be able to transform into moral curators, guiding students through the ethical ambiguities of cyberspace, so that technology can function as a character enhancer, not a civilization destroyer. Ultimately, the harmonious synergy between digital competence and teachers' moral integrity is the absolute key to producing a golden generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually and socially graceful.

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