

MONTESORI APPROACH IN CHARACTER EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

Character education is an effort to form good values imprinted in a person and manifested in the form of behavior so they can distinguish themselves from others. This character education aims to form a strong and noble human being. All educational institutions realize how important the development of character education is for students in their institutions. However, the process of character education has not been fully able to run effectively in all educational institutions because schools emphasize more on increasing students' cognitive abilities. This study aimed to obtain an overview of the extent to which teachers understand the importance of character education in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and the Montessori Method in shaping the character of students. This study is quantitative with a descriptive approach. The sample in this study was ECE teachers in Panongan Sub-district, Tangerang Regency, totaling 112 people. The selection of samples was done using the Simple Random Sampling method. The instrument used was a survey distributed to respondents via Google form. The results of the study indicate that ECE teachers have understood the importance of character education and the Montessori Method which is integrated into 6 aspects of early childhood development through a character education process that is provided continuously at every level.

Keywords: Character Education, Montessori Method, Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Education (ECE) Teacher

INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in developing the potential of students to have life skills and broad insight. Education aims to be able to produce a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also morally intelligent. The Ministry of Education since 2010 has determined that every school must be able to instill and apply the values of the nation's character to its students. Instilling character values into students should be done from an early age, namely by laying the foundations of personality that will make students strong individuals when they become adults. This is in accordance with Rosyadi (2013) who states that one's attitudes and behavior are essentially formed from an early age. Early age is a phase of life where one experiences a significant increase in their development, which includes religious and moral values, social-emotional,

cognitive, language, physical motoric and art (Koesoema, 2018). So an early age is a right time to build character because at this time children are experiencing a process of extraordinary growth and development. Children are born into the world with all the potential (intelligence) given by God, but these potentials will not develop and appear optimally if they are not stimulated from an early age (Sudaryanti, 2010). Children in their early childhood do not have many negative influences from the outside, or the environment so parents and educators will find it much easier to direct and guide them, especially in instilling character education values.

Character education is an effort to realize the character formation of students or the nation's generation of noble character. Therefore, character education should be applied from an early age because it can lead children to mature

in processing their emotions. Mulyasa (2012) argues that character education for children in their early childhood has a higher meaning than moral education because it is not only related to the problem of right - wrong but also the way to instill habits about various good behaviors in life so that children have awareness and commitment to apply virtue in daily life.

Early childhood education is one of the efforts to stimulate the various potentials of children so they can develop optimally. The National Education System Law of 2003 states that early childhood education is a teaching effort aimed at children from birth to age six which is carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to help physical and spiritual growth and development so that children have the readiness to enter further education. Early childhood education is an education in achieving the optimization of all aspects of development, both physical and psychological development which includes intellectual, language, motor and social-emotional development (Yulianti, 2010:7).

In the development of character education in ECE, there are 4 (four) main principles. The four main principles, namely 1) Sustainable, meaning that the development of character education in educational institutions must be carried out continuously at every level; 2) Through all subjects/all aspects of development in ECE, self-development and school culture; 3) Value development, meaning that the developed values are not assessed like ordinary teaching materials; and 4) The educational process is carried out by students in an active and fun way.

Maria Montessori is one of the leaders of Early Childhood Education. Maria Montessori is known for her learning method that focuses on students and their environment. The Montessori Method views children as the center and adults as facilitators. There are five basic principles in the Montessori Method, namely 1) The principle of freedom (concept of freedom); 2) The principle of structure and order; 3) The principle of realistic and natural; 4) The principle of comfort; 5) The principle of concentration (Montessori, 2015).

In Montessori learning there are five areas that students must explore, namely (1) Practical Life; (2) Sensory; (3) Culture; (4) Languages; and (5) Mathematics. In the Practical Life learning area,

students will be given direct experience so they can grow to become independent individuals and not depend on others. Students are trained to complete daily tasks without the help of the teacher. According to Gerald (in Rantina, 2015: 186), practical skills include a series of activities designed to develop children's independence. In the Culture learning area, students are trained to understand manners, structures and orders, culture, kindness in a cultural context and ask for apologies and forgive, say thank you and so on. Learning methods that emphasize aspects of culture, structures and orders and morality will greatly determine one's success in the future.

The Montessori Method in schools emphasizes the importance of adjusting the learning environment of students to their level of development so students are better able to absorb the knowledge provided in a method that is fun for them. In addition, the Montessori Method emphasizes independence, freedom with certain limitations as well as respects the development of children as unique individuals.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aimed to obtain an overview of the extent to which teachers understand the Montessori Method and its relation to forming the character of students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is quantitative with a descriptive approach. This study aimed to obtain an overview of the problems of character education experienced by teachers in ECE institutions and the need for new methods to respond to these problems. Therefore, this study covered 2 (two) variables, namely Character Education and the Montessori Method. This study used a survey distributed to 112 respondents. The instrument was an attitude scale measured using a Likert scale with a range of 1-5 (ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)). The respondents are representatives of ECE teachers in the Panongan sub-district, Banten. The survey was conducted online using Google form (G-form) considering that it was not possible to hold a meeting in person because the Implementation of Restrictions on Social Activities was being

conducted due to the pandemic. The survey took place for 3 weeks in August 2021.

Before the study took place, the instrument was tested for the validity and reliability of the instrument. The instrument try-out was conducted on 35 respondents consisting of ECE teachers from several schools in Panongan sub-district. From the results of the validity test on the character education variable, 21 valid items were obtained from 23 items, after 3 rounds of validity testing were carried out. The level of reliability of the character education variable instrument has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.751. Meanwhile, for the Montessori Method variable, 13 valid items were obtained from 14 items—and the level of reliability has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.765. From these results, it can be concluded that the instruments for the two variables have met the level of validity and reliability.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of this study include quantitative data about the general description of teachers' understanding of the responsibilities of character education, the implementation of character education in the teachers' current schools, character education as continuing education, the use of the Montessori Method in early childhood education, the implementation of the Montessori Method in Curriculum 2013 and limitations of the use of the Montessori Method.

a) Teachers' Understanding of the Responsibilities of Character Education

Teachers' understanding of character education is a manifestation of the four competencies that teachers must possess. The results of a survey on teachers' understanding of the responsibilities of character education are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Understanding of Character Education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	2	1.8	1.8
	4	48	42.9	42.9
	5	62	55.4	100.0
Total	112	100.0	100.0	

Based on Table 1, it is shown data that most of the teachers agree that they have understood about character education in ECE. This proves that the importance of character education from an early age is well understood by ECE teachers. This result also proves that the government program proclaiming the urgency of character education in schools has been understood by the teachers.

The teachers claim to have understood the aims and objectives of character education. They understand that the purpose of character education besides instilling moral values and forming a superior personality, is also improving student discipline and achievement. This understanding is in line with the opinion of experts, who among others state that there is a positive correlation between the cultivation of

positive values and discipline (Osher et al., 2010), which can also increase the students' attendance in school (Taylor et al., 1999). Some respondents in this study qualitatively admitted to feeling the difference between before and after applying a character education program, such as children being more enthusiastic in following lessons, having respect for teachers which eventually lead to changes to a more comfortable classroom atmosphere. Character education that is instilled correctly with the right method can build high character and moral values. This is confirmed by Cooley (2008) that character values can be learned and taught through appropriate pedagogy. Furthermore, Pike (2010) and Skaggs & Bodenhor (2006) describe that the effect of instilling character values can improve personal qualities such as being a person that is trustworthy; having

integrity, high-spirited, tough, persistent, respecting each other, fair and responsible.

b) Implementation of Character Education in Schools

The implementation of character education in schools aims to enable students to be able to

independently improve and use their knowledge, examine and internalize and personalize character value and noble character so that they are manifested in daily behavior. The results of the survey related to the implementation of character education in schools are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Implementation of Character Education in Schools

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	3	2.7	2.7
	3	15	13.4	13.4
	4	53	47.3	63.4
	5	41	36.6	100.0
	Total	112	100.0	100.0

Based on Table 2, it is shown data that some schools are still unable to carry out character education optimally. This can be seen from the attitude statement of a small number of teachers (16.1%) who state that they do not agree that the implementation of character education in their current schools has been going well.

mature in processing their emotions. This is an effort to help children to develop optimally. (Yulianti, 2010:7) Early childhood education is an education in achieving the optimization of all aspects of development, both physical and psychological development which includes intellectual, language, motor and social-emotional development.

c) Character education as continuous learning

c.1. The importance of character education from an early age

The implementation of character education from an early age will be able to lead children to

Table 3. The Importance of Character Education from an Early Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	.9	.9
	4	7	6.3	6.3
	5	104	92.9	92.9
	Total	112	100.0	100.0

Based on Table 3, it is shown data that almost all teachers agree that character education is important to be instilled from an early age. This is in line with the opinion that attitudes, habits and behaviors that are formed in the early years of a child's life will determine how far he or she manages to adjust to life as an adult (Rosyadi, 2013). If the child's character has been formed at an early age, it will have an effect on the appreciation and practice of the character throughout his life (Zubaedi, 2017).

c.2. Character Education in ECE Must be Given According to Age Level

In instilling character education values, Ki Hajar Dewantara has goals and objectives and tries to

provide advice, suggestions and materials that can lead students to do good and form good character and personalities as well (Mareta, 2017). In addition, Ki Hajar Dewantara also said that character education materials should be in accordance with the age level of children's development by using the understanding, feeling and acting methods (Mareta, 2017). From the survey results, it is found that teachers agree that character education in ECE should be given according to age level.

Table 4. Character Education in ECE Should be Given According to Age Level

	Frequ ency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	6	5.4	5.4
	4	24	21.4	21.4
	5	82	73.2	100.0
Total	112	100.0	100.0	

Based on Table 4, it is obtained data indicating that most teachers agree that character education in ECE should be given according to the age level of students. This is in accordance with the teaching and learning process that must be adapted to the task of child development. The implication is that there must be a difference in

the way of teaching and the depth of material between Kindergarten A and Kindergarten B. Furthermore, the results also show the teacher's perception of sustainable character education as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Character Education in ECE Must be Carried Out Continuously from Kindergarten A to Kindergarten B

	Frequ ency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	.9	.9
	4	7	6.3	6.3
	5	104	92.9	92.9
Total	112	100.0	100.0	Total

Based on Table 5, it is shown data that almost all teachers agree that character education must be carried out continuously from the lowest to the

highest level. In the context of ECE, the development of values carried out in

Kindergarten A must continue to Kindergarten B.

d) The Use of the Montessori Method in Character Education in Early Childhood Education

Table 6. The Montessori Method is Appropriate for Character Education Learning in ECE

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	.9	.9
	3	19	17.0	17.0
	4	46	41.1	41.1
	5	46	41.1	100.0
	Total	112	100.0	100.0

Based on Table 6, it is shown data that more than 80% of teachers agree that the Montessori Method is appropriate for character education

learning in ECE. However, according to the respondents, the Montessori curriculum needs to be modified to suit character education.

Table 7.Character Education Emphasizes Practice or Learning from Real Experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	.9	.9
	2	2	1.8	1.8
	3	18	16.1	16.1
	4	45	40.2	40.2
	5	46	41.1	41.1
Total		112	100.0	100.0

Based on Table 7, it is shown data that the teachers agree that character education should emphasize more on practice or learning from real experience. This is what often creates a dilemma in the teaching and learning process in Indonesia because there are still teachers who

teach moral values through theory rather than practicing directly to students.

e) The Implementation of the Montessori Method in Curriculum 2013 for ECE

Table 8. The Montessori Method Focuses on Reality rather than Stories

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2	1.8	1.8

3	17	15.2	15.2	3
4	43	38.4	38.4	4
5	50	44.6	44.6	5
Total	112	100.0	100.0	Total

Based on Table 8, it is shown data that the Montessori Method is seen as more focused on reality than stories. In other words, in the Montessori Method, students are given the opportunity to experience real events in a well-controlled learning environment and not just listen to stories or look at pictures. For example, when children learn to pour water into a glass or cup, the children directly practice doing that and not just look at pictures or videos or not just

listen to the teacher's explanation. When children learn about the meaning of discipline and respect for the rights of others, children will be taught how to queue to enter class, or even queue when going to an elevator or public transportation. This experience is very meaningful for children in Montessori Method-based learning.

Table 9. The Teacher Acts as a Facilitator

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	9	8.0	8.0
	4	31	27.7	27.7
	5	72	64.3	100.0
Total	112	100.0	100.0	

Table 10. Student-Oriented Character Education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	.9	.9
	2	3	2.7	2.7
	3	6	5.4	5.4
	4	40	35.7	35.7
	5	62	55.4	55.4
Total	112	100.0	100.0	

Table 11. The Learning Process in Character Education is Carried Out Actively and Enjoyably for Students

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	7	6.3	6.3

4	33	29.5	29.5	35.7
5	72	64.3	64.3	100.0
Total	112	100.0	100.0	

Table 12. Students are Given the Freedom to Explore Experiences

	Frequ ency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	2	1.8	1.8
	4	24	21.4	21.4
	5	86	76.8	100.0
Total	112	100.0	100.0	

Based on Table 9 to Table 12, the data show that the teachers understand well that the process of the development of character education for students must be carried out actively and enjoyably (in a fun way). The teaching and learning process is student-oriented so the teacher acts as a facilitator. In the student-oriented teaching and learning process of

education, it is hoped that students will learn more independently, be more active and have fun because it is more in line with what students want. Besides, students are also given the freedom to explore experiences so that an independent learning process occurs.

Table 13. The Montessori Method is Suitable for Use in Curriculum 2013

	Frequ ency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	.9	.9
	3	12	10.7	10.7
	4	56	50.0	50.0
	5	43	38.4	38.4
Total	112	100.0	100.0	

Based on Table 13, it is shown data that more than 88% of teachers agree that the Montessori Method is suitable for use in Curriculum 2013. This is in line with the expected learning principle in Curriculum 2013 that learning is student-centered. This principle has finally

pushed the concept of independent learning launched by the current Minister of Education and Culture.

Table 14. The Montessori Method Emphasizes Games as a Way of Learning

	Frequ ency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

	2	1	.9	.9	.9
	3	10	8.9	8.9	9.8
Valid	4	49	43.8	43.8	53.6
	5	52	46.4	46.4	100.0
	Total	112	100.0	100.0	

Based on Table 14, it is shown data that almost all teachers agree that the Montessori Method emphasizes games or joint activities as a way of learning. This is in line with the principle of

learning in ECE which reads “learning through playing.”

Table 15. The Montessori Method is Easy to Use

	Frequ ency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1	1	.9	.9
	2	2	1.8	1.8
Valid	3	18	16.1	16.1
	4	57	50.9	50.9
	5	34	30.4	30.4
	Total	112	100.0	100.0

Based on Table 15, the data show that the teachers seem to have quite diverse opinions about the ease of teaching students using the Montessori Method. Although the majority of teachers agree that the Montessori Method is easy to use, there are still more than 17% of teachers who think that the Montessori Method is still difficult to use. This implies that schools

that want to use the Montessori Method must increase their training for teachers so that they can run it optimally.

f) Limitations in the implementation of the Montessori Method

Table 16. The Montessori Method Requires Expensive Media

	Frequ ency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1	14	12.5	12.5
	2	23	20.5	20.5
Valid	3	44	39.3	39.3
	4	15	13.4	13.4
	5	16	14.3	14.3
	Total	112	100.0	100.0

Table 17. The Montessori Method Prioritizes Skills over the Mastery of Moral Values

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	10	8.9	8.9
	2	16	14.3	23.2
	3	46	41.1	64.3
	4	28	25.0	89.3
	5	12	10.7	100.0
	Total	112	100.0	100.0

Based on Table 16 and Table 17, the data show that the teachers' opinions about the concerns or limitations of the Montessori Method when it is implemented to character education learning. Based on the results of the study, it is obtained data that most of the teachers do not agree that the Montessori Method is considered to require expensive teaching media (table 16) and only prioritize the mastery of skills over the formation of moral values.

DISCUSSION

Character education is an educational effort in an effort to develop the personality of students to be good. This makes character education one of the pillars of the formation of Indonesian people who are tough and have noble character. The importance of the development of character education for students is also recognized by all educational institutions. However, character education has not been fully effective in all educational institutions. In practice, character education is still constrained by many factors, such as inadequate teacher understanding of how the implementation of real character education, a learning process that is still theory-oriented and an emphasis on academic competence rather than student character development.

Character education in ECE is the responsibility of all teachers. Therefore, the formation and development of children's character in their early childhood must also be by the teacher. This shows that teachers play a dominant role in teaching national character education. Without

exception, all teachers must make themselves authoritative role models for their students.

In implementing the principles of the development of character education, teachers must first master and understand character education, so the character education learning process takes place effectively. Continuous character education indicates that the development of values that have been obtained by students at the initial level of education must be continued to the next levels of education.

Character education cannot be separated from aspects of self-development in the ECE curriculum. Therefore, character education is not given specifically but has been integrated into every teaching and learning process in ECE. In addition, moral values are not taught like other subjects or learning. In other words, values are not taught but developed so they cannot become ordinary teaching materials that can be immediately assessed and evaluated at the end of the lesson.

Principles of the development of character education, one of which is that the character education learning process must be carried out actively by students and in a fun/joyful environment. One of the efforts that can be done is by implementing student-centered learning so students will get the freedom to explore, including exploring their life experiences and providing learning media in which the learning process is realistic and contextual. One example of a learning method that adheres to the principles of "student-centered learning", "independent learning" and "contextual learning" is the Montessori Method.

The Montessori Method really upholds freedom, namely the freedom of a child to carry out, choose and explore their own learning by utilizing objects and the surrounding environment as a supporter of the learning process. Through a series of activities that are carried out by themselves and obtained according to their developmental phase with the help of adults (teachers) who give them the freedom to explore each of their developments, it will be able to create children in their early childhood who are independent, disciplined, responsible and love the environment, cleanliness and beauty as well as make them be brave and tough in the learning process or in everyday life and so on.

In Curriculum 2013, it is emphasized that there is an increase and balance between soft skills and hard skills which include aspects of attitude, skills and knowledge competencies. The Montessori Method also emphasizes the same thing, namely the achievement of soft skills and hard skills in learning. Through Curriculum 2013, it is reflected attitudes that can be directly proportional to the skills acquired by students so these attitudes and skills will be able to prepare students to have the ability to live as individuals and citizens who are faithful, productive, creative and innovative and can contribute to social life. Furthermore, this is in accordance with the five objectives of Curriculum 2013 (Fadillah, 2014:25).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that teachers have understood the importance of character education that is integrated into 6 aspects of development at the ECE level. The Montessori Method can be used as an alternative in character education learning in Curriculum 2013, given that the Montessori Method is student-centered and provides real experience to students. The formation and development of moral values are carried out through playing while learning activities so that the learning process takes place in a fun way for students. The process of character education needs to be provided continuously at every level.

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