



Integrating a Character-Based Curriculum to Build Children's Resilience Against Violence and Negative Digital Impacts

Yossi Srianita¹, Azi Matur Rahmi¹, Gina Asri Ruwaida¹, Dwiyani Anggraeni¹

¹Universitas Pelita Bangsa, Indonesia

 yossi@pelitabangsa.ac.id *

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Abstract

The development of digital technology presents both opportunities and challenges for early childhood. Increased use of devices without adequate guidance has the potential to lead to digital addiction, exposure to age-inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and impaired social-emotional development. This study aims to analyze the application of character education and patterns of digital media use in early childhood, formulate a curriculum integration model based on character education and healthy digital habits, and examine its implementation in building children's resilience against the negative impacts of digital media. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach with observation, interview, and documentation techniques. Informants consisted of early childhood education teachers, parents, and children aged 4–6 years in Cikedokan Village, Bekasi Regency. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions using triangulation of sources and techniques. The results show that character education has been implemented in learning, but has not been systematically integrated with digital literacy. Children exhibited quite high intensity of device use with limited guidance. The developed integration model combines the values of discipline, responsibility, and empathy through screen time management, media use guidance, and healthy digital behavior habits. Implementation of the model contributed to improving children's ability to control device use and adapt to digital risks. These findings suggest that integrating character education and digital literacy into the early childhood education curriculum can strengthen children's resilience in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

The digital era presents both opportunities and challenges for young children. On the one hand, digital technology can be utilized as an interactive learning medium and a source of knowledge exploration. This also carries a high risk of children being exposed to negative impacts such as device addiction, reduced social interaction, exposure to inappropriate content, and the risk of violence, both in the real world and online. (Karimah & Sholeha, 2022).

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The curriculum is a central part of instilling character values from an early age. The curriculum is all learning experiences planned and directed by the school to achieve educational goals (Azis, 2024). Meanwhile, according to another opinion, the curriculum is a series of learning experiences planned by the school to help students acquire the desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Yusup et al., 2023). The curriculum can be developed based on needs and developments over time. It is said that the Early Childhood Education curriculum must be designed based on the stages of child development, meaning that the content, methods, and learning experiences must be tailored to the needs, interests, and abilities of children according to their age (Bredekamp, S., & Copple, 1997). The Early Childhood Education (PAUD) curriculum in Indonesia was developed to support holistic child development, covering aspects of religious and moral values, physical motor skills, cognitive, language, social emotional and art. (Nugraha, A., & Sujiono, 2008) The Holistic Integrative Curriculum (HI) is an Early Childhood Education (PAUD) curriculum that emphasizes holistic and integrated child development, covering aspects of health, nutrition, education, care, and child protection. Through a holistic approach, the curriculum focuses on developmental aspects that must be stimulated, and also integrates character education, behavior formation and digital literacy according to the needs of the 21st century.

Strengthening character education through the PAUD curriculum is done by integrating values such as discipline, responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and honesty in learning activities. (Lestari, 2020). Character education is an effort that is deliberately designed to improve the character of students. (Syarbini, 2019). Character education is one of the soft skills, namely the process of guiding students to become whole human beings with character in the dimensions of heart, mind, body and feeling and intention (Ruwaida et al., 2025). Character education must be based on the principle that moral values are not only understood, but also felt and practiced in everyday life.

According to Lickona, character education includes conscious efforts to help someone understand, feel, and practice good values in everyday life. The main principles include: a) holistic: character education includes cognitive (knowledge of values), affective (appreciation of values), and psychomotor (real actions) aspects. b) role model: teachers, parents, and the environment become the main models in instilling character values. c) Habituation - character values need to be instilled consistently through daily activities, not just theory. d) Integration: character education does not stand alone, but is integrated into the curriculum, learning, and children's activities. e) contextual: values are taught according to real situations faced by children, including the challenges of the digital era. f) participatory: involving all parties, including schools, families, and communities in the character education process. g) resilience-oriented - character education aims to form children who are resilient, able to face pressure, and adapt to social and technological change. (Lickona, 1991).

Technological advancements have transformed various aspects of life, including education. Even early childhood education has utilized technology as a learning resource. This is all part of adapting to changing times. However, it's important to note that in the digital era, young children are vulnerable to risks such as exposure to violent content, *cyberbullying*, gadget addiction, so educators need to build resilience in early childhood so that children are able to adapt positively.

Resilience in early childhood is the ability to adapt positively when faced with pressure, threats, or negative experiences, both in the real world and the digital world. According to Masten, resilience is *ordinary magic* namely the innate capacity possessed by every child to develop healthily even in difficult situations, provided they receive support from a conducive environment. (Masten, 2014). To build

resilience, the role of education is crucial. Character education integrated into the Early Childhood Education curriculum can strengthen the social-emotional aspects (emotional control) and morals (the ability to distinguish between right and wrong). Armstrong (1991) emphasized that every child has natural potential (natural genius) that can develop through appropriate educational stimulation, including in facing the challenges of the digital era. (Armstrong, 1991). Furthermore, the involvement of parents and teachers is very important. Domoff et al (2019) found that parental guidance in the use of gadgets significantly reduces the risk of digital addiction. (Domoff, S. E., 2019) Thus, building children's resilience against violence and the negative impacts of the digital world requires strong character education, healthy digital literacy through collaboration between schools, parents, and the social environment.

The development of digital technology offers significant opportunities for early childhood learning. However, it also presents serious challenges, including exposure to age-inappropriate content, device addiction, and the risk of online violence. These conditions threaten children's social and emotional development and reduce their ability to adapt normally. Therefore, integrating a character-based early childhood education curriculum with healthy digital literacy is crucial for building children's resilience in the face of violence and the negative impacts of the digital world.

Various studies have addressed character education in early childhood and digital literacy separately. However, there is limited research integrating character education and digital literacy into the early childhood education curriculum as a strategy to build children's resilience against the risks of violence and the negative impacts of digital media. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by developing an integrated curriculum model relevant to the needs of the digital era.

Recent research shows that uncontrolled digital media use in early childhood can impact their social, emotional, and behavioral development. The study, conducted by McArthur et al. (2023) McArthur, B. A., Racine, N., McDonald, S., Tough, S., & Madigan, S. (2023). Digital Well-Being in Early Childhood: A Scoping Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(4), 3510. shows that children's digital well-being is influenced by the quality of parental support and the child's ability to develop healthy digital habits. Other research by Third et al. (2024) Third, A., Moody, L., Kaziunas, E., & Richardson, I. (2024). Children's, Parents' and Educators' Understandings of Digital Resilience. *New Media & Society*, 26(4), 2150–2168. emphasized that digital resilience is a crucial skill that needs to be developed from an early age so that children can deal with digital risks adaptively. Furthermore, Kim and Lee (2024) Kim, J., & Lee, H. (2024). Exploring Digital Literacy Education in Early Childhood Education. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Studies*, 44(2), 75–92 found that integrating digital literacy into early childhood learning can improve children's ability to use technology safely and responsibly. These findings demonstrate the importance of integrating character education and digital literacy into the early childhood education curriculum as an effort to build children's resilience in the digital age.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the phenomenon of the application of character education and the use of digital media in early childhood in a natural context. In descriptive research, the data collected is in the form of words, describing what is without providing recognition and is also not in the form of numbers. (Sugiyono, 2017). Qualitative descriptive research is used to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically, by describing them in the

form of words and language in a specific context. (MOLEONG J LEXY, 2009) Creswell (2014) added that this approach seeks to uncover the meaning contained in the experiences of individuals or groups, so that researchers can obtain a comprehensive picture. (Creswell, 2014).

The research was conducted at several early childhood education institutions in Cikedokan Village, Bekasi Regency. The informants consisted of five early childhood education teachers, 10 parents, and 15 children aged 4–6 years old, selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering their involvement in children's digital media use.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to assess digital media usage behavior and the implementation of character education in learning activities. Interviews were conducted with teachers and parents to obtain information on device usage patterns, digital mentoring, and strategies for instilling character values. Documentation was used to supplement the data from the observations and interviews.

Data validity was achieved through source and technical triangulation. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings in the field regarding the integration of early childhood education curriculum based on character education to build children's resilience against violence and negative digital impacts. Viewed from 1) Existing curriculum and digital usage patterns 2) model of curriculum integration based on character education and healthy digital habits, and 3) model in building children's resilience against violence and the negative influence of digital media. With qualitative data collection techniques, namely through observation, interviews, and documentation, the following results were obtained:

1. Existing Curriculum and Digital Usage Patterns

Field findings indicate that the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) curriculum at partner institutions has implemented basic character values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy through social and moral education. However, these values have not been specifically integrated with healthy digital literacy. Furthermore, children aged 4-6 in Cikedokan Village were found to be accustomed to using devices for entertainment and learning without adequate supervision, leaving them vulnerable to the risk of addiction and exposure to age-inappropriate content.

Low digital resilience in early childhood is also evident in the emergence of irritability, excessive crying, and tantrums when device use is stopped. Furthermore, some children show a tendency to imitate aggressive behavior from digital viewing and have difficulty concentrating during classroom learning activities. This situation indicates that the use of digital technology without guidance and reinforcement of character values can impact children's social-emotional development. Therefore, integrating character education with digital literacy in the early childhood education curriculum is an urgent need.

This integration can be implemented through learning activities that instill discipline in gadget use, the ability to choose age-appropriate viewing, and the practice of polite communication in digital spaces. Teachers can develop limited and targeted digital-based educational play activities, accompanied by simple discussions about good and bad behavior in digital media use. Furthermore, parental involvement is a crucial factor in establishing consistent digital parenting at home, such as setting limits on device use, accompanying children when accessing digital media, and providing examples of healthy technology use.

This aligns with Livingstone and Smith's (2014) view that children are the most vulnerable group to digital risks due to limited self-control. The lack of integration between moral values and digital activities results in children being unable to control their emotions when device access is restricted, an indicator of low digital resilience.

2. Character Education-Based Curriculum Integration Model

The integration model formulated in this study carries a holistic-integrative approach, where character education does not stand alone but becomes a filter in children's digital activities. The main strategies include: Discipline through Screen Time: Turning screen time rules into disciplinary value practices. Empathy through Content: Using discussions about digital content to hone children's empathy towards the negative influences of media. Responsibility: Training children to stop using devices according to mutual agreement.

The main strategy in this integration model includes several aspects. First, discipline through regulation. *screen time*, namely transforming device usage time rules into concrete practices that instill the values of discipline and self-control. Children are accustomed to understanding time limits for digital device use through simple agreements with teachers and parents. Second, developing empathy through digital content is done by inviting children to discuss the shows or games they access, so that children are able to recognize good and bad behavior and understand the emotional impact of actions on others. Third, instilling responsibility is done by training children to stop using devices according to agreed-upon rules without coercion or excessive emotional conflict.

This approach is in line with the theory of character education put forward by Thomas Lickona (1991), which states that character education must include three main dimensions, namely *moral knowing* (moral knowledge), *moral feeling* (moral feeling), and *moral action* (moral action). In the digital context, these three aspects are realized through learning that not only provides an understanding of technology use but also forms emotional awareness and real habits in interacting with digital media in a healthy manner. Therefore, integrating character education into the early childhood education curriculum is a relevant preventive strategy for building children's digital resilience from an early age amidst increasingly rapid technological developments.

Theoretically, this approach supports Lickona's (1991) principle that character education must include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (real action) aspects in the context of real situations faced by children, including digital challenges.

3. Building Children's Resilience Against Digital Violence and Impact

The results of the model implementation indicate that integrated character building can increase children's resilience, or "innate capacity," to adapt positively to digital pressures. This is achieved through intensive parental guidance. Research shows that synergy between teachers at school and parents at home is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of a character-based curriculum integration model. Teachers play a role in instilling the values of discipline, empathy, and responsibility through learning activities, while parents reinforce these values through parenting patterns and monitoring device use at home. Without consistent collaboration between these two environments, the character values taught in school have the potential to be diminished by uncontrolled technology use patterns in the domestic environment. Therefore, successfully strengthening children's digital resilience requires continuity of character education between schools and families.

As found by Domoff et al. (2019), the risk of negative impacts such as gadget addiction can be significantly reduced. The research context in Cikedokan Village

shows that synergy between teachers at school and parents at home is crucial. Without consistent collaboration, the character values taught in schools will be reduced by uncontrolled gadget use patterns in the domestic environment. 6.4. Research Implications Practically, this research implies the need for practical modules for educators and parents that combine character guidance with digital literacy. The theoretical implications emphasize that in the digital era, the PAUD curriculum is no longer sufficient to focus only on stimulating physical and cognitive development, but must include child protection through strengthening character that is adaptive to technological changes.

Table 1. Summary of Findings and Related Literature

Aspects of Findings	Supporting Literature	Implications
Children's Digital Vulnerability	Livingstone & Smith (2014)	The urgency of strengthening self-control through character.
The Role of Mentoring	Domoff et al. (2019)	Parents as a key factor in digital resilience.
Learning methods	Lickona (1991)	Integration of values into real action (device rules).
Characteristics of Resilience	Masten (2014)	Building children's adaptability in the digital era.

Based on Table 1, research findings indicate that young children are highly vulnerable to digital risks, primarily due to limited self-control and understanding of safe digital media use. This aligns with the views of Sonia Livingstone and Peter K. Smith (2014), who assert that children are the most vulnerable group to the negative impacts of digital technology. Therefore, strengthening character traits such as discipline, self-control, and responsibility is crucial to helping children cope with various digital pressures from an early age.

Furthermore, research findings also indicate that parental guidance plays a central role in building children's digital resilience. This finding is supported by research by Sarah E. Domoff et al. (2019), which states that active parental involvement in children's digital media use can reduce the risk of device addiction and improve children's emotional regulation skills. In the context of the study in Cikedokan Village, consistent guidance has been shown to help children understand the limits of device use and develop healthier digital habits.

From a learning methodology perspective, this study adopted the character education approach proposed by Thomas Lickona (1991), namely the integration of moral values into concrete actions and daily habits. Values such as discipline, empathy, and responsibility are not only taught theoretically but also implemented through device usage rules, discussions about digital content, and the habit of stopping device use by mutual agreement. This approach is considered effective because children learn to understand character values through direct experiences in everyday life.

Meanwhile, the concept of resilience developed by Ann S. Masten (2014) reinforces the finding that children have the capacity to adapt positively to challenges if they receive adequate environmental support. In this study, this support is realized through synergy between schools and families in developing healthy digital habits. Thus, the integration of a character-based early childhood education curriculum serves not only as a moral development effort but also as a child protection strategy in the face of increasingly complex digital technology developments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the integration of the character education-based PAUD curriculum in Cikedokan Village, several main points can be concluded, namely: The implementation of character education in partner PAUD institutions currently still focuses on conventional moral-social aspects and has not been integrated with digital literacy, while early childhood has been exposed to intensive use of gadgets without adequate guidance. The formulated integration model combines key character values (such as discipline, responsibility, and empathy) into children's digital activities, where the rules for using gadgets (*screen time*) is used as a means of practicing these values in real life. Implementing an integrative curriculum model through collaboration between teachers and parents has proven crucial in building children's resilience, enabling them to develop positive adaptation skills and self-protection against the risks of violence and the negative impacts of digital media.

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