

THE CHARACTER OF EDUCATION IN MERDEKA BELAJAR KAMPUS MERDEKA LEARNING AT HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The primary purpose of education is to promote the well-being of students, and genuine happiness can only be attained through Education with Affection. An essential component in Education with Love is imparting Character Education, which significantly influences the ethical and academic development of students. Emphasizing Character Education has been acknowledged as "four valuable virtues in life" by a higher power: 1. Rationality, 2. Faith, 3. Conscience, and 4. Exemplary Moral Conduct. This relates to the skills expected from "Students as Catalysts for Change in the Modern Era," reflecting the requirements for student abilities in this century. Based on studies conducted in the UNSAP environment and surrounding universities, it is evident that certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the implementation of character education in MBKM learning. While lecturers have been practicing MBKM learning, they are yet to fully incorporate the requirements of graduate profiles as catalysts for change in the 21st century. The study identifies three essential prerequisites - foundational literacies, competencies, and character qualities - which ideally should be integrated into both campus-based and off-campus programs. A comprehensive MBKM learning model aligned with Course Learning Outcomes or further refined based on character education-focused outcomes is expected to produce graduates who embody superiority, nobility, religious grounding, global awareness, and moral integrity.

Keywords: Character Education, Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM), Higher Education, Education with Affection.

INTRODUCTION

Character education plays a crucial role in the 21st century as an individual's character is considered the ultimate measure of a nation's success. The progress and excellence of a country are greatly influenced by the character of its people. Additionally, technological advancements have contributed to global education through various media such as cell phones, laptops, and emails, enabling learning without limitations on time or place (Munir, 2017: 69).

In the evolving conditions of social, national, and state development which are increasingly complex and unpredictable. At every moment experiences rapid and chaotic changes (chaos theory) as a consequence and demand for the development of information technology which should be followed by an acceleration in character education within the framework of realizing excellent human resources (excellent, intelligent, noble-minded, and virtuous).

The recent issue related to national character building has shown the following phenomena:



Source: Minister of National Development Planning in 2019.

Implementing Character Education within the context of Free Learning and Campus Freedom presents the challenge of fully optimizing character education integration into learning. This is illustrated by factors such as accommodating diverse student inputs (talents and interests), meeting demands for computational skills, creative thinking, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, empathy; and considering instrumental inputs like educators' capacity and capability, teaching methods, and media used for evaluation. It also involves adapting learning resources to create a conducive physical and social environment that meets students' demands in developing 21st-century foundational literacy competencies alongside their character qualities. Ultimately encompassing various aspects including appearance, mindset, behavior, nature, personality, and values or social/emotional skillsets (Center for Curriculum Redesign:2015:4).

The concept of Character comprises two interconnected elements: performance character and moral character. According to Davidson M, Lickona T, and Dan Khmelkov (2008) in "Smart & Good Schools Handbook of Moral & Character Education", these dimensions encompass Performance Character Indicators that describe a focus on mastering one's potential for excellence in all areas of activity including Diligence, Perseverance, A strong work ethic, and positive attitude. Moral Character Indicators describe ethical interpersonal relationship orientations involving characteristics such as Integrity Justice Caring, respect, and Cooperation.

Moral character is demonstrated by setting goals that consider the interests of others and uphold values such as honesty, fairness, and care. It's important to achieve excellence without compromising moral principles. Integrating this ethical framework with technological advancements is vital for educators to expand their teaching methods beyond traditional approaches and utilize tools to enhance widespread learning. In today's context, technology plays a crucial role and must be mastered by educators and students alike as a prerequisite for effective 21st-century learning.

Problem Formulation

Based on the previous background, an imbalance exists between what should be (sollen) and what is (das sein), reflecting a disparity between expectations and reality. The aim of character education in MBKM at higher education institutions is to promote high-quality learning with the goal of producing exceptional graduates. However, this objective has not been met. Therefore, we pose the following problem formulation: "How does incorporating character education into MBKM learning at Higher Education Institutions contribute to developing outstanding graduates?"

Objectives

The study aims to explore the integration of character education into MBKM learning at Higher Education Institutions, to produce outstanding graduates.

Research Benefits

The research objectives offer multiple benefits. For users, they can guide policy-making decisions by stakeholders and serve as a foundation for future researchers. Higher Education Institutions can use them to assess the effectiveness of implemented programs, better control and enhance strategic MBKM programs in the future. The Ministry of National Education can utilize them to revitalize effective MBKM programs based on campus autonomy characteristics, while other relevant agencies/institutions can benefit from using them as benchmarking material for improved programs.

Theoretical Foundation

The Essence of Character Education

They have identified eight different approaches to character education based on research in psychology, philosophy, and educational literature related to values. Additionally, after consulting with educators and considering practical aspects of the field, these approaches were condensed into five typologies: the values instillation approach (also known as the inculcation approach), cognitive moral development approach, values analysis approach, values clarification approach, and the action learning approach. In this study, the author has chosen to focus on the first and fifth approaches - specifically emphasizing value instillation (inculcation) and action learning methods

Theory Driscoll's Learning theories

Driscoll delves deeper into learning theory and its impact on teaching decisions regarding character education. Behaviorism, rooted in Skinner's reinforcement theory, prioritizes observable behavior over internal processes during learning (Driscoll, M. P. (2005). While this approach may have limitations for higher-level skills, it can still be valuable for basic knowledge or skills. In contrast, cognitivism introduces fresh perspectives by examining how learners perceive, process, and manage information through mental models and memory storage processes to tackle complex tasks efficiently.

Constructivism

Going beyond cognitivism, experiential learning emphasizes student involvement in meaningful experiences. Constructivists argue that learners create their own interpretations of the information world within their own contexts. Instruction provides

students with ways to gather knowledge rather than simply teaching facts, and learning occurs most effectively when students engage in authentic tasks related to meaningful contexts - essentially learning by doing. Therefore, the ultimate measure of learning is the ability for students to use knowledge to facilitate thinking in real life – an approach suitable for the uncertain future of the 21st century where learners must solve problems and attain additional skills for effective solutions.

Social Psychology

Examining teaching and education from a social psychological perspective involves analyzing the influence of social class structures on the learning process. Scholars like Robert Slavin propose that cooperative learning is more effective and advantageous than competitive or individualistic approaches. Slavin has developed methods to encourage small group cooperation, student-directed instruction, and recognition based on collective achievement. In today's digital age, students bring diverse skills acquired from technology-based social networks into classrooms. It is crucial to apply specialized collaborative skills discussed in social psychology perspectives to effectively meet these learners' needs. Depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary to utilize behaviorist techniques or cognitive and constructive strategies tailored for different types of learning tasks encountered by students

Cybernetic Learning

Cybernetic theory of learning, a relatively recent addition to the existing theories like behaviorist, constructivist, humanistic and cognitive learning theories, posits that learning is about information processing. This perspective emphasizes the importance of the information system being processed in determining how knowledge is gained. Unlike traditional cognitive learning theory which focuses on studying informational systems, cybernetic theory highlights participants' manipulation and monitoring of information along with strategy development (Joice et al., 2015). The approach recognizes that there isn't a single ideal way for every situation; rather it allows participants to use different approaches based on their individual needs (Yunus, 2018). According to Sani's book (2013), in 21st century learning, teachers must plan, prepare, and provide important stimuli to incorporate symbolism, and Hamid's interpretation of Cybernetic Learning Theory, "Information System" takes precedence over instructional methods and determines personalized learning strategies tailored according to each learner's trusted sources (Hamid, A. (2009). Therefore, applying Cybernetic Theory involves setting educational objectives, selecting relevant teaching material, integrating it into instruction materials through suitable strategies focusing on its instructional pattern followed by presenting content leading students towards effective knowledge retention

Characteristic of Millennial and Generation Alpha Students in MBKM

This technology tool/media should prioritize not only cognitive thinking skills, but also impart content/messages regarding attitudes, behavior, personality, problem-solving abilities, collaboration, respect for others, creativity, innovation, critical thinking and decision-making willingness. It should promote ethics, laws and comprehensive character education.

The 21st Century Partnership learning framework emphasizes the characteristics of Generation Alpha, born between 2011 and 2025 (Fadhilurrahman et al., 2020:180),

highlighting the significance of education in this era. It prioritizes achieving optimal educational outcomes with a focus on skills such as learning and innovation, information media and technology literacy, as well as life and career skills. Skill development and technological proficiency define the essence of the 21st century—an essential trait for Generation Alpha who belong to a digitally adept generation. However, there may be negative social implications stemming from individualistic tendencies prompted by these factors.

The essence of the Independent Learning and Campus Empowerment involves bridging academic theory with real-world applications to achieve alignment and compatibility between the two, as detailed in the MBKM Program's objectives. The "right to study three semesters outside of the study program" policy aims to enhance graduates' competencies in both soft skills and hard skills, better preparing them for current needs. It seeks to equip graduates as future leaders who excel not only professionally but also personally for their nation. Experiential learning programs with flexible pathways are designed to facilitate students in developing their potential according to their passions and talents.

The MBKM Program offers significant benefits by preparing students to address rapid social, cultural, professional, and technological changes. It aims to align student competence with current needs by connecting them not only with the industrial and professional world but also with an ever-evolving future. Higher education institutions must create innovative learning processes that enable students to achieve relevant learning outcomes covering attitudes, knowledge, and skills in order to meet these demands. The Free Campus Independent Learning Policy is designed to fulfill these requirements by providing self-governing and adaptable higher education learning that promotes a culture of unconstrained innovation tailored to student needs. Key program features include facilitating the establishment of new study programs; modifying university accreditation systems; simplifying the process for state universities to become legal entities; as well as allowing students three semesters for independent study outside their main program - one dedicated semester for taking courses beyond their curriculum studies while two focus on off-campus or non-university educational experiences. This policy empowers students to choose subjects they wish pursue thus offering flexibility in delving deeper into selected majors enhancing various soft skill competencies alongside hard skill knowledge during their academic journey. This initiative emphasizes forward-thinking preparation for upcoming career paths amidst evolving circumstances.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology design

The analysis applies the research and development methodology, as suggested by Sukmadinata (2009), indicating that R&D is seen as a method to enhance practices in the field. Furthermore, it states that research and development generate products that can enhance existing ones (Sujadi, 2003: 164 in Ristekdikti, 2017). The focus of this study is on a learning model based on character-driven MBKM education. To assess the effectiveness of this study, a quantitative research approach is employed (Sugiyono, 2016).

The main aim of this research is to: 1) explore and explain how character education can enhance students' abilities in implementing MBKM; 2) develop a conceptual framework for character-centered MBKM learning relevant to the demands of the 21st century; 3) Compare the effectiveness of improving student competencies through character education instruction with traditional approaches, and assess the impact of MBKM learning on student competencies as catalysts for change in modern times.

This study aims to produce a character education model for MBKM learning that is adaptable to the present and future. The product design and production involve preliminary studies, needs analysis, literature reviews, and previous research theories. Additionally, the designed product undergoes testing (validation) by experts in character education, learning modeling, and MBKM teaching (success story). Feasibility achievements are then obtained from these expert judgments to allow limited model trials before proceeding with testing on experimental classes and different test classes to measure effectiveness.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Based on the analysis of how MBKM learning is implemented, it is apparent that there are still suboptimal connections and alignment between the current state (das sein) and the desired state (das sollen) in academia regarding professional practice. There persists an assumption that academic institutions are isolated from real-world society; however, fundamentally, MBKM learning should be flexible in terms of knowledge, attitude, and skills – especially in relation to Course Learning Outcomes which ideally should closely align with broader Learning Outcomes or further develop them.

In the educational process, learning results should align closely with predetermined outcomes. Educators are expected to demonstrate their expertise in adapting students' academic skills to real-world situations that meet societal requirements, preparing graduates for the workforce or field.

To achieve the Learning Outcomes of a course aligned with its program learning outcomes, educators must enhance their skills and qualities. This will enable them to cultivate exceptional, creative, ethical, and highly competitive graduates who are well-prepared to thrive in our increasingly complex society. An ideal lecturer should guide students for progression, excellent performance, integrity and ethical conduct. The competency and capability of lecturers can be measured through their expertise in personal attributes, teaching methods, professional standards, and social involvement.

The implementation of MBKM learning still has shortcomings in achieving meaningful learning outcomes for related courses and program learning outcomes. For example, in mathematics education, a student has raised questions about the connection between algorithms, arithmetic, social algebra topics, and the development of entrepreneurship for aspiring entrepreneurs. Similarly, in English departments, there are disparities between academic grades obtained from conversation courses and students' practical communicative language skills required by the industry

Based on the study, there are several significant phonemes that result from integrating character education in MBKM learning at universities. Character education plays a crucial role in preparing tertiary-level graduates to be exceptional,

intelligent, skilled, global-minded and morally upright individuals. This is emphasized by Lickona (1992: 22), who states that "Just as character is the ultimate measure of an individual, so it also is the ultimate measure of a nation." According to Davidson M., Lickona T., and Khmelkov V.'s work *Smart & Good Schools...* in *Handbook of Moral and Character Education* (2008: 373), Performance Character indicators describe mastery orientation for achieving excellence within activities through Diligence, Perseverance, Strong work ethic, A positive attitude, Ingenuity, and Self-discipline. Indicators for Moral Character encompass ethically sound interpersonal relationships with characteristics such as Integrity (integrity), Justice (justice), Caring (caring), Respect (respecting) dan Cooperation (cooperation).

The essence of MBKM learning, which is based on a more extensive and comprehensive character education, is expected to provide a foundation/reference that can significantly influence all components of learning. This includes aspects like raw input, instrumental input, environmental input, as well as the exploration, elaboration, and confirmation processes in MBKM learning. These will ultimately lead to excellent graduate quality outputs and outcomes; graduates who are high-quality agents of change in the 21st century. This perspective aligns with The World Economic Forum's 2017 findings: foundational literacies – how students apply core skills to everyday tasks (literacy, numeracy), scientific literacy, financial literacy; cultural/civic literacy; competencies – how students approach complex challenges including critical thinking creativity communication collaboration; character qualities - curiosity initiative persistence adaptability leadership social/cultural awareness.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of character education in MBKM learning at Higher Education Institutions has not been optimal. There is a need to develop ethical and critical thinking, academic achievement, and the nurturing of characters for students through optimizing Campus Culture, updating Curriculum with linkages and matches, and strengthening multi-method teaching methods that are suitable for millennial as well as generation alpha student demands. This aims to create a 21st-century student profile that emphasizes foundational literacy, competencies, computational creativity, collaboration, and communication skills alongside compassion.

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