Strengthening character and citizenship education: a case study of teaching materials in elementary schools

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Abstract: *The fading character of politeness and cooperation among elementary school students encourages the need for innovation in teaching materials. This research focuses on Canva and Heyzine-based digital teaching materials to strengthen character and citizenship education at SDN Pisangcandi 3. The aim is to analyze the effectiveness of teaching materials in improving students' character values. The case study method was used with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires. Thematic analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed an increase in students' understanding of the value of politeness and cooperation through interactive and interesting digital teaching materials. However, there are challenges in optimization related to teacher skills and resource availability. In conclusion, the innovation of digital teaching materials is effective in shaping student character, with recommendations for teacher training for further effectiveness.*

Keywords: *Digital Teaching Materials, Character Education, Citizenship, Elementary School*

Introduction

Character and citizenship education plays an important role in shaping a generation with noble character and strong national awareness (Afan et al., 2024). Character itself is generally defined as a set of moral, ethical, and spiritual values that guide individuals in thinking, behaving, and interacting with others (Lickona, 1991; Maqbool et al., 2024). According to Alfi et al. (2024), character education not only develops cognitive and affective aspects, but also forms identity and moral responsibility as members of society. Ideally, character education involves synergy between schools, families, and communities so that learning does not only focus on academic aspects but also on the formation of a strong personality. Through character education, students are able to make good or bad decisions so that they can behave well in their daily lives. Schools are responsible for integrating national values in the curriculum, while families and social environments provide real examples in daily life (Japar et al., 2024). At the elementary school level, noble values such as politeness, compassion, and cooperation are the main foundations in shaping student character (Salamah et al., 2023). One simple but meaningful way is through learning Indonesian language materials on the use of magic words such as "please", "excuse me", "sorry", and "thank you" (TERKASIH) in daily interactions at school. A superior generation is not only those who are able to compete at the global level, but also those who still uphold local cultural values (Murtiningsih et al., 2024).

Character development can be measured through several key indicators such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, tolerance, cooperation, politeness, and social care (Kollo et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). These indicators become the benchmark for evaluating the success of character education programs in schools. Marsakha et al. (2021) emphasize that character indicators need to be operationalized in concrete behaviors so that teachers can observe and assess them in the classroom context. For example, honesty is reflected in admitting mistakes, politeness in language use, responsibility in completing tasks, and cooperation in group activities.

Teaching materials are one of the most important components in realizing character education in schools. As stated by Jayanti & Syahfitri (2023), teaching materials are not only sources of information, but also media that can internalize values through examples, stories, and interactive activities. Innovative teaching materials can motivate students, stimulate critical thinking, and provide opportunities to practice character values in everyday life (Setiawan et al., 2024). In the context of digital learning, Canva and Heyzine platforms provide alternative media that are more visual, interactive, and accessible, making them effective tools for strengthening politeness, empathy, and cooperation in the classroom. However, the reality at SDN Pisangcandi 3 shows a decline in the use of these four magic words that reflect manners in students' daily lives. Their social interactions often do not demonstrate character and citizenship values. Various factors such as the increasing use of digital technology, lifestyle changes, and the lack of teaching models that emphasize the importance of these values contribute to this condition. In addition, social media and digital technology often influence the way students communicate, which has an impact on reducing awareness of the importance of manners and social empathy (Pradnyani et al., 2024).

This phenomenon can be explained through Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Lickona's character education framework, and Bandura's social learning theory, which highlight the role of moral reasoning, habituation, and modeling in shaping children's character (Kohlberg, 1981; Lickona, 1991; Bandura, 1977). In addition, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bruner's constructivist theory, and Dewey's experiential learning perspective emphasize that values and citizenship awareness are built through social interaction, active learning, and meaningful experiences (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1938). Furthermore, the importance of cultural literacy in character formation is supported by Banks' multicultural education theory, Freire's critical pedagogy, and UNESCO's global citizenship framework, which stress the integration of cultural values and democratic participation in education (Banks, 2009; Freire, 1970; UNESCO, 2015).

Based on these perspectives, strengthening character education in elementary schools becomes urgent and strategic. One of the effective ways is through the development of innovative and culturally relevant teaching materials that emphasize politeness, empathy, and cooperation. In this regard, the use of digital-based teaching materials that integrate local cultural values and promote the habituation of magic words (TERKASIH) is expected to be a solution to improve students' manners and citizenship awareness in the digital era.

Method

This research uses the case study method because it allows researchers to thoroughly explore how this phenomenon occurs in the natural context of the world of education (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). This method provides deeper insights into how teaching materials are applied and impact the learning process (Creswell, 2012). The research location was in grade 2 of SDN Pisangcandi 3 because the teaching materials used were considered relevant to character and citizenship education. Grade 2 students consisted of 24 students, namely 14 boys and 10 girls. The research subjects included teachers as learning organizers, students as users of teaching materials, and principals as policy holders.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires. Through direct observation, researchers can see how Canva and Heyzine-based digital teaching materials are used in learning and their impact on students. In-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and students helped explore the experiences, challenges, and effectiveness of digital teaching materials. Document analysis was conducted by reviewing teaching materials, lesson plans, and student evaluation results to see the relevance and effectiveness of teaching materials in shaping student character. In addition, questionnaires were distributed to students to understand how they receive and understand digital teaching materials in the learning process.

Table 1. Research Instrument Grid

No	Aspect of Research Focus	Indicator	Data Source	Instrument / Technique
1	Student Character (TERKASIH values)	Politeness (use of "please", "excuse me", "sorry", and "thank you")	Students, classroom interactions	Observation sheet, interview guide
2	Student Character (TERKASIH values)	Cooperation (working together in groups, helping peers)	Students, teachers	Observation, student reflective journals
3	Student Character (TERKASIH values)	Honesty (admitting mistakes, completing tasks sincerely)	Students, teachers	Observation, questionnaire
4	Student Character (TERKASIH values)	Compassion (showing empathy, offering help)	Students, teachers	Observation, interview
5	Teacher Readiness	Mastery of digital teaching materials (Canva & Heyzine)	Teachers	Interview, document analysis (lesson plans, modules)
6	Implementation of Digital Teaching Materials	Use of interactive media and students' engagement	Teachers, classroom activities	Observation, interview, questionnaire
7	Supporting& Inhibiting Factors	Infrastructure, internet access, and facilities	Teachers, principal, students	Interview, observation

The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis, which included three main stages, namely: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, relevant information from observations, interviews, documents and

questionnaires were selected and summarized. Then, the data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives to describe how digital teaching materials are applied in learning. Finally, conclusions were drawn to see the extent to which Canva and Heyzine-based digital teaching materials helped strengthen students' character and citizenship education. Quantitative data from the questionnaire is also analyzed descriptively to calculate the percentage of students' responses to the use of digital teaching materials. The results of this analysis will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of digital teaching materials in shaping student character and provide recommendations for future development. This research is expected to make a real contribution in strengthening character and citizenship education through the innovation of digital teaching materials in elementary schools.

Results and Discussion

Based on observations, the teaching materials used at SDN Pisangcandi 3 played a significant role in improving students' understanding of character and citizenship values. Teachers integrated the TERKASIH materials as the main medium in conveying values of honesty, compassion, and cooperation through the habituation of four magic words. During the lessons, students were actively engaged in real-life practice of these values through discussions, role-play, storytelling, singing, coloring, and reflective journaling. The classroom atmosphere became more interactive, and students showed enthusiasm when the learning involved games and creative activities. The use of TERKASIH words such as "please", "excuse me", "sorry", and "thank you" could be observed in daily classroom interactions, indicating a shift in communication patterns. However, observations also revealed challenges, particularly in internet accessibility, since only half of the classes had stable connectivity, which sometimes limited the optimization of digital learning materials.

Figure 1. Students practicing the TERKASIH values through role-play activities

The TERKASIH coursebook consists of 30 pages including learning outcomes, songs, conversation practices, charade cards, assessment rubrics, interactive quizzes, and a daily journal. The teaching materials highlight honesty (admitting mistakes), compassion (helping peers), cooperation (working together), and politeness (saying thank you).

Figure 2. Students reading and using the TERKASIH digital e-book

From interviews, teachers and principals reported that digital teaching materials were more engaging than printed ones, though limitations such as poor internet connectivity (only 50% of classes could access online resources) affected implementation. Students expressed enthusiasm for visual-rich and interactive content, but teachers indicated a need for more professional training to maximize digital media.

Figure 3. Teacher guiding students during reflective journaling of TERKASIH values

The questionnaire results showed that more than 60% of students enjoyed storytelling and visual activities, while 70% wanted more pictures and stories. In terms of character outcomes, 70% of students reported positive changes in compassion, 65% in honesty, and 60% in cooperation. Preferences varied in media: 45% preferred videos and songs, 55% preferred combined book-video approaches. Despite these variations, 60% of students felt motivated to do good after class activities, though fewer retold the stories at home. Overall, these results highlight that Canva and Heyzine-based teaching materials contribute positively to character building, although improvements are still necessary in terms of interactivity, teacher readiness, and digital infrastructure.

In terms of character development, the findings show that the digital teaching materials significantly contributed to the growth of four key values: politeness, honesty, compassion, and cooperation. Politeness was reflected in students' increased use of the TERKASIH words in daily communication, both during lessons and informal interactions. Honesty appeared when students admitted mistakes in class activities and completed their assignments responsibly. Compassion was demonstrated by the willingness of students to help peers who had difficulties, while cooperation was visible in group activities such as role-play, storytelling, and collaborative games. These results confirm that character education can be effectively cultivated through interactive and culturally relevant learning materials, especially when they integrate everyday language practices with engaging digital media.

The results show that character based teaching materials are effective in strengthening politeness, compassion, honesty, and cooperation among students. The photos of classroom activities, along with the reduced findings from observations and interviews, confirm that students not only enjoyed the learning process but also practiced these values directly in their daily interactions. This supports Lickona's (1991) framework, which highlights the importance of habituating moral values through repeated practice in meaningful contexts, and Yusuf et al. (2024), who argue that collaboration among schools, families, and communities enhances character education.

Students' strong preference for visual and interactive content is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the effectiveness of digital learning tools in enhancing motivation and engagement (Puspitaningrum & Witanto, 2024; Ayu et al., 2025). The high appreciation of storytelling aligns with Dewey's (1938) experiential learning perspective, which stresses the role of direct experiences in forming values. Meanwhile, the finding that repetition of TERKASIH words strengthened behavioral change reflects the principles of behaviorism in skill acquisition (Anggraini et al., 2024).

From the teacher and principal perspectives, the results highlight the importance of teacher competence and professional development in integrating technology into the classroom. This finding resonates with Sukma et al. (2024) and Arifin et al. (2024), who emphasize that equipping teachers with digital literacy skills is essential for effective implementation of media based learning. Moreover, the fact that values of citizenship were more effectively internalized through practical experiences rather than theoretical explanations aligns, who argue that experiential learning fosters stronger ethical and moral behavior in students.

Therefore, this study not only reinforces established theories of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981), social learning (Bandura, 1977), and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), but also provides empirical evidence that innovative, culturally relevant digital teaching materials can successfully bridge character education with students' digital lifestyles.

Conclusion

This research shows that teaching materials at SDN Pisangcandi 3 play an important role in strengthening character and citizenship education, helping students understand values such as ethical behavior, mutual cooperation and responsibility as citizens. However, there are still challenges in its implementation, especially related to the availability of resources and teachers' skills in developing more interactive teaching materials. Therefore, training and mentoring for teachers are needed to optimize learning. In addition, the development of teaching materials needs to be tailored to the needs of students through multimedia elements and interactive methods to make it more interesting and effective. With a more visual, explorative and technology based approach, students can more easily understand and internalize the values taught. Overall, this research provides insights into how teaching materials can be an effective tool in shaping character and civic awareness, as well as a basis for the development of innovative and contextualized educational policies.

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