



## Fighting against Corruption through Character Education: The Voices of Indonesian Primary School Teachers

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### Abstract

Indonesian government is currently through a tough moment where corruption has been massive. One of the long-term solutions of this practice is the implementation of character education from early ages. The purpose of this research was to find out the importance of character education in the fight against corruption for primary school students. The study was part of a research and development study aiming to design a model for integrating character education in integrated thematic learning in primary schools. We used semi-structure interviews to get data from eight participants who were Indonesian teachers of primary schools about the issue. This case study was analyzed through a thematic analysis. The findings show that character education is important for tackling corruption behaviors from early ages, shaping students' mind towards the danger of corruption, producing excellent students with a good moral and behavior, and influencing teachers' perception towards corruption. Recommendations are offered for Indonesian education betterment.

### Keywords

Corruption, character, education, primary school teachers

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## Introduction

There are many theories both character education and many standpoints on the roles of education on character and national development. Some educational experts have informed that schools as educational institutions have suitable settings for moral education since the main purpose of these institutions is student learning, and the purpose of learning is to improve students' cognitive factor (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Two main goals of educational institutions focus on improving cognitive-academic improvement and character formation. Cognitive-academic improvement aims to improve students' knowledge and ability. On the other hand, character formation forms students' attitudes and behaviors which are shown through some merits such as honesty, responsibility, self-discipline, integrity, respect, and reliability.

The significance of education to democracy has been highlighted as democracy requires a certain step of an educated citizenry to appropriately run. The major element to improve morality is discipline sense and good behavior in line with collective and autonomous practices. Method of facilitating quality education in a democratic community requires educated people who understand the political lives of social duties (Dewey, 1969; DeRoche & Williams, 1998). Therefore, the major aim of education is to transfer the culture of people, to transform young people into their way of life as well as to shape their character for appropriateness of their community. Lickona (2004) delivers the importance of concrete recommendation for human development and moral reasoning for those working in educational institutions. On the other hand, corruption is difficult to define; however, we realize corruption when we are confronting it. Some literature defines corruption as the abuse of power for private gains (Hamzah, 1991; Nussbaum, 2006; Riley, 1998; Treisman, 2000). It has very seriously damaging effects on national development. It is morally wrong since it is not compatible with the ethical value of human beings. Corruption is a serious threat to Indonesia for the country's economic development and new established-democracy (Riley, 1998; Schutte, 2012). To encourage effective governance, Indonesian system of democracy is made based on the three highest institutions; the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. However, because of corruption, the criminals from these three institutions' in many cases do improper activities stealing people's money (Putra, 2003; Republic of Indonesia, 2001). With the destructive power of corruption, dishonest people have been role models for the youths as future leaders to continuously decline the moral standards and committed to having corrupt practices in Indonesia.

To act against the corruption, character education is important to be taught from early ages. Therefore, this study aimed at elaborating the importance of character education to fight against corruption for primary school students. To achieve the purpose of the study, two main questions guided our research: (1) what are the needs of teachers teaching character education? and (2) how do they deal with problems?

## Literature Review

### *Corruption and its impacts in Indonesia*

Indonesian people have been discussing a series of national debates and a storm of reports of how corrupt leaders plundered the nation and have had a wave of social reforms to tackle corruption unsuccessfully. These efforts were unsuccessful, not because they were



wrong but the environment in which the ideas were practiced by the reforms had lost the capacity to preserve good ideas. More importantly, people who carry out the reform are somehow corrupt which prevents them from being effective. The missing parenting material is leaders (and followers who have part to blame) lack of moral mission and goals (Fullan, 1993). For example, parents, school administrators, political leaders, and public institutions have failed to comprehend their ethical and moral responsibilities to young people and society at large. Many of them cannot distinguish between right and wrong, fair and unfair things because most are not given the right character during the early years of their school (Lickona et al., 1996).

Corruption also occurs in the enforcement of Indonesian law, everyone can be different before the law. Law in some cases treats politicians who are strong and corrupt differently from the poor; therefore, a law is not a good guide to good behavior. Changing laws is no better than the behavior of corrupt leaders. Therefore, Indonesia's political and social system does not serve the interests of ordinary people (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2015; Swanda & Nadiroh, 2018). This has forced some good individuals in the community to discard ideal behaviors to shorten wealth. Corrupt law enforcement officials use money and their position to distort the rule as well as allow their corrupt friends to escape punishment under the pretext of strengthening the rule of law. Sponsors have a negative impact on Indonesian politics because it leads to conflicts of interest. Corruption is a human behavior affecting policymakers and officials' minds and hearts applying the law and makes them impotent (Haynes, 1994). Corruption has destroyed the morality of some Indonesian leaders. However, human morality tells us that corruption is wrong which causes a lack of character and moral education of young people (Putra, 2003).

### ***Character education***

Character education has been the main agenda for the national movement in many advanced countries includes teaching students about human values ((McBrien & Bradnt, 1997). The purpose of character education is to create schools in order to improve ethical and responsible people (Lickona, 2004). Adults should be familiarized with character education for their change of attitudes. However, it is difficult to get adults to change, particularly, the adults with the established bad behaviors (Persson, Rothstein, & Teorell, 2010). For example, the districts, which authorize schools in the USA, committed to making efforts to expose their students important core of character education with the emphasis on the core values of the social share (PNSC, 2018). Character education is an important part of every aspect of education since it facilitates a long-term solution to moral and academic aspects for people across the world.

Character education has been a research object for many studies; however, there is no certain rule and method for effective character education, but there are some common and basic principles of character education; it should promote core values of ethics of good character including feeling, thinking, and behavior with meaningful academic curriculum aiming for the students' success. Character education should start with character building implemented by engaging family and community (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 1996). In implementing effective character building for character education, effective schools are needed in order to reinforce good character traits through a thorough approach such as adult modeling, good school climate, and access to comprehensive guidance or counseling (Haynes, 1994).



The leaders of Indonesia (parents, politicians, and educators) should truly focus on the students' bad behaviors and low academic achievements as well as unethical behavior and inappropriate work ethics of adults with their destructive impacts on national development. They should make character education as a priority (Ryan, 1996; Wahid, Djasli, & Wibowo, 2006). A well-implemented character education has the potential of addressing negative social problems, cultism, and violence and cheating in examinations, and sorting in schools. It could also a way out to fight the rampant corruption and fraud that is the destruction for Indonesian democracy, politics, and economy.

Character education should be compulsory taught in Indonesian schools and must be legal. For an effective war on corruption in Indonesia, an appropriate strategy must target young people and instill their own good and moral character. Through good character, the community will help young people to develop good governance, integrity, credibility, and other necessary virtues (Lickona, 2004). If young people are properly educated and if their minds and hearts are denigrated of corruption they will grow up and know what is right and wrong, and know their social responsibilities and limitations. The lack of good moral character can cause greed, selfishness, and corruption. Corruption is a moral problem (Wraith & Simpkins, 1963) which is incompatible with the moral values of good citizens. Indonesia can deal with corruption through the management of ethics and individual integrity and formulate it to be honest.

The matter of corruption is difficult to solve in Indonesia (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2015; Swanda & Nadiroh, 2018). The threat has destroyed the nation's democracy and hampered Indonesia's economy. To maintain true democracy in Indonesia, leaders and citizens must assume their social responsibility as needed by democratic citizens. For business to grow and be right, the workforce must have a good work ethic and character of honesty, reliability, and capacity to cooperate with others for the common good. Businesses and companies must also increase their social responsibility as reflected in the impact of their business activities and practices on their immediate community. The virtues could be obtained through good character education. Someone who is morally literate will have far better equipment than moral illiterate people to achieve a reasonable position and be ethically maintained on difficult issues (Bennette, 1993; Stambach, 2012).

## **Methodology**

A qualitative design with the case study approach was used to find out the importance of character education in fighting against corruption for primary school students. To achieve the purpose of the study, two main questions guided our research: What are the needs of teachers teaching character education? and how do they deal with problems? In this study, the influence of the work of the three qualitative experts, Stake (1995), Merriam (1998), and Yin (2014) was used in this study design. They described a case study as a bounded system where researchers determine boundaries and establish clear statements about the emphasis of the research. A case study is a holistic (consideration to similar relations of the phenomenon and its contexts), empirical (observation-based), interpretive (intuition of the researcher), empathic (perspective to mirror on how individuals think), and integrated (Stake, 1995). Similarly, Yin (2014) stated, "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context" (p. 16). Merriam (1998) argued that an exploratory case study was appropriate if the focus of the research has not



been investigated exhaustively which is similar to this study context, to find out the importance of character education to fight against corruption in Indonesia.

Merriam (1998) further recommended that through studying an issue, which has not been investigated thoroughly, researchers have chances to explore relevant aspects and provide descriptive information for larger and future research. In this study, the approach was decided to use in order to analyses the importance of an integrated model of character education in primary school. What Merriam (1998) stated about the use of a case study for understudied investigation was inspired this research to be under the case study tradition particularly, in analyzing the importance of an integrated model of character education in primary school.

### ***Research site, sampling, procedures, and participants***

This research was funded by Jambi University through its financial scheme distributed by the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training. Getting access is very important in qualitative data collection. This research was conducted at two primary schools in Jambi, Indonesia. The two schools were financed by Jambi municipality government. We applied a purposeful sampling with a convenience case approach. “Convenience cases [are those] which represent sites or individuals from which researchers can access and easily collect data” (Creswell, 2007. p. 126). We applied this strategy in order to choose research sites and participants because we had the access, collecting data and doing research at the two schools. Through the adoption of a qualitative case study approach, the findings of this research could not be generalized to the other schools or participants.

Participants of this study were previously invited with an official letter. Six of eight invited primary teachers of the two schools were voluntarily got involved by filling in the research consent form given prior the process of data collection. When we held this research, all participants possessed more than 6 years’ experience of teaching in primary schools. The demographic questionnaire was addressed to obtain general data of their age, experience, and educational backgrounds.

The explanation of the right to answer or not to answer the research question was informed and they all agreed that their opinions would be inserted in the final report of the research. The explanation of the research purpose was also conducted as well as the information of the consequences of their opinions to become the research data. Member checking was carried out by telling our participants the data that would be used in this research. The participants’ names and research sites were pseudonyms considered as ethics of the research. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8 were used as participants’ alias names in this research.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

Semi structured interview was utilized to obtain information about the importance of character education in fighting against corruption for primary school students. The interview was recorded through using the J6 Samsung smartphone in the two schools as noted earlier. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The official invitation was sent in July 2017. Guided by the protocol designed based on the reviews of prior research during the interview, some questions about the importance of an integrated model of character education in primary schools were asked to participants. In a specific term, some questions



were asked regarding the expectation of the participants in order to teach anti-corruption attitudes to students of primary schools in Indonesia.

In dealing with the validity and reliability known as trustworthiness in qualitative tradition, the researchers' member checking and reflexivity (Creswell, 2014) were done. The researchers did a triangulation in the research by analyzing the data from three perspectives of data collection techniques interview. In verifying the accuracy of the findings and interpretations, member checking was used. We gave back the transcription, findings, and a final report to each interview member teacher. This was opted to make sure that each teacher agreed with the data obtained and used as well as presented in the elaboration of the research findings.

## **Findings**

The purpose of this research was to find out the importance of character education in fighting against corruption for primary school students. From this research, there were four themes revealed: (1) tackling corruption behaviors from early ages, shaping students' mind towards the danger of corruption, producing excellent students with a good moral and behavior, and influencing teachers' perception towards corruption.

### ***Tackling corruption behavior from early ages***

Character education is important to tackle corruption behaviors from early ages. By teaching character education, students are hoped to understand that corruption is a bad thing to do. As they are taught that it is bad, it will tackle the behaviors. When the virtue of character education has been rooted from early ages, it is a step to tackle corruption behaviors. As quoted from one participant's opinion,

“A very important thing to teach from early ages. Indonesia is being attacked by the act of corruption as we watch TV every day where there are many Indonesian politician, businessperson, and bureaucrats caught to bribe or get money illegally.” (P2)

Corruption possesses many damaging effects, destroying national institutions including in education, inequitable social services, and severe injustice in the courts, along with economic inefficiency and environmental exploitation. Through character education which should be implemented and taught from early ages, it can be reduced; however, it requires years to do. This is one way to tackle corruption in Indonesia as a developing country.

“The character education is very important in tackling corruption which have very serious threats and effects on national institutions. From young children, it is our effort to teach character education in Indonesia.” (p7)

The earlier a student is taught about the negative effects of corruption, the better it would be a step to tackle corruption in a country. Since the effect of character education should be started from early ages.



### ***Shaping students' mind towards the danger of corruption***

Character education is also important to shape students' mind towards the danger of corruption. When part of character education discusses the danger of corruption, students' mind should be important to pay attention. There is news everyday about people who corrupt country's money. It would be a poison for young children about the corruption, which might be not an extraordinary crime anymore. Character education taught in primary schools must have impacts on changing young students' mind about the danger of corruption. Two of the participants informed,

“I think it is very important to have full attention towards the case of corruption in Indonesia. People in Indonesia watch corruption news every day. It is common to watch Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission announce a suspect of corruption on daily basis.” (P5)

Character education can be a tool to stigmatize to young students that corrupting is an extraordinary crime.”,(P6)

Values education with a good character education is concerned as vital elements to shape young students' mind. Like political institutions, character education is hopefully becoming a broader future of democracy for the corruption-free era. One of the participants said that everybody should focus on giving the right direction for a better generation in order to make this country better. One way to do that is through character education.

### ***Producing excellent students with a good moral and behavior***

Another reason why character education is important for fighting against corruption perceived by the participants of the study is that it aims to produce excellent students with a good moral and behavior. According to one line of thought, character education occurs through a sequence of stages which better start from the early ages since the beginning of education. Two of the participants' opinions were quoted,

“In order to prepare Indonesia to become a better nation. It is important to have excellent students with moral and behavior. Therefore, character education is a solution for a better generation.” (P4)

“To change a view of a generation is not an easy process. It is a long-time process in which people have to keep promoting character education in an attempt to tackle corruption. If it is done high-quality students with moral and value are a guarantee in a country.” (P1)

It has been commonly understood that practices of ethics and values of moral and beliefs are achieved through some long time processes. Therefore, to produce high-quality generation of anti-corruption, it is important to include character education in primary schools as it is the first stage of school with formal teaching and learning processes.



### ***Influencing teachers' perception towards corruption***

The importance of character education for fighting against corruption has been revealed for the need of students. However, teachers of primary schools are also influenced by the character education. The perception towards corruption of the teacher is also important factor why character education is important to be included in primary education syllabus. As two of the participants revealed,

“I myself is influenced by the implementation of character education in primary education. What I mean here is that I know how bad corruption has been part of a damaging factor of this country.” (P2)

“We should learn how the corruption has been ruining the country for years. I think this is not only about educate students about corruption but also educate us not to corrupt Indonesia's money.” (P3)

Adults should also learn how to tackle corruption through character education. The teachers also take important messages about fighting against corruption through character education they teach.

### ***Problems of conducting character education***

Besides the importance of character education to fight against corruption, problems of conducting character education emerged from the interview. Funding for character education was mentioned as the main problem of conducting character education in Indonesian primary schools. Underfunding and lack of specialists in the areas, conducting effective character education in Indonesian schools would seem an overwhelming task.

“Corruption is an extraordinary crime in Indonesia. Thus, the government should provide more money to make this character education to be more established.” (P1)

“It is hard to implement character education in primary schools. We need more cutting age tools or technological devices to make it fun activity.” (P8)

Character education will be well-implemented if the required human and financial sources are facilitated. Little can be done to restructure schools to change the mind and heart of the youths without good character education. Even in some schools, there is an absence of character education as the main reason for the leadership problem facing the nation today. In addition, teachers understanding of character education should also be developed by the government through seminar and training to strengthen the effort to better the implementation of character education in primary schools.

### **Discussion**

Many Indonesian youths today do not live in productive ways because they are not educated and maintained by the community. Youth in Indonesia like the others in other



communities, need good character education to grow up, to be able to distinguish between right and wrong and become adults with responsibility (Stambach, 2012). As such, Indonesian education reformers must focus on giving students the tools needed to learn and become better citizens (Putra, 2003). National education reform must focus on the important things. This study underlines the importance of character education as it is a tool to fight corruption from early ages. Corruption will effectively be tackled with a combination of good laws and good character education of the population through tackling corruption behavior from early ages, shaping students' mind towards the danger of corruption, producing excellent students with a good moral and behavior, and influencing teachers' perception towards corruption.

This study informs that students are expected to understand that corruption is negative through character education teaching (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2015). Indonesian people need to be educated on the danger of corruption from young ages as it is the best way to tackle corruption in Indonesia. Character education is also important to shape students' minds about the dangers of corruption. Character education must have an impact on changing the minds of young students of the dark sides of corruption. The value of education with good character education is considered as an important element to shape the minds of young students. Another reason why character education is important for fighting against corruption for primary school students reported in this study is it produces excellent students with a good moral and behavior for future generation (Swanda & Nadiroh, 2018). Character education should be through many stages; however, students from early ages are better taught character education in order to fight against corruption as it was also discussed by some previous researches (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2015; Swanda & Nadiroh, 2018). Not only for students, character education in primary schools is also important for teachers. The teachers take important messages about fighting against corruption through character education they teach. Beside the importance of character education to fight against corruption, problems of conducting character education emerged from the interview. Funding for character education was mentioned as the main problem of conducting character education in Indonesian primary schools. Some previous studies also informed similar facts about the problems in implementing character education to fight against corruption (Swanda & Nadiroh, 2018; Sulistiyawati, Risnawati & Purba 2017).

Well-designed and implemented character education will make better student behavior and create an environment for effective teaching and learning. The law will provide legal supports to the program. Schools should be caring institutions. If teachers have the competence to teach and are well-motivated and students are consistently given positive guidance (rather than letting them behave like wild animals), they will behave well and learn and understand their social responsibilities and limitations; this has the potential to reduce corruption and the community will progress. Moral decay in this country is widespread and has affected schools that are supposed to be caring and character printing institutions. For decades, Indonesian schools have carried out character education and the nation's social morality has since swooped sharply. Students today are threatened by corruption models when they see news about corruption every day. With Indonesia's harsh and corrupt, environment providing good role models to young people will make a lot of difference in their lives (Republic of Indonesia, 2001; Wahid et al., 2006). Reform efforts in the education sector have not been successful because of the lack of character education to fight corruption.



## Conclusion

This paper has stated that children's character education is needed to overcome the root causes (psychological and philosophical dimensions) of corruption in Indonesia. Character education will be tackling corruption behaviors from early ages, shaping students mind towards the danger of corruption, producing excellent students with a good moral and behavior, and influencing teachers' perception towards corruption. Because it seems that most politicians who grow up in communities are filled with corruption and are founded on wrong principles and broken contracts. They do not seem to understand their social responsibility and the impact of their unethical behaviors on society. Character education will also provide important virtues for young people and adults to enable them to become good citizens and success in a rapidly changing and highly competitive global economy. For an anti-corruption crusade to be successful, Indonesia needs political leaders with moral goals to make a positive difference in the lives of all citizens and the community must start asking corrupt leaders to be responsible for their actions. Failure gives them adequate consequences because their unethical behavior drives corruption in the public and private sectors. However, character education alone will not be sufficient; to deal with corruption effectively, the program must be complemented by an effective institutional framework.

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