



## Integrating Character-based Thematic Learning Activities to Promote Early Child' Character Acquisition

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### Abstrak

*The important role of character education in the child's psychological development is continually promoted as early as possible. By integrating the characters in accordance with the varied learning materials, the role of children in acquiring the character's values will be much better promoted. Integrating character-based thematic learning activities is one of the models in providing critical environment in the children's development. Therefore, this study aims to 1) analyze the needs of character-based teaching materials model for early childhood in West Java, 2) design a character-based thematic learning model to help the acquisition of character values, and 3) validate the proposed model. The method used is research and development. In this study, there were three early child education studies in West Java selected based on the accreditation of BAN PNF of West Java region and for model validation, the two experts were involved to evaluate the activities provided and the model itself. Related to the needs of character-based learning activities, the schools still need variations in the learning process that integrates the characters. The current models used in the schools are in need to be enhanced for better effects on the children. In addition, in this model, the validation results indicate that this model meets aspects of the teaching materials approach and objectives, publicity, and content design, with minor improvements in the*

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## INTRODUCTION

The issue of character education has been a global matter in the education setting. As what had been reported by Harrison, Morris, and Ryan (2016), the issues on character education have arisen in the UK, US, India, China, Taiwan, Canada, Korea, Australia, and Malaysia. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the introductory of character education has since emerged in the introduction of the 2013 curriculum, where the moral values and character are ones of the underlying cores in the education.

It may remain unanswered as to what is wrong with the youth behavior in the Indonesian context. The cause may be caused by the lack of well-designed formulation into religious-integrated lessons, civics lessons, or character lessons, where the main program lies at the introduction of cognitive values alone. At least a little deeper into the affective value of appreciation. In fact, the education of character should bring children to the recognition of values cognitively, appreciation of value affectively, ultimately to the actual value of the practice. Thus, emerging from the aforementioned reasons, the government attempted to balance religious instruction and character education (ADB & OECD, 2015). Yet, the recent momentum from the Indonesian President Regulation no. 87 of 2017 on strengthening character education further ignites the curriculum reformation, where this, in effect, requires the teacher to explicitly include the character education in their classroom (Indonesia Cabinet Secretariat, 2017). This allows the government to provide technical guidance in order to embrace and supplement the implementation of character education in both formal and informal education, through various means such as civic education, religious-infused subjects, or any other implementation (UNESCO, 2014).

Character education has a higher meaning than moral education because it is not just teaching what is right and what is wrong. Moreover, character education inculcates good habits so that students become understandable, able to feel, and want to do good conducts. Generally, the introduction of character education can only be seen as the general needs of the current degrading situations in the country. However, as what Arthur, Kristjánsson, Harrison, Sanderse, and Wright (2017) consider, character education should be built on the basis that the characters should be developed, logically used, and internally motivating the users to form their moral identity.

The integration of values in the formation of character through the world of education

requires careful planning for the results in accordance with the expected. The process of cultivating values in character building through education must be well packed and structured that can be implemented through learning activities. One of the supporting learning requirements is the textbook. Teaching materials are very helpful for teachers and students in achieving learning objectives. This research reports on 1) the identification of the need for teaching materials for character education and the context of character education in early childhood education institutions in West Java, Indonesia and 2) the identification of teaching materials that have been and are being used by teachers in early childhood education institutions in West Java, Indonesia.

## METHOD

The method used in this research is case study method. This method was chosen to meet the research needs that require the process of developing and collecting data in various aspects as the final outcome is developing the model of learning materials of early child education. In addition, this method is very supportive of the evaluation process of the model of teaching materials. In this part, expert evaluation was to be conducted to assist the process of materials evaluation needs analysis is the main instrument by which the data to be developed.

The instruments used for needs analysis were questionnaire and observation. The questionnaire contained 40 questions, combining closed-ended and open-ended types of question. For the observation, it was recorded in a single learning session for each institution. The recordings were transcribed to allow the interpretation towards the use of thematically character-based learning materials in context. The limited experimental has not been conducted as of yet, due to the limited time available in the institutions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research focused on identification of three things, that is conducting the expert judgment about the thematic-based game teaching materials model for early child education in West Java, exploring the level of legibility of the texts in the thematic game-based teaching materials model for early child education, and knowing the effectiveness of teaching materials thematic game-based character for early child education on a limited scale. At this stage, research has not yet reached the limited trial stage of this thematic teaching material model.

Expert assessment was obtained using a semi-open questionnaire with a total of 40 items of questions, in which the appraisal expert was given the discretion to comment or criticism related to the model of the thematic materials being developed. Related to the expert team that assess, this research involves two experts which both experts have expertise that qualified in the field of early childhood and evaluation of teaching materials. The self-assessment process is conducted for two months, starting from May to June.

In this assessment, the focus of the assessment is on aspects of the approach and objectives of teaching materials, aspects of publication, and aspects of design or content design. In the aspect of the approach and objectives of the teaching materials, the assessment focuses on the excavation of pedagogical concepts in the learning approaches related to the use of thematic materials in character teaching, especially in terms of the flexibility of the use of teaching materials and the implementation of teaching materials. In the publication aspect, many assessments focus on organizing teaching materials in providing practical and theoretical guidance in the delivery of learning aspects methodically, continuously, clearly, and purposefully. In relation to the design aspect or content design, the assessment is more on the aspect of the development of character-based learning which is integrated with thematic game to be applied in an active and fun learning process.

In the process of evaluation of teaching materials, validation results indicate that this model has met the aspects of the teaching materials approach and objectives, publicity aspects, and content design aspects, with minor improvements to the characteristics of instructional learning media and evaluation tools.

Related aspects of the approach and objectives of the teaching materials, expert test team found no significant problems in the tested materials. The learning approach developed for thematic learning has met the pedagogical suitability of learning that contains character education. Meeting the needs of learners related to character education has been explicitly described in each discussion. The developed material is also considered to have fulfilled the integration of character into the learning process adequately and integrated, so that teachers are able to empower their own creativity to integrate character education

dynamically, depending on the psychological and physiological condition of the learner. The needs of individual children are also summarized specifically to be able to educate students

individually as well as groups.

In relation to the publication aspect, teaching materials have provided sufficient basic knowledge for learning in the classroom. By explicitly explaining what teachers should know in teaching learners about character education, teachers are expected to be able to recreate thematic game activities that are capable of promoting learning of fun characters for learners, without letting learners function in order to be able to use their physical and mental abilities in absorbing patterns of characters that are promoted effectively and efficiently. The organization of the teaching materials itself has been compiled based on skills that teachers should master in order to integrate thematic games based on character education in a logical and systematic way. Teaching materials are also considered to have been prepared on a continuous basis by considering the usefulness of learning in the classroom and classroom. Each unit is also organized by providing an overview of information in the form of images, tables, and other message delivery media. Layouts, fonts, and font sizes have also been adapted to the needs of the teacher to read comfortably. The position of each text and image in the teaching materials has also been compiled by standard without detracting from the general aesthetics of how a book is structured.

In relation to the design aspect or the design of the content, this instructional material is considered to have provided the material and exercise or task adequately. The material is given in a brief and clear way to facilitate how the delivery of the material reaches the final goal of each learning unit. The continuity of each unit is also taken into consideration in order to guarantee teachers to be able to develop or integrate patterned thematic patterns of character in the classroom in particular or in general. Text readings for each unit have also been varied to be able to provide an explicit picture of how patterned thematic play patterns are integrated in the classroom as curricular or beyond curricular activities.

Minor deficiencies are found in the aspects of instructional learning media and evaluation tools where both aspects still do not show an interactive teaching-learning pattern and emphasize valid and reliable evaluation-based learning. In relation to instructional learning media, this instructional material is still considered not to describe specifically how the alternative media used if not owned by the institution. The expert team considers that the need for alternative learning media should be prepared to deal with deficiencies or lack of learning media, where not

all institutions have adequate learning media in the implementation of learning in their respective institutions. The media alternative itself can be either a modern or traditional device, as long as it does not diminish the essence of how the thematic pattern of games is implemented.

Associated with minor revisions to the evaluation tool, the evaluation process still does not adequately illustrate how achievements each teacher can make in implementing thematic character patterns in each class. This is particularly evident in the lack of explanation in individual learning evaluations that require little touch to make sense that evaluation is an integral process in classroom and out-of-class learning.

## CONCLUSION

This research focused on identification of three things, that is knowing the expert judgment about the game-based thematic teaching materials model for early child education in West Java, knowing the level of legibility of the texts in the thematic game-based teaching materials model for early child education, and knowing the effectiveness of teaching materials thematic game-based character for early child education on a limited scale. At this stage, research has not yet reached the limited trial stage of this thematic teaching material model.

In general, the theme-based thematic teaching-learning model for early child education meets the general criteria for the learning model for early childhood teachers. In this model, the validation results indicate that this model meets aspects of the teaching materials approach and objectives, publicity aspects, and content design aspects, with minor improvements in the characteristics of instructional learning media and evaluation tools.

Based on the findings obtained in this study, the role of development of teaching materials becomes more crucial where without the development of teaching materials that are able to accommodate character education in the development of teaching materials thematically will hamper the acquisition process of what the actual meaning of learning itself. Teachers must be able to catalyze their learners to be able to trigger the development of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective more human and noble character.

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