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Evaluation of Civics Learning in Building Character of Elementary School Students: A Study in the Context of the Independent Curriculum

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of artificial intelligence (AI)-based learning media in improving students' understanding, reasoning, and communication in Citizenship Education (PKn) learning in Elementary Schools or Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The main problem faced is how the use of this technology can support the development of students' character and strengthen understanding of citizenship values. The research method used is a qualitative approach with a case study at MI Asy-Syafi'iyah Kendari. Data were collected through observation, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation analysis. The data analysis technique used the NVivo application to identify patterns and themes that emerged from qualitative data. The results of the study showed that AI-based media were effective in improving understanding of PKn teaching materials, as well as helping students develop verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Another significant impact is the improvement in the quality, creativity, and collaborative attitudes of students. This study confirms that the integration of technology in learning can strengthen students' character and deepen citizenship literacy, but also identifies challenges related to teacher skills and equal access to technology. Recommendations for this study include the importance of teacher training and increasing access to technology across regions.

Keywords: *AI-Based Learning, Civic Education, Independent Curriculum.*

PRELIMINARY

Civics Education (PKn) plays a strategic role in shaping the character and civic identity of students from an early age. In the context of Indonesia as a multicultural, democratic country, Civics learning at the Elementary School/Islamic Elementary School (SD/MI) level serves as the initial foundation for instilling the values of Pancasila, democracy, tolerance, and awareness of the rights and obligations of citizens (Assingkily, et.al., 2023). Dynamic social change, technological disruption, and the increasing tendency of intolerance and disinformation require a Civics learning approach that is not only cognitive but also touches the affective and psychomotor domains holistically. In this regard, Civics learning is required to not only teach "what citizenship is" but also how to be a good and responsible citizen (Anatasya, & Dewi, 2021).

In response to these challenges, the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) emerged as a national education policy initiative that encourages the transformation of learning toward a more contextual, participatory, and student-centered approach. One key aspect of this curriculum is strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, which encompasses six character dimensions: faith and piety, global diversity, independence, mutual cooperation, critical thinking, and creativity. However, the implementation of this curriculum in the context of Civics (PKn) learning in elementary schools (SD/MI)

still faces various challenges, particularly in terms of the effectiveness of learning strategies, the relevance of media and learning resources, and the measurability of student character development. This underscores the importance of comprehensive evaluation of Civics (PKn) learning as part of efforts to strengthen student character within the Independent Curriculum policy framework (Rahayu et al., 2022).

Although Civics Education (PKn) has been normatively integrated into the national curriculum and recognized as important in shaping students' character, its teaching practices at the Elementary School/Islamic Elementary School (SD/MI) level do not fully reflect this idealism (Assingkily, 2021). Civics learning is often trapped in a textual and memorization-oriented approach, thus neglecting the development of critical thinking skills, ethical decision-making, and active participation in everyday life. This results in weak internalization of civic values in students' actual behavior, such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, and awareness of diversity and social responsibility (Mardiati, 2020).

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which upholds the principles of differentiation, project-based learning, and strengthening Pancasila student profiles, has not been fully internalized in Civics (PKn) learning practices in schools. Teachers tend to face challenges in adapting contextual and meaningful learning strategies and in developing assessments that can authentically measure student character. This situation indicates a gap between curriculum policy and the reality of its implementation in the field, and raises critical questions about the extent to which current Civics learning is truly capable of supporting the formation of students' character as democratic, reflective, and ethical citizens (Mulyasa, 2023).

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Civic Education (PKn) learning in shaping the character of Elementary School/Islamic Elementary School (SD/MI) students within the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The main focus of the evaluation is directed at the extent to which learning strategies, teachers' pedagogical approaches, and the media and learning resources used are able to internalize civic values in students' lives. This assessment covers not only cognitive aspects, but also affective and psychomotor dimensions directly related to the formation of Pancasila student profiles, particularly in terms of critical thinking, mutual cooperation, and global diversity (Latip, 2018).

Using a comprehensive evaluative approach, this research is expected to produce empirical findings relevant to improving the quality of Civics learning at the elementary school level. Furthermore, this research aims to provide practical recommendations for teachers, principals, and education policymakers in developing more effective and transformative Civics learning models. More broadly, this research aims to contribute to strengthening character education as the core of developing democratic and moral citizens in Indonesia (Magdalena, 2020).

Although numerous studies have been conducted on Civics (PKn) instruction in elementary schools, most of these studies tend to focus solely on cognitive aspects, such as material mastery or students' level of understanding of civics concepts. Meanwhile, studies that comprehensively evaluate Civics instruction in terms of the effectiveness of methods, media, and its contribution to student character development are still limited. Furthermore, in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes strengthening the character and profile of Pancasila students, there is limited research that investigates the direct relationship between Civics instructional strategies and the achievement of students' character dimensions in a measurable and in-depth manner (Harlina & Wardarita, 2020).

Furthermore, studies that place the context of madrasas or Islamic educational institutions as the locus of Civics research are still relatively rare. Yet, the Islamic educational environment possesses unique complexities and dynamics in integrating Islamic values with national values. This leaves a significant gap in the academic literature, particularly in understanding how Civics learning can be designed to simultaneously harmonize religious and democratic values. Therefore, this research occupies a strategic position to fill this gap by providing conceptual and empirical contributions to the discourse on evaluating character-based Civics learning within the Merdeka Curriculum framework (Lestari & Ain, 2022).

This study offers novelty by presenting a comprehensive evaluative approach to Civic Education (PKn) learning, which focuses not only on the transfer of knowledge but also on the extent to which such learning can shape students' character as an integral part of national education goals. Within the context of the Independent Curriculum, which prioritizes strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, this study assesses the achievement of character dimensions such as mutual cooperation, global diversity, and critical

reasoning as key indicators of the effectiveness of PKn learning (Anshori, 2017). This approach has been relatively unexplored in previous studies, which tend to be descriptive or limited to teacher and student perceptions (Ramadhan, et.al., 2021).

Furthermore, this research takes place in an Islamic educational institution—a madrasah—which faces unique challenges in synergizing religious values with the principles of inclusive and democratic citizenship. This context enriches the academic nuances while broadening the scope of the study's theoretical and practical contributions, as it places character education within a more complex spectrum and is relevant to Indonesian social realities. Thus, this research not only provides an empirical overview of civics learning practices but also proposes a conceptual model that can be adapted for character building in the primary education system, particularly in Islamic educational institutions.

METHOD

Types and Approaches of Research

This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive-analytical approach. This type of research was chosen because the primary objective of the study is to deeply understand the processes, dynamics, and meanings behind the implementation of Civics (PKn) learning in shaping student character at the elementary school level. The qualitative approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the social and pedagogical context and facilitates data collection that is contextual, reflective, and interpretive.

Research Location

The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Asy-Syafi'iyah, located in Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi. This location was chosen based on the consideration that MI Asy-Syafi'iyah is an Islamic educational institution that actively implements the Independent Curriculum and demonstrates a high level of attention to character education and national values in its learning process. The madrasah context is considered important because of its unique ability to synergize Islamic and national values in civics learning.

Research Informants

The informants in this study were determined through purposive sampling techniques, with certain criteria relevant to the study objectives. The main informants consisted of: (1) Civics subject teachers, who understand the strategies and implementation of learning directly. (2) Fifth and sixth grade students, who have participated in Civics learning based on the Independent Curriculum. (3) Madrasah principals, who play a role in academic policy and supervision. (4) Parents of students, as parties who can provide perspectives on the development of children's character outside the school environment. The number of informants was adjusted to the principle of data saturation, namely when the information obtained no longer shows significant variations or the addition of new meanings to the theme being studied.

Data collection technique

Data were collected through several techniques, namely: (1) In-depth interviews: Conducted in a semi-structured manner to allow for flexible yet focused exploration of information. Interviews focused on the informants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections related to Civics learning and its influence on student character formation (Assingkily, 2021). (2) Participatory observation: Conducted during the learning process to observe teaching strategies, teacher-student interactions, the use of learning media, and student responses to learning activities. (3) Documentation study: Includes analysis of the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), student learning outcome records, character portfolios, and other supporting documents. All primary data, including interview and observation results, were documented in the form of transcripts and field notes, and recorded for further analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using the NVivo 14 Plus application, which allows for systematic, coding-based management of qualitative data. The analysis process includes the following steps: (1) Transcribing and importing data into NVivo. (2) Open coding, which is the identification of initial themes based on

phrases, expressions, or narratives that appear dominantly in the data. (3) Axial coding, which is the grouping of themes into larger, interrelated categories, such as learning strategies, developed character values, and student perceptions. (4) Selective coding, which is the synthesis and drawing conclusions regarding thematic patterns that are conceptually and contextually meaningful. (5) The use of NVivo allows for the visualization of relationships between themes, word frequency analysis, word clouds, and thematic models that can strengthen the validity of the interpretation of research results.

Data Validity Test

The validity of the data was tested through several strategies, namely: (1) Source triangulation, by comparing data obtained from teachers, students, madrasah principals, and parents. (2) Technical triangulation, by combining the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to confirm data consistency. (3) Member check, carried out by asking for clarification or reconfirmation from informants regarding the results of the researcher's initial interpretation. (4) Audit trail, namely documentation of the entire research process in a transparent and systematic manner, so that the analysis process can be traced and evaluated critically by other parties. These strategies are used to ensure the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the data produced, in accordance with the principles of validity in qualitative research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

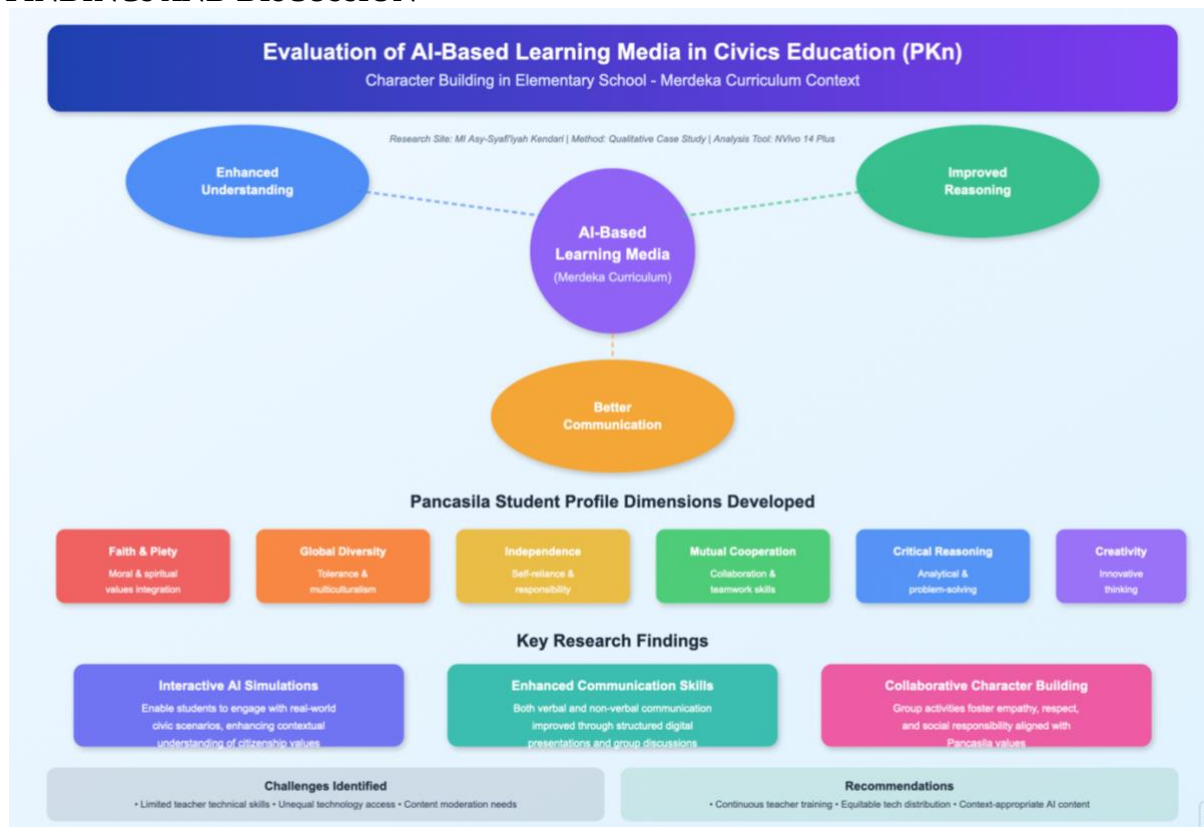


Figure 1. Evaluation of AI-Based Learning Media in Civics Education

Interpretation of Analysis Results

The results of this research analysis provide significant insights into the effectiveness of AI-based learning media in improving elementary school students' understanding, reasoning, and communication, particularly in the context of Civics (PKn) learning implemented within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. Based on data analysis obtained through NVivo 14 Plus, it was found that the use of AI-based learning technology has a substantial positive impact on students' character development, particularly in terms of critical thinking, collaboration, and communicating their ideas both verbally and nonverbally.

One of the most striking key findings is how AI-based media enables students to understand civics learning materials in a more interactive and comprehensive manner. Through the use of various AI applications, students not only gain faster access to information but are also given the opportunity to participate in simulations that reflect real-life civics, such as discussions on social, political, and economic issues. This finding aligns with Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in individual learning and development. In this regard, AI-based media enables students to interact in a broader context, enriching their experiences through activities based on real-life problems and providing opportunities for collaborative learning (Suparlan, 2019).

Thematic analysis using NVivo showed that the use of AI applications, such as interactive simulations and AI-based quizzes, had a direct impact on students' understanding of civics concepts. One clear example of this was the students' improved ability to communicate their ideas. Previously, in traditional learning models, students often struggled to verbally express their understanding, let alone connect it to complex civic values. However, with the introduction of AI, they were given a platform to hone their communication skills, both verbally and in writing. This demonstrates that technology-based learning not only improves students' knowledge but also their ability to articulate ideas more clearly and structuredly, a crucial aspect of character education.

Furthermore, the analysis showed significant improvements in student collaboration. In AI-based simulations, students were asked to work in groups to solve various challenges related to civic values, such as tolerance, diversity, and social awareness. Data analysis showed that students involved in these activities not only improved their ability to work collaboratively but also demonstrated improvements in mutual respect and sharing ideas. This aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum component, which emphasizes the importance of developing social and emotional competencies as part of shaping the Pancasila student profile. The ability to work in teams and demonstrate empathy for others is integral to more holistic civic learning.

However, despite these positive findings, challenges related to implementing AI media in civics learning remain. Data analysis shows that not all teachers at MI Asy-Syafi'iyah Kendari have sufficient skills to utilize this technology optimally. Some teachers still find it difficult to integrate technology into their curriculum, particularly in adapting teaching materials to suit student needs and the local context. This is a crucial concern because the success of AI-based learning depends heavily on the extent to which teachers can effectively manage the technology. Therefore, while the technology has great potential, training and professional development for teachers are key to maximizing the effectiveness of technology-based learning.

Furthermore, the use of AI in civics learning also demonstrates differences in student responses, depending on their background, both in terms of technological access and their initial understanding of the material. NVivo analysis identified that students with easier access to technological devices and familiarity with digital applications adapted more quickly to AI-based learning methods. Conversely, students with less experience with digital technology tended to struggle initially. This highlights the need for equitable access to technology and more equitable support for all students to maximize the outcomes of this technology-based learning.

In relation to student character development, the analysis also shows that AI-based media not only enhances understanding of the material but also plays a role in strengthening civic values. Through interactions in simulations involving social, political, and economic scenarios, students are given the opportunity to develop critical attitudes towards global issues such as public policy, human rights, and cultural diversity. AI-based learning integrated with discussions of these social issues can foster students' civic awareness from an early age, introducing them to the importance of democratic values, human rights, and active participation in national and state life (Ratnaningrum et al., 2023).

Overall, the results of this study indicate that AI-based learning media plays a significant role in improving the quality of civics learning, particularly in enhancing student understanding, communication, and collaboration. This technology enables students to not only learn about civic values theoretically but also apply them in real-life scenarios that closely resemble their everyday experiences. Therefore, this AI-based learning is highly relevant to the objectives of the Independent Curriculum, which prioritizes more contextual, creative education, and is based on the Pancasila-based student profile.

Impact on Theory and Practice

This research makes a significant contribution to character learning theory, particularly in civics education, by demonstrating that the use of AI-based learning media can optimize students' understanding and skill development in the context of elementary education. Theoretically, these findings support and extend the perspective of social constructivism theory (Vygotsky), which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning and character development. AI-based media, in the context of this research, acts as a mediator that facilitates students' interactions with the learning materials in a more dynamic and contextual way. This enriches the learning experience, allowing students to learn through simulation and collaboration, leading to a deeper understanding of civic values.

Furthermore, these findings provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of technology in strengthening the affective and psychomotor dimensions of learning. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes the development of Pancasila student profiles, the results of this study indicate that AI-based media not only focuses on achieving academic competencies but also provides space for students to develop essential character attitudes, such as social responsibility, collaboration, and respect for diversity. From a practical perspective, this research provides important insights for educators on how technology can be used to create more inclusive and participatory learning, supporting a more holistic character development of students. The implementation of AI-based media in Civics learning can be an effective alternative to improve the quality of learning in elementary schools, particularly in facilitating the development of students' character and social competence. With these steps, the use of AI-based media in elementary education is expected to be optimized to build better student character and create more inclusive learning based on national values (Mesra et al., 2023).

However, while the results of this study demonstrate the enormous potential of AI media in character education, significant challenges remain in its implementation in the field. One of the main challenges faced is the lack of technical skills among teachers in managing and utilizing this technology effectively. Therefore, this study also emphasizes the importance of training and professional development for teachers so they can optimally integrate technology into civics learning. In this regard, there is an urgent need to strengthen technology-based teaching capacity through ongoing training programs that encompass not only the use of technological tools but also pedagogical strategies that support student character development through technology.

Social and Ethical Implications: Civic Literacy in Elementary Education

This research also has important social implications, particularly regarding civic literacy in elementary school students. The findings suggest that AI-based learning media can be an effective tool for introducing and developing civic literacy from an early age. Through the use of interactive digital applications that promote the values of nationalism, tolerance, and diversity, students are given the opportunity to understand and internalize these values in the context of their daily lives. AI-based learning allows students to engage in simulations that reflect current social and political issues, so they learn about civics not only as a theoretical concept but also as part of their daily practice.

Furthermore, AI-based learning provides students with a deeper understanding of the importance of active participation in society, a key component of the Pancasila student profile. By engaging in technology-based discussions and collaborations, students develop an awareness of their rights and obligations as citizens and appreciate the diversity within society. Therefore, the use of this technology plays a crucial role in fostering a caring attitude toward the community and social environment around them. Through AI-based media, students also learn to be more critical of the information they receive and develop critical thinking skills and be responsible in their use of technology.

However, on the other hand, there are ethical implications that need to be considered regarding the use of technology in education. One key ethical issue is how to ensure that the content used in AI-based learning aligns with the national and religious values embraced in Indonesia. In the context of madrasas, which have strong Islamic values, it is crucial to ensure that the digital applications used do not contain content that could undermine morality or deviate from upheld religious values. Therefore, monitoring and moderation of digital content are crucial in ensuring that learning remains within a framework that aligns with national education goals (Sugiono, 2020).

Furthermore, attention needs to be paid to the gap in technology access among students. While technology offers various benefits, its successful implementation depends heavily on students' access to the necessary devices and networks. This study found significant differences in students' responses to AI-based learning, depending on their technological background. Students with better access to devices and internet networks tended to adapt more quickly to AI-based learning, while students from families with limited access to technology struggled. This poses a social challenge in terms of equitable access to educational technology, which needs to be addressed by parties involved in the development and implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Akbar & Noviani, 2019).

Overall, the findings of this study underscore that while technology can bring positive changes to learning, its implementation must consider various social and ethical factors. While AI-based learning media can significantly impact students' civic literacy, it also requires careful monitoring to ensure that the learning provided aligns with prevailing social, cultural, and religious values. With the right approach, technology can be a highly effective tool in supporting the development of character and civic literacy in elementary school students.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of AI-based learning media in improving elementary school students' understanding, reasoning, and communication skills in the context of Civics (PKn) learning implemented in the Independent Curriculum. Based on the results of the analysis using the NVivo application, the research findings indicate that the use of AI-based media has a significant impact on improving the quality of learning and student character. Specifically, this technology has succeeded in strengthening students' abilities in understanding Civics teaching materials, improving verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and encouraging the development of collaborative and empathetic attitudes among students. The use of AI-based interactive media, such as simulations and quizzes, allows students to engage in more contextual and participatory learning, which aligns with the objectives of the Independent Curriculum.

The implications of this research's findings are significant both in the context of educational theory and in the practice of learning in the field. Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the view that learning technology can be a catalyst in the development of students' social, emotional, and cognitive competencies. This supports the theory of social constructivism, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning, as well as the theory of problem-based learning, which demonstrates how technology can be used to present real-world scenarios in learning. Practically, the results of this study indicate that the integration of AI-based media in Civics learning can enhance students' understanding of civic values and strengthen their character, such as attitudes of social responsibility and cooperation. Thus, the use of AI can be an effective solution in improving the quality of basic education that focuses on character development and civic competence.

However, this study also identified several challenges and limitations that require attention. One is the lack of teacher skills in maximizing the use of learning technology, which is a major obstacle to the effective implementation of AI in the classroom. Furthermore, differences in access to technology among students, particularly in areas with limited infrastructure, can impact the equity of learning outcomes. Therefore, ongoing teacher training and equitable access to technology are crucial aspects that must be considered in implementing AI-based media in civics learning.

Based on these findings and implications, several recommendations can be made for further research and educational practice. First, the development of more intensive and focused training programs for teachers on integrating AI-based learning technologies into the learning process, particularly in the context of civics education. Second, efforts are needed to increase technology access for students in areas with limited infrastructure, through collaboration between the government, schools, and communities to provide adequate devices. Third, further research can be conducted to explore the long-term impact of technology use on character development and civic literacy, and to identify best practices in integrating technology across various educational contexts.

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