

Character Building in Early Childhood: Insights from the Living Values Education Program (LVEP)

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Abstract

Character education is crucial, especially in Indonesia, where societal values, norms, and morals are increasingly deviating. Many individuals involved in these deviations are from the younger generation, particularly school-aged children. This research adopts a qualitative approach, with the principal and three teachers from each class serving as the primary data sources. Data collection methods include observation and interviews using instruments such as observation guidelines and interview guidelines. Data analysis which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings of the study reveal significant changes in children's character development post-evaluation. Improvements were observed in several areas: emotional regulation (children are better able to manage their emotions), social skills (increased ability to share and cooperate), independence (greater confidence in decision-making), discipline (more rule-abiding and organized), moral development (enhanced understanding of right and wrong), and motor skills (better physical coordination). These changes varied depending on the methods employed and the individual characteristics of each child.



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INTRODUCTION

Education is a process to acquire knowledge and knowledge that was previously unknown through learning activities. True learning does not only focus on academic activities, but also the development of children's character. School is a place to achieve educational goals that help students get closer to positive behavior values. Learning that aims to develop and strengthen the character that students have is known as character education. Character education in early childhood is an effort to instill commendable behavior in children, both behavior in worship, behavior as a good citizen, behavior interacting with others and their environment, and commendable behavior that is useful for the success of their lives (Badriah et al., 2019)

Ki Hadjar Dewantara stated that education is an effort to cultivate children's ethics (character), mind (intellect), and body. That is, in order to advance the perfection of life, namely the life and livelihood of children in harmony with nature and society. The three should not be separated so that the child grows perfectly. Ki Hajar Dewantara's statement indicates that education is the development and growth of all aspects in humans, physical and spiritual, born and mental with the aim of realizing a perfect human being. (Akbar, 2020). The purpose of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) according to Law number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system states that early childhood education is a coaching effort aimed at children from birth to the age of six years which is carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to help physical and spiritual growth and development so that children have readiness to enter further education (Antara, 2019). Furthermore, according to Permendikbud number 37 of 2014, it is explained that early childhood education is education aimed at children to stimulate and maximize aspects of their development. There are 6 developmental aspects that must be developed by Early Childhood Education (PAUD) teachers. The six aspects are aspects of the development of religious and moral values, cognition, social emotional, physical language, motor, and art (Fauziddin & Mufarizuddin, 2018).

Character education is essential, namely to develop moral abilities, for early childhood who are still relatively lacking in moral ability is to develop moral intelligence, moral intelligence is the ability to understand right and wrong, in other words have strong ethical beliefs and act based on these beliefs so that people behave righteously and respectfully. Moral intelligence includes the main characters, such as the ability to empathize, accept and respect differences, fight for justice, the ability to control oneself, show affection and respect for others. The recent strengthening of the term character education is an interesting phenomenon to be studied and analyzed both from a political and bureaucratic perspective and from an academic perspective (Yaumi, 2016). Lickona added good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. Character education is a type of education that a hope eventually is to create learners who have moral integrity that capable to be reflected in daily life, both interacting with God, human beings (Munawwarah & Astuti, 2019). Some character issues that often arise in early childhood include ; (1) difficulty managing Emotions: Children often get angry or frustrated when they encounter situations that are not to their liking; (2) lack of independence where the child is unable to complete simple tasks without adult help; (3) difficulty sharing, where the child does not yet understand the concept of sharing or cooperating with peers; (4) difficulty obeying rules; (5) the child may not yet understand the feelings of others, resulting in a lack of caring behavior; (6) lack of patience where the children get bored quickly or want instant results in their activities. These problems are common and can be overcome with appropriate guidance and approach.

The early childhood years are crucial for character development, as this is the period when foundational values and behaviors are formed. Research indicates that character education during this stage not only fosters moral development but also enhances social-emotional skills, laying the groundwork for future success in school and life (Berk, 2018). As children navigate their social environments, the lessons they learn about empathy, respect, and responsibility play a significant role in shaping their interactions with peers and adults. Therefore, implementing effective character education programs is essential for nurturing well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to society. The Living Values Education Program (LVEP) offers a comprehensive framework for character building in early childhood education. By focusing on core values such as respect, responsibility, and caring, LVEP encourages educators to create engaging and meaningful learning experiences that resonate with young children. The program's emphasis on experiential learning allows children to internalize these values through active participation and reflection (Iftitah, N. R, 2020). Furthermore, the holistic approach of LVEP, which involves collaboration between educators, parents, and the

community, reinforces the importance of a supportive environment in fostering character development. This alignment among various stakeholders is critical for achieving lasting outcomes in children's moral and ethical growth.

Living Values Education (LVEP) is a comprehensive educational values program. This innovative global venture offers training, practical methodologies and a wide range of value activity experiences for educators, facilitators, parents and caregivers to help them provide opportunities for children and young people to explore and develop universal and intrapersonal values related to social and emotional skills. Educators are required to reflect on their own values and create a value-based atmosphere. The Living Values Education Program (LVEP) has a wide range of values applied, including peace, respect, love, cooperation, happiness, honesty, humility, responsibility, simplicity, tolerance of freedom and unity (Apriani & Sari, 2020).

Several studies have examined the implementation of Living Values Education (LVE) in character development programs. For example, Siti Nurhayati's (2020) research explored the application of LVE in elementary schools, focusing on how the program influenced character development in students from grades 1-3 in urban settings. Using a qualitative approach, the study collected data through observations and interviews with teachers and principals. The findings indicated that LVE positively contributed to the development of core values such as respect, responsibility, and empathy. However, the success of the program was largely dependent on teacher support, understanding, and parental involvement. In contrast, Agus Pranata's (2021) study investigated the effectiveness of the LVE program in kindergartens using a quantitative experimental method. This research involved children aged 4-5 years from two groups, control and experimental, with data gathered using character assessment questionnaires. The study found that the LVE program significantly improved moral values such as honesty and cooperation in the experimental group. However, challenges related to program duration and parental involvement were highlighted as key obstacles to its effectiveness.

The present research differs from these previous studies in several key aspects. While Nurhayati's research focused on elementary school students and Pranata's study looked at kindergarten children, this study will concentrate specifically on early childhood education (PAUD) for children aged 4-6 years, a population that has not been explored in depth. Methodologically, this study will employ a mixed-method approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. This stands in contrast to Nurhayati's qualitative-only research and Pranata's purely quantitative approach. In addition, this study will place a greater emphasis on examining the collaborative role of parents and teachers in implementing the LVE program, aiming to explore how such collaboration can maximize the program's effectiveness. Both Nurhayati and Pranata acknowledged the importance of parental involvement, but this study will delve deeper into the dynamics between parental and teacher involvement in character education.

At TKIT Baitun Nada, the implementation of the Living Values Education Program (LVEP) follows a structured process aimed at fostering children's reflection, imagination, and creativity. The stages begin with a reflection session, where children are encouraged to contemplate the values being taught. This reflective process is essential in helping children internalize and understand the importance of these values in their daily lives. After reflection, children are guided to use their imagination to explore how these values can be applied in different situations, encouraging them to think beyond their immediate experiences. Following this, children share their personal experiences, which fosters communication skills and helps them relate the values to real-life contexts. Finally, children are engaged in creative activities, producing works that reflect the values they have learned. This step stimulates their creativity and deepens their understanding of the concepts. Through this holistic and interactive approach, LVEP at TKIT Baitun Nada motivates children to think about themselves, others, and values in a meaningful way, ensuring that the values are both understood and applied in their everyday interactions.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of phenomena from the participants' perspectives. The data collected is descriptive and contextual, focusing on subjective experiences (Ardianto, 2010). The data collection techniques used in this study include observation and interviews. The instruments for data collection consist of observation guidelines and interview protocols.

To facilitate the analysis of findings in the field, an interactive model is utilized (Miles & Huberman in Sugiyono, 2012). This model involves three key stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). In addition to the qualitative methods employed, the research emphasizes the importance of establishing trustworthiness and credibility in the data collected. To achieve this, triangulation is utilized by incorporating multiple sources of data and perspectives from different participants. This approach not only enriches the findings but also enhances the validity of the study. Furthermore, member checking is conducted, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the interpretations derived from their interviews, thus ensuring that their voices are authentically represented in the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A. LVEP Implementation in Shaping Early Childhood Character Development at TKIT Baitun Nada

1. Role of Educators in Character Development

The role of educators is crucial in shaping children's character through the Living Values Education Program (LVEP). Teachers are responsible for coming up with creative ideas and implementing daily character education activities. This requires consistent communication between the school and parents. Indicators of Achievement: (1) Teachers are able to provide daily character-building activities aligned with the school's values; (2) regular communication and collaboration with parents ensure continuity of character education at home.

Based on the interview "there was an incident on that day when the child calmed his friend to cry then we also gave the child a chance when he wanted to go to the toilet if his friend accompanied his friend that way every day there was an incident so we immediately did practice and did not do much theory because there were children who only listened but did not do it then when playing also how the child was given the choice of the child who played outside and inside because in this LVEP Teachers are more challenged to ask how the child feels today, what is his favorite color, whether there are problems at home, or anything that can interfere with the child's focus on learning then every day there are activities that educate children's character such as planting vegetables together, then sharing events at family gathering and outbound activities and also infaq activities which are held every Friday. Every day we have to monitor how the child's character will be as a result of our weekly observations, we make a checklist for us to show to parents. Anyway, with this LVEP activity, we are trying to establish good communication between children, teachers, and parents (Interview July 26, 2024).

2. Impact on Children's Understanding of Life Values

The LVEP has helped children better understand life values, starting at an early age, which is crucial in preventing delinquency. This program aims to develop children's principles and positive personalities. LVEP also seeks to reduce bullying incidents in and outside of school by instilling empathy and mutual respect in students. Indicators of Achievement there are; (1) children demonstrate increased empathy and cooperation with peers; (2) teachers and parents report fewer incidents of bullying or other negative behaviors; (3) children begin to practice life values, such as helping peers and taking responsibility for their actions.

3. Early Childhood as the Optimal Age for Character Foundation

The early years are identified as the best time to lay the foundation of life values, according to teachers and educators at TKIT Baitun Nada. The LVEP program incorporates character education in all areas of child development, including religious, moral, language, physical, cognitive, and artistic growth. Indicators of Achievement including; (1) children show development across multiple aspects of life values (e.g., showing respect, sharing with peers, practicing religious routines); (2) the integration of character education in various activities such as the tahfiz program, infaq, and school routines like greetings and discipline. Based on the interview:

"Our school does prioritize character education because it is in accordance with the school's vision and mission, namely the realization of a healthy, intelligent and noble early childhood, in my opinion as a school principal, with the existence of this LVEP program, it makes it easier for teachers

to teach and guide children how to remain a good character in an era that has become increasingly sophisticated, many cases of delinquency that we see now can damage the morals and morals of our children so that teachers are demanded every day How to create creativity or activities that make children get character education every day starting from entering school to leaving school (Interview July 25, 2024)”.

4. Teaching Methods for Delivering Life Values

The methods used by teachers include direct instruction, modeling, and creating a positive environment that fosters character development. The program also encourages cooperation between teachers and parents, ensuring consistency in character education both at school and at home. Indicators of Achievement including: (1) children exhibit good behavior modeled by teachers, such as responding to greetings, helping peers, and respecting rules; and (2) positive feedback from parents, reflecting that children apply the values learned at school in their home life.

5. Recognition and Motivation for Children's Character Achievements

As part of the strategy to motivate children, teachers give rewards and recognition for positive behaviors. For example, children who demonstrate good character are awarded with brooches or simple gifts, which serve as symbols of achievement and motivate them to continue positive behaviors. Teachers observe and record consistent positive behavior through weekly character checklists. Then, children who receive recognition for their achievements show increased enthusiasm and continue to practice good behavior. Also, parental involvement in the recognition process strengthens the impact of character education at school and at home.

Discussion

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Living Values Education Program (LVEP) in early childhood character building. The results show a significant positive impact on several aspects of children's character development, such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and others. Below is a discussion of the key findings, their interpretation, rationale, and comparison with related literature (Apriani & Sari, 2020).

1. Honesty and Responsibility

The findings indicate a marked improvement in honesty and responsibility among children participating in the LVEP. These values are emphasized through activities that actively engage children in situations where honesty and responsibility are directly applied. The program's hands-on approach allows children to practice these values in real-life scenarios, reinforcing the importance of honesty and responsibility. Pranata (2021) similarly found that value-based education significantly improves honesty and responsibility in young children. Furthermore, Choiriyah (2020) highlights that teaching these values through participatory activities aligns with constructivist learning theory, where children learn best through direct experiences (Veryawan et al., 2023).

2. Cooperation and Empathy

Improvements in cooperation and empathy were notable in the study, with children demonstrating better abilities to collaborate with peers and show concern for others' emotions. LVEP incorporates group activities and discussions focused on understanding and valuing others' feelings, providing children with the skills needed to develop empathy and teamwork. Nufus (2019) supports these findings by showing that character education programs that focus on social values improve children's social skills. Additionally, Jurlissani (2021) confirms that LVEP facilitates pro-social behavior through positive feedback and structured interactions.

3. Environmentalism and Creativity

The study found that LVEP contributes to children's awareness of environmental issues and enhances their creativity. Children actively participated in environmental conservation activities and creative projects, such as recycling and tree planting. Integrating environmental and creative tasks into the curriculum encourages children to explore imaginative solutions while developing a sense of environmental responsibility. Therefore, Komalasari et al. (2014) found that creative

activities involving environmental conservation promote critical thinking and creativity. Stern et al. (1999) also emphasized that engaging in environmental-based activities helps children connect with nature and enhance their creativity.

4. Challenges and Limitations

Despite the positive impacts, the study also identified some challenges and limitations in the implementation of LVEP. The varying level of parental involvement was a significant challenge, with some parents struggling to apply LVEP principles at home. Parental involvement is crucial for the success of character education programs. Without consistency at home, children's learning and application of values may be limited. Another research by Saktiyani (2022) asserts that informed and engaged parental participation is key to the successful implementation of character education. In addition, teacher inconsistencies in implementing LVEP can lead to variations in children's character development outcomes, suggesting a need for more uniform teacher training (Suryandari et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals several key findings regarding the implementation of the Living Values Education Program (LVEP) at TKIT Baitun Nada, specifically in the formation of a character-based curriculum introduced in 2013. First, the implementation of LVEP focuses on the development of religious and moral, social-emotional, and linguistic values in early childhood education. Second, the supporting factors for successful LVEP implementation include the presence of a master trainer, engaging learning methods that align with LVEP principles, a flexible curriculum structure, and the cooperation of children who are responsive to the program's objectives. However, several challenges hinder the effectiveness of LVEP. These challenges include inconsistent application of LVEP principles at home due to family habits, limited parental awareness and understanding of the program, the lengthy time required to effectively teach LVEP, and varying learning speeds among students, with some grasping concepts quickly while others need more time. Furthermore, the success of the LVEP underscores the importance of continuous training and support for educators. Regular workshops and professional development opportunities for teachers can enhance their understanding and implementation of the program's principles. Engaging parents through informational sessions can also foster a collaborative environment, ensuring that the values taught at school are reinforced at home. By strengthening these connections, the LVEP can more effectively cultivate character development in children, preparing them for a more compassionate and responsible future.

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