Effective Communication in Character Education: A Pathway to Strengthening Student's Nationalism in Jabal Noor Islamic Junior High School

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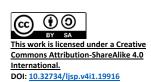*Corresponding Author: maulanaandinatad@usu.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how effective communication strategies within character education programs can serve as a vital instrument to instill and strengthen the spirit of nationalism among students. By focusing on communication as a pedagogical tool, the research addresses a pressing need to bridge the gap between moral instruction and civic identity development in the school environment. This research uses the effective communication theory initiated by Lickona and the mass communication theory proposed by McQuail. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews with the principal, vice principal, and homeroom teacher. The findings reveal that effective communication strategies, including lectures, group discussions, and the use of digital media, play a pivotal role in embedding nationalistic values within students. The principal's leadership in designing policies integrating Islamic and national values ensures alignment between religious teachings and nationalism. The vice principal implements these strategies through engaging extracurricular programs, such as flag ceremonies and national-themed competitions, heightening students' awareness and pride in their national identity. Homeroom teachers contribute through interpersonal communication, offering individual counseling and classroom discussions that connect historical and religious narratives with students' daily lives. The study highlights that integrating digital tools in delivering character education makes learning that enhances educational engagement and effectiveness for digital-native students.

Keywords: effective, communication, character education, nationalism

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana strategi komunikasi yang efektif dalam program pendidikan karakter dapat berfungsi sebagai instrumen penting untuk menanamkan dan memperkuat semangat nasionalisme di kalangan siswa. Dengan berfokus pada komunikasi sebagai alat pedagogis, penelitian ini membahas kebutuhan mendesak untuk menjembatani kesenjangan antara pengajaran moral dan pengembangan identitas kewarganegaraan di lingkungan sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori komunikasi efektif yang digagas oleh Lickona, dan teori komunikasi massa yang diusulkan oleh McQuail. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui

observasi dan wawancara mendalam dengan kepala sekolah, wakil kepala sekolah, dan wali kelas. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa strategi komunikasi yang efektif, termasuk ceramah, diskusi kelompok, dan penggunaan media digital, memainkan peran penting dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai nasionalisme dalam diri siswa. Kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam merancang kebijakan yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam dan nasionalisme memastikan keselarasan antara ajaran agama dan nasionalisme. Wakil kepala sekolah menerapkan strategi ini melalui program ekstrakurikuler yang menarik, seperti upacara bendera dan kompetisi bertema nasional, yang meningkatkan kesadaran dan kebanggaan siswa terhadap identitas nasional mereka. Guru wali kelas berkontribusi melalui komunikasi interpersonal, menawarkan konseling individual dan diskusi kelas yang menghubungkan narasi sejarah dan agama dengan kehidupan sehari-hari siswa. Studi ini menyoroti bahwa mengintegrasikan perangkat digital dalam memberikan pendidikan karakter membuat pembelajaran lebih menarik dan berdampak bagi siswa yang terbiasa dengan teknologi digital.

Kata kunci: efektif, komunikasi, pendidikan karakter, nasionalisme

INTRODUCTION

Nationalism plays a crucial role in fostering unity and a sense of belonging among students, particularly in a multicultural and diverse nation like Indonesia. However, recent reports suggest a decline in nationalistic attitudes among Indonesian youth, marked by an increase in individualism, apathy towards national issues, and a reduced sense of civic responsibility (Suyatno et al 2020). These trends are concerning, especially in an era where digital globalization influences young minds with competing ideologies and cultural shifts (Kominfo, 2022). Educational institutions, therefore, hold a pivotal role in countering these challenges by embedding nationalism into students' character through effective communication and educational frameworks. The rapid advancement of digital media has revolutionized various aspects of life, including education. Students, as primary actors in the educational process, are expected to possess both motivation and competence in utilizing digital platforms to meet their learning needs (Larry, 2014). However, despite the proliferation of technology, many students still rely on conventional learning methods and face challenges in effectively using digital media (Marjuni & Harun, 2019; Samsudi & Hosaini, 2020; Pala, 2011). This issue reflects a significant gap in digital literacy, which is crucial not only for academic success but also for developing responsible digital citizenship in an era dominated by information and technology. Digital literacy and nationalism refer to the intersection between individuals' ability to effectively use digital technologies and their awareness, understanding, and commitment to national identity and civic values. Digital literacy encompasses skills in accessing, evaluating, creating, and communicating information through digital platforms. When applied in educational and civic contexts, these skills can shape how individuals engage with national narratives, participate in democratic processes, and respond to issues of national importance.

Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful character education. According to Lickona (1991), character education aims to develop moral and civic virtues in students, and communication strategies are essential in shaping these values. Similarly, McQuail's (2010) mass communication theory emphasizes the need for clarity and relevance in messages delivered to young audiences to ensure behavioral and attitudinal alignment (DeRoche & Williams, 2001). In the context of Islamic education, integrating values of nationalism with religious teachings is even more critical. Studies by Sterkens (2001) highlight that schools with an Islamic curriculum can enhance nationalistic attitudes by leveraging communication techniques that blend religious and nationalistic narratives. These findings reinforce the idea that strategic communication in schools like Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Junior High School can significantly contribute to fostering nationalism among students. Effective communication strategies are key to bridging the gap between digital literacy and character education.

According to Lickona (1991), character education aims to instil civic virtues and ethical behaviour, which can be effectively supported by digital tools when guided by clear and strategic communication (Mailin et al., 2023). Previous research indicates that incorporating digital media into teaching enhances students' engagement and academic performance, as shown in studies by Purwijayanti & Munir (2021). Nevertheless, challenges such as limited infrastructure, low motivation, and inadequate skills hinder the optimal utilization of digital media in learning (Yustanti & Novita, 2019; Singh, 2019). These findings highlight the critical role of educators in using communication as a tool to integrate digital literacy and character education, ultimately fostering a strong sense of nationalism among students.

This study aims to explore the role of effective communication in character education at Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Junior High School in enhancing students' nationalism (Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2006). Located in Medan, North Sumatra, Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Junior High School operates within a culturally diverse and religiously pluralistic environment. As one of the most populous cities outside Java, Medan represents a microcosm of Indonesia's multicultural society, where various ethnicities, languages, and beliefs coexist. This demographic landscape poses both opportunities and challenges for fostering a unified national identity among students. Given its Islamic foundation, the school has the potential to bridge religious values with national ideals, making it an ideal setting for exploring the impact of communication strategies in character education. The geographic significance of Medan as a key urban center in western Indonesia further amplifies the relevance of this study, as the findings may be applicable to other urban Islamic educational institutions facing similar social and cultural dynamics. Specifically, it seeks to examine how interpersonal and instructional communication methods, combined with the school's Islamic values, can shape students' understanding and commitment to national identity. Furthermore, the research addresses the gap in existing literature by focusing on how Islamic educational institutions balance religious teachings with the promotion of nationalism, particularly through tailored communication strategies that resonate with young learners. By focusing on the role of teachers as communicators and facilitators, this research seeks to understand how digital literacy and character education can be aligned to address the evolving needs of students in a digital era. Moreover, this study aims to provide practical recommendations for improving digital literacy and fostering nationalism through innovative communication approaches.

The effective communication strategies employed by educators at Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Junior High School significantly influence the development of nationalism among students. It argues that by aligning communication practices with both religious and nationalistic values, educators can foster a sense of pride, unity, and civic responsibility in students. This observation underscores the potential of educational institutions to act as agents of change in addressing the declining sense of nationalism among Indonesian youth, emphasizing the need for further exploration and application of strategic communication in character education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study highlights the importance of effective communication in character education to strengthen nationalism among students. Several international studies support this finding by emphasizing the role of character education and communication in shaping national identity. For example, a study published in SAGE Open found that the implementation of Civic Education policies in universities had a significant effect on students' sense of nationalism and patriotism. This study shows that a structured and communicative educational approach can increase national awareness among students (Nurdin, 2017)

One of the articles in the Journal of Philosophy of Education emphasizes that national identity is understood as an ongoing construction, which provides communication character education that focuses not only on knowledge, but also on the formation of national identity through dialogue and interaction (Ljunggren, 2014). Furthermore, a study published in the Asia Pacific Education Review

discusses ethical challenges in education related to increasing global interconnectivity. This study highlights the importance of forming an ethical community through communicative character education to generate collective action in facing global challenges, which in turn can strengthen nationalism. international literature supports the finding that effective communication in character education plays an important role in shaping and strengthening nationalism among students (Rizvi, 2019).

Effective communication plays a crucial role in character education, particularly in fostering national identity and patriotism among students. Several international studies have examined the link between educational policies, communication strategies, and nationalistic values, demonstrating how structured character education can enhance students' awareness and engagement with national identity. A study emphasizes that civic education policies significantly impact students' sense of nationalism and patriotism. This study found that structured educational approaches and communicative strategies improve students' national consciousness, making them more aware of their role as responsible citizens (McLaughlin, 2017). Additionally, a paper in the Journal of Philosophy of Education highlights that national identity is a continuous social construct, emphasizing that character education should not only focus on knowledge transmission but also on shaping national identity through dialogue and interpersonal interaction (Davies, 2014). This aligns with Lickona's (1991) theory that moral values must be internalized through clear and relevant communication strategies to be effectively integrated into students' character development.

The role of communication in character education has been further explored in a study published in Asia Pacific Education Review, which discusses the ethical challenges in education amid increasing global interconnectedness. The study underscores the importance of fostering ethical communities through communicative character education, ensuring that students not only internalize national values but also develop collective responsibility in addressing global challenges (Tan, 2019). Moreover, research from the Journal of Educational Research emphasizes that the use of digital media in education significantly influences students' engagement with national and moral values. This study supports the findings at Jabal Noor Private Islamic Junior High School, where digital media, group discussions, and interactive learning strategies have been successfully implemented to instil nationalism (Purwijayanti & Munir, 2021).

The literature suggests that effective communication strategies, when integrated into character education, can foster a stronger sense of nationalism among students. Schools should emphasize a holistic educational approach, combining traditional lectures, interactive discussions, and digital media to ensure that students not only understand moral values conceptually but also apply them in their daily lives. Furthermore, teacher training in innovative communication techniques is crucial in ensuring long-term effectiveness in character education programs.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand the phenomenon in depth based on the informant's perspective (Creswell, 2014). This approach is relevant because the focus of the study is to explore how effective communication in character education can strengthen student nationalism at Jabal Noor Private Islamic Middle School. The Data Collection Technique used is observation. Observation is used to obtain empirical data regarding learning activities, interactions between students and teachers, and the use of digital media in the character education process. This technique is carried out in a non-participatory manner, where the researcher is only an observer without being directly involved in learning activities. Observations were conducted during July in the Jabal Noor Private Islamic Middle School environment. This field observation aims to map the dynamics of communication in the classroom, including the pattern of material delivery by teachers and student responses (Spradley, 1980).

In addition, the interview research method also uses in-depth Interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with three main informants, namely the principal, the vice principal, and the

homeroom teacher. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, using a semi-structured interview guide to allow for more flexible information extraction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was recorded with the consent of the informant. Location and Time The research was conducted at Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Junior High School in July. The selection of this location was based on the consideration that the school has a strong vision and mission in integrating Islamic values and nationalism into character education.

Data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process included: Reading interview transcripts and observation notes repeatedly, Identifying key themes related to effective communication in character education, Categorizing data into themes such as communication strategies, use of digital media, and challenges in character education, Compiling interpretations and conclusions relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2002).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals how effective communication in character education at Jabal Noor Private Islamic Junior High School contributes to strengthening students' nationalism. Data obtained through observations and interviews with three key informants—the principal, vice principal, and homeroom teacher show several key findings: The principal has a strategic and central role in designing character education policies that integrate Islamic and nationalist values at Jabal Noor Private Islamic Junior High School. The principal mandates that moral and civic values be embedded across subjects. For example, in Islamic Studies, students learn about *hubbul wathan minal iman* (loving the nation is part of faith), while in Civics Education (PPKn), Islamic teachings are used to explain concepts such as justice, leadership, and patriotism. This policy not only aims to create students with noble morals but also to be aware of the importance of maintaining unity and love for the homeland amidst diversity. The findings of this study are in line with Lickona's theory (1991), which states that character education must include clear and relevant communication strategies to internalize moral values. In the context of Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Private Junior High School, the communication used by the principal, vice principal, and teachers combines visual, verbal, and interpersonal elements, which have proven effective in building students' nationalist awareness.

In the interview, the principal revealed that the communication approach implemented was designed systematically, involving lectures, group discussions, and the use of digital media. Lectures are a method often used to convey moral messages directly. In routine activities such as flag ceremonies or religious studies, the principal often links Islamic values with the historical context of the nation's struggle. For example, stories about national heroes who fought based on faith and nationality are often used as examples to strengthen students' love for the homeland. This lecture provides a strong moral emphasis and builds students' collective awareness of the importance of nationalism.

Group discussions are also an important part of this approach. In the discussion session, students are given the opportunity to critique issues related to nationality, such as the importance of tolerance and maintaining diversity. This method allows students to learn through interactive dialogue, so that the values taught can be deeply internalized. This discussion not only strengthens the sense of nationality but also encourages students to think critically and appreciate differences of opinion. The principal utilizes digital media as an effective communication tool to support character education. Media such as educational videos and interactive presentations are used to provide interesting visual illustrations of the values of nationalism. For example, documentary videos about the history of the nation's struggle or inspiring Islamic figures are used to instil a sense of pride in national identity. The use of digital media is very relevant to the learning style of the digital generation, which is more connected to visuals and technology. Through digital media, moral messages can be conveyed in a more creative and impactful way.

The policy designed by the principal has the main objective of integrating Islamic values with nationalism in the context of Indonesia's diversity. This approach reflects that nationalism does not conflict with religious teachings, but is instead part of strengthening faith. By emphasizing the importance of diversity as a strength, students are invited to understand that they have a moral and social responsibility in maintaining the unity and integrity of the nation. The leadership of the principal who is able to strategically direct character education policies shows how education can be a powerful tool in building a young generation with strong character. By combining lectures, group discussions, and digital media, character education at Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Private Middle School not only creates students who understand moral values, but are also able to apply them in everyday life. This approach is proof that effective communication can bridge religious values and nationalism to create harmony in diversity (Kholil et al., 2024; Dalimunthe et al., 2023).

The vice principal plays an important role in implementing the character education policy designed by the principal, especially in translating the school's vision and mission into concrete and applicable programs. Based on interviews, the vice principal revealed that the communication strategy to instil nationalism in students is realized through various school and extracurricular activities that are designed systematically. One of the main programs is the flag ceremony, which is not only a weekly ritual but also a medium to strengthen the sense of pride in the symbols of the country. In each ceremony, messages related to the values of patriotism, responsibility as citizens, and the importance of maintaining unity are always conveyed by teachers, including the principal and vice principal. In addition, the ceremony is also a means to remind students of the struggles of the nation's heroes, so that they can appreciate the sacrifices of previous generations.

Competitions with a nationalism theme, such as speech, poetry, and essay competitions on the nation's history, are another effective strategy. Through these competitions, students are invited to explore and understand more deeply about the journey of the Indonesian nation, historical figures, and the values that underlie independence. This activity not only increases students' knowledge, but also builds a sense of pride in their national identity (Dalimunthe et al., 2020). The vice principal noted that such activities provide a space for students to express their love for their country creatively, while improving communication and critical thinking skills. Another program is a discussion on the theme of national history, which is designed to provide a space for dialogue between students and teachers on topics relevant to national values.

These discussions, which are often facilitated by teachers with a participatory approach, allow students to express their views and ask questions related to the history of the nation, the importance of diversity, and their role as the younger generation in maintaining unity. The vice principal emphasized that such discussions not only provide new insights to students, but also encourage them to better appreciate history and their role in building the future of the nation. Observation results show that student enthusiasm for these programs increases when activities are delivered through relevant and interesting media. For example, in history discussions, the use of documentary videos, interactive presentations, and simulations of historical events make students more involved and active in the learning process. These media, which are tailored to the interests and learning styles of digital generation students, provide a more enjoyable and meaningful learning experience. For example, a documentary about the struggle of national heroes combined with interesting animations and narratives can trigger students' curiosity and enthusiasm for learning.

The vice principal noted that these programs also had a positive impact on the formation of students' character. They became more confident in expressing their opinions, had more respect for national symbols, and demonstrated behavior that reflected a sense of love for their country. This impact shows that the communication strategies implemented through school and extracurricular activities are not only effective in conveying moral messages but also in forming attitudes and behaviors that reflect nationalism. The communication strategies implemented by the vice principal through these various programs show the importance of a relevant, creative, and adaptive approach in instilling nationalist values. Although the use of digital media is not yet fully optimal, findings

show that its use can increase student engagement. This supports the research of Purwijayanti & Munir (2021), which found that digital media can improve student achievement and learning motivation. However, challenges such as limited internet access and students' digital literacy are obstacles that need to be overcome.

This approach ensures that character education messages are not only passively received by students but also internalized and manifested in their daily behavior. Homeroom teachers play a strategic role in building strong interpersonal relationships with students, which is an important foundation in character education. Based on the interview results, the role of homeroom teachers is not only limited to administrative supervision, but also as mentors who guide students in internalizing character values. The interpersonal communication approaches used by homeroom teachers include individual counselling and class discussions, which are designed to create an atmosphere that supports the formation of moral values and nationalist attitudes. The interpersonal relationship between teachers and students has been shown to be a key factor in instilling character values. This approach allows for the delivery of messages that are more personal and relevant to students' life experiences, as emphasized by McQuail's (2010) theory on the importance of relevance in mass communication.

Individual counselling is one of the main strategies implemented by homeroom teachers to understand and address the emotional needs and challenges faced by students personally (Frydrychowicz, 2005).

Through this counselling, teachers can detect problems that may hinder the development of student character, such as lack of motivation, awareness of national values, or difficulty in adapting to the school environment. In this session, homeroom teachers use an empathetic approach and open dialogue to provide relevant solutions, while instilling values such as responsibility, discipline, and love for the country. This approach also builds students' trust in the teacher, so that communication is more effective. Class discussions are used as a collective dialogue space to discuss important issues that are relevant to Islamic values and nationalism (Deep et al., 2019). Homeroom teachers often start discussions with themes that attract students' attention, such as the contribution of Islamic figures in the history of the nation's struggle (Normore & Blaylock, 2011). For example, teachers can discuss the role of ulama in raising the spirit of nationalism during the colonial period, which is not only historically relevant but also relevant to the context of the religious values held by students. By using this approach, students are invited to see that Islamic and national values are not two separate things, but rather complement each other in shaping their identity as the young generation of Indonesia.

Homeroom teachers also use contextual and inspiring communication methods to align Islamic values with national pride (Larson, 2000). For example, teachers often relate religious lessons to students' daily lives, such as how the values of hard work, honesty, and mutual cooperation taught in Islam are also important pillars in building the nation. This approach provides students with a deep understanding that practicing their religious values is part of contributing to the progress of the nation. Observations show that this interpersonal approach is effective in creating a classroom environment that is conducive to character learning (Carrasco & Imbiarra, 2018). Personal and dialogical interactions between teachers and students not only build emotional closeness but also motivate students to be more open in accepting the values taught. Homeroom teachers also become role models for students in showing how Islamic and national values can be implemented in daily life.

The results of this study indicate that character education integrated with effective communication strategies can be a powerful tool for building student nationalism. This emphasizes the importance of training for educators in using innovative and adaptive communication techniques to reach young people in the digital era. Furthermore, homeroom teachers often use narrative strategies by telling inspiring stories from the history of Islam in Indonesia. These stories, such as the struggles of scholars and religious figures in uniting society in the past, provide students

with a deeper understanding of the importance of unity and love for their homeland. These stories also serve as a reflection tool for students to understand their role as the younger generation in continuing the struggle. With a personal, dialogical, and inspiring interpersonal approach, homeroom teachers not only act as teachers but also as moral guides who help students internalize character values.

This approach proves that effective character education requires a strong relationship between teachers and students, which is built through interpersonal communication that is full of empathy, relevance, and inspiration. This combination ensures that students not only understand character values conceptually but are also able to apply them in their daily lives. Through effective communication strategies, Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Private Junior High School has succeeded in strengthening students' nationalism values. This study underlines the importance of a holistic approach that combines interpersonal communication, the use of digital media, and the delivery of character values that are relevant to the context of Islam and national diversity.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study confirm that effective communication in character education plays a vital role in shaping students' national identity. By integrating Islamic values with nationalism, educational institutions can foster a generation that is morally upright, socially responsible, and deeply committed to national unity. Through a holistic approach that combines interpersonal communication, digital media, and relevant character education methods, Jabal Noor Integrated Islamic Junior High School provides a compelling model for cultivating strong character and nationalism among students. This research contributes to the existing literature by offering empirical insights into the intersection of religious education and civic values, specifically within the context of Islamic schooling in Indonesia. It addresses the gap concerning how tailored communication strategies can be systematically applied to enhance national identity in diverse educational settings. Furthermore, the findings have potential policy implications, especially for curriculum developers and educational policymakers seeking to strengthen civic education frameworks. Integrating effective communication as a core pedagogical element in character education programs may serve as a strategic approach to fostering nationalism among Indonesian youth in the digital era. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to assess the sustained impact of these strategies on students' national consciousness and civic engagement.

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