

Hidden Theories in Modern Social Studies Education: Literacy Studies of Character Education

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Abstract: *This research investigates the hidden theories present in contemporary Social Studies education and their influence on character education. Utilizing a qualitative approach through a 'literature review method,' this investigation analyzes significant research centered on behaviorism, social learning theory, and comprehensive strategies for character enhancement. Sources were gathered from peer-reviewed periodicals, scholarly texts, and reliable research papers, which were then systematically examined using 'content analysis' and thematic categorization to uncover consistent themes and connections. The findings indicated that behaviorist theory and social learning theory form the foundational basis for character education within Social Studies instruction. Behaviorism stresses the significance of reinforcement, habituation, and observable actions, promoting discipline and ethical accountability through organized rewards and feedback. In contrast, Bandura's theory of social learning emphasizes the role of imitation and learning through observation, where pupils assimilate moral values by watching educators, community influencers, and significant historical personalities. The research also highlights the crucial function of educators as guides and examples in implementing these theories. Moreover, the necessity of a 'holistic and culturally relevant approach' was stressed to ensure that character education is applied meaningfully in practical situations. Connecting moral teachings with students' life experiences and cultural beliefs enhances their capacity to assimilate ethical standards and societal obligations. In summary, merging behaviorism and social learning theory offers a well-rounded framework for character education within Social Studies instruction. By integrating structured reinforcement, observational learning, and cultural significance, teachers can effectively influence students' character development, equipping them to become responsible and ethical members of society.*

Keywords : Hidden Theories, Character Education, Behaviourism, Social Learning Theory, Social Studies Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The learning process in Indonesia, referred to as educational activities in the contemporary age, is intrinsically linked to the use of information technology (IT). This technology serves as a resource for learning, a platform for educational media, and a method for evaluating learning. The prevalence of social media and electronic devices among students has taken center stage in their everyday routines. Consequently, this trend diminishes face-to-face interactions and direct social encounters. This shift also influences how individuals behave towards one another. A person's behavior is typically recognized as their character. Character manifests itself in actions and attitudes observed in everyday life, at educational institutions, and in interactions with peers. One negative consequence of using IT is the alteration of behavior towards a less favorable direction. The language that individuals employ tends to become more simplistic but often lacks respect or courteousness. For instance, communication with older individuals should inherently be more respectful than interactions with those who are younger. The manner in which a person conducts themselves through spoken words, facial expressions, and body movements is indicative of their character's quality. Character education aims to develop and cultivate traits that highlight the significance of three key components of positive character: moral knowledge,

emotional understanding of morals, and moral actions. The fields encompassed by character education include areas like moral reasoning, social-emotional learning, education on moral virtues, life skills training, health literacy, violence prevention, conflict resolution, and moral philosophy.

The education of social studies in modern times has undergone significant changes to align itself with the advancements in a global society. Presently, the social studies curriculum not only prioritizes cognitive understanding—such as comprehension of history, geography, and economics—but also aims to incorporate character values essential for the personal and social growth of students. The aspiration is to cultivate learners who are intellectually capable while also possessing strong social and moral values. Nevertheless, similar to other educational strategies, the integration of character within contemporary social studies education offers benefits that influence learning outcomes.

In essence, character education encapsulates various dimensions of teaching and learning aimed at personal growth. It involves efforts to nurture and shape character, focusing on three crucial aspects of virtuous character: moral knowledge, emotional responses to morals, and moral conduct. The domains that fall under character education include moral reasoning or cognitive progression, social and emotional development, teaching of moral virtues, life skills instruction, health education, violence prevention strategies, conflict

resolution, and moral philosophy. Moral education constitutes a deliberate or inadvertent attempt by educators to instill positive habits in students, ultimately shaping them into individuals devoted to the divine.

In educational activities focused on social studies within the school environment, various learning theories will be utilized to meet the desired educational goals. Concerning the learning framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, which prioritizes constructivism and humanistic approaches, are there additional educational theories that should be considered in the moral and character development of students? Which learning theories remain implicit in the character education practices employed by educators? The upcoming comparative literacy research aims to identify several significant learning theories that teachers can implement in their efforts to foster character education in students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Character Education

Character education plays a significant role in shaping morality and instilling values in students to prepare them to be responsible citizens. Various studies have examined the importance of character education, how it is implemented, and its impact on the development of students' moral and ethical values.

In their research titled 'Analysis of Comparative Studies of Moral and Character Education Concepts,' Bahera and Arif Ridha-Lutfiyani (2023) emphasize the importance of integrating moral education with cultural values. The authors state that 'the development of character education must be done by considering the cultural context and needs of society to ensure its relevance and effectiveness' (Bahera & Ridha-Lutfiyani, 2023). Their analyses show how different cultural views influence the notion and practice of moral education, encouraging adaptive approaches in line with societal expectations.

In the same way, Pradana et al. (2020) in 'Nationalism: Orientation of Character Education in Learning Development' emphasize the importance of linking nationalism with character education. They argue that 'the development of character education in the learning process is an effective way to foster a sense of nationalism and moral values among the younger generation' (Pradana et al., 2020). By integrating national values into the curriculum, students will create a sense of pride and responsibility towards their country, which strengthens individual character as well as social harmony.

Lian et al. (2020), in 'Teacher Models in Building Student Character,' highlighted the function of teachers as role models in promoting character education. They note that 'teachers' behavior, attitudes, and teaching methods greatly influence students' character and moral development' (Lian et al., 2020). This research explains that educators need to demonstrate the values they want to instill, as their attitudes and actions have a direct impact on the learning atmosphere. By modelling

positive behavior, teachers are able to encourage students to adopt aligned moral principles.

Saputro and Murdiono (2020), in 'Implementation of Character Education through a Holistic Approach for Senior High School Students,' discuss how a holistic approach can effectively integrate character education in school programs. They argue that 'character education requires a holistic approach that combines academic learning, extracurricular activities, and community participation to reach its full potential' (Saputro & Murdiono, 2020). This holistic approach ensures that character education not only takes place in the classroom but also extends to real-life experiences, thus deepening the understanding and application of moral values.

Finally, Hafizi and Wiyono (2023), in 'The Importance of Moral Education in Children's Character Formation,' underline the key contribution of moral education in young people's development. They emphasize that 'moral education is fundamental in character development, as it creates a strong foundation for ethical behavior and social responsibility' (Hafizi & Wiyono, 2023). Their research points to the long-term benefits of implementing strong moral values early on, emphasizing that children who receive a good moral education tend to grow up to be responsible and empathetic adults.

Overall, these studies provide in-depth insights into character education, discussing its theoretical basis, implementation strategies and impact on students. Bahera and Ridha-Lutfiyani (2023) emphasize the importance of cultural relevance, supporting contextualized and adaptive character education programs. Pradana et al. (2020) linked character education to nationalism, highlighting its function in building a sense of pride and belonging among students.

Lian and colleagues (2020) highlight the significance of teachers as role models, while Saputro and Murdiono (2020) advocate a holistic approach that combines classroom learning with extracurricular and community activities. Furthermore, Hafizi and Wiyono (2023) emphasize the fundamental value of moral education in the early phases of character formation. To summarize, these studies overall emphasize the diversity of character education and its importance in shaping ethical, responsible and engaged individuals. Effective character education requires cultural adaptability, active teacher participation, and a holistic approach that transcends classroom boundaries. In addition, embedding moral and national values in the education curriculum not only strengthens the character of individual students, but also contributes to creating a more harmonious and responsible society.

2.2 Learning Theory In Character Education In Social Studies Learning

In today's learning process, teachers often prioritize humanistic theory and constructivism. Constructivism theory focuses on student-oriented learning methods, otherwise known as student-centered learning. This approach supports independent learning. On the other hand, humanistic theory

measures learning success based on students' ability to understand themselves and their environment well. This approach encourages students to gradually achieve self-actualization. In this theory, student's views are emphasized rather than teacher's views. However, when linked to character education, it can be seen that there are elements of behavioristic theory underlying.

For character education in social studies, much support comes from various learning theories, particularly behaviorism and social learning theory. These theories serve as fundamental approaches in shaping students' attitudes, behaviors and moral development in a regular learning environment. In their research entitled *Application of Behaviorist Theory Based on the Learning Experience of Students in Boarding School Environments*, Muhja, Abdidn, and Meliani (2024) emphasized how behaviorist theory can influence students' moral character through controlled learning experiences. They stated, behaviorism plays an important role in boarding school environments, where disciplined reinforcement and reward systems contribute to students' character formation' (Muhja et al., 2024). This research suggests that behaviors that are repeated and reinforced through rewards or consequences can effectively instill discipline as well as moral values among students, especially in structured educational settings such as boarding schools.

Imron et al. (2021), through their work entitled *'Development of A Soft Skills-Based Learning Model with A Behaviouristic Approach'*, highlighted the use of behavioristic approach to develop students' soft skills in social studies. They explained that *'the behavioristic approach emphasizes the importance of observable behavior and reinforcement in the formation of students' character and skills'* (Imron et al., 2021). This approach focuses on a planned and gradual learning process, where soft skills such as communication, cooperation and discipline are acquired through constant practice, assessment and reinforcement.

Nasrallah et al. (2022), in their study entitled *'Application of Behaviouristic Theory in Curriculum 2013 Learning to Form Students' Character Principles'*, looked at the integration of behavioristic principles in the 2013 curriculum in Indonesia. They argued that *'behavioristic approaches effectively shape student character through the use of reinforcement, habituation, and clear learning outcomes'* (Nasrallah et al., 2022). This research emphasizes how systematic reinforcement of positive behaviors and the application of discipline in social studies learning encourage students to develop values such as honesty, a sense of responsibility and respect.

He (2022), through his work *'The Inspiration of Bandura's Social Learning Theory to Moral Education in Colleges and Universities'*, expanded the discussion by linking Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of learning through observation and imitation. He underlines that *'social learning theory states that moral character is formed not only through direct instruction but also through observation of*

role models and social interaction' (He, 2022). Bandura's views are particularly relevant in Social Studies, where students observe and imitate the behavior of teachers, peers and community leaders. This theory links behaviorism and moral education by emphasizing the importance of modelling, imitation and environmental influences in character formation.

Lika and colleagues (2022), in their work entitled *'Behaviouristic Learning Theory and its Application in Learning'*, conducted a deeper exploration of the application of behaviorism in the classroom. They mention that *'behaviorist learning theory gives educators the tools to regulate behavior in a planned way and instill order through regular reinforcement and feedback'* (Lika et al., 2022). This method has proven successful in social studies education, where learners are taught moral values, ethical principles, and social responsibility through repeated practice and structured learning activities. Mahbub and colleagues (2020), in a study titled *'Humanistic Behaviourism and Mental Health in the Formation of Learning Processes during the Covid-19 Pandemic'*, examined the role of behaviourism during the distance learning process caused by the pandemic. They explained that *'behaviourism, along with mental health concerns, provides a planned yet empathetic approach to creating learning outcomes in times of crisis'* (Mahbub et al., 2020). This research emphasises the capacity of behaviouristic theory to overcome barriers in social studies education, particularly in maintaining discipline, engagement and moral development with reinforcement techniques even in a virtual context.

Combining behavioristic theory with social learning provides a solid foundation for character education in social studies. Behaviouristic theory, as reviewed by Muhja et al. (2024), Nasrallah et al. (2022), and Lika et al. (2022), emphasizes the formation of visible behavior through the process of reinforcement, feedback, and habit. This approach is particularly effective in building discipline, responsibility and other moral values among students by providing clear expectations and rewards for desired behavior.

In contrast, Bandura's social learning theory, discussed by He (2022), provides a broader perspective by emphasizing the importance of behavioral models and learning through observation. Social studies learning often involves modeling for students-teachers, historical figures or community leaders-whose behavior and values serve as moral models for students to follow. This theory complements the behavioristic approach by recognizing the impact of the social environment and interactions in character formation. Imron et al. (2021) and Mahbub et al. (2020) further develop this idea by explaining the practical application of behavioristic methods in developing soft skills and overcoming challenges in learning. Imron et al.'s emphasis on soft skills highlights the flexibility of the behavioristic approach in teaching cooperation, communication and discipline - crucial skills in social studies learning. Meanwhile, Mahbub et al. emphasize the adaptability of behavioristic strategies during difficult times such as the

Covid-19 pandemic, showing that structured reinforcement remains effective even in the context of distance learning. The literature as a whole suggests that behavioristic theory and Bandura's social learning theory are highly relevant in character education in social studies. The behavioristic approach places emphasis on the importance of reinforcement, feedback and habituation in instilling moral values and discipline, while social learning theory adds this dimension by acknowledging the power of observation and modelling. By incorporating these theories into the social studies curriculum, educators can effectively shape student behavior, reinforce moral values and develop soft skills. Through planned reinforcement and the presentation of positive examples, social studies learning becomes an important vehicle for character education, preparing students to serve as responsible, ethical and active members of society.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied a qualitative approach in its methodology with a focus on literature analysis to explore the hidden theories that lie behind current social studies education and their links to character education. The literature analysis method was adopted as it provides an opportunity to systematically assess relevant theoretical frameworks, previous studies and results related to character education in the context of social studies learning. This approach is in line with Creswell's (2014) suggestion that qualitative research is an appropriate approach to understanding the concepts and theories underlying complex educational phenomena.

3.1 DATA COLLECTION

The primary data source for this study consists of academic journals, books, and credible research articles focusing on character education, Social Studies pedagogy, and learning theories. Sources were selected based on their relevance, recency, and scholarly rigor. The data was gathered from:

- a. Peer-reviewed journals, such as the Journal of Islamic Education (AJIE), JICSA, Jurnal Tarbiyatuna, and International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding.
- b. Academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate, to access articles by key authors like Zainal Abidin, Nasrallah, and Yufei He.
- c. Foundational books on educational theories, such as Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) and Skinner's Behaviorism (1953).

3.2 Data Analysis

The analysis follows the content analysis method, which involves organizing, reviewing, and interpreting existing data to identify recurring themes and hidden theories relevant to character education in Social Studies. This method is grounded in Krippendorff's (2004) guidelines for systematic

content analysis, where data is categorized to uncover relationships, patterns, and embedded ideas.

- a. Thematic Coding: The literature was reviewed to identify key themes, such as moral development, behaviourist reinforcement, and social learning theory.
- b. Comparative Analysis: Various sources were compared to determine how different theories (e.g., Behaviourism and Social Learning Theory) are implicitly or explicitly embedded in Social Studies education.
- c. Synthesis: A synthesis of findings was conducted to integrate various perspectives, highlighting the theoretical underpinnings of character education in Social Studies.

3.3 Rationale and Ethical Considerations

The qualitative literature review approach is particularly suitable because it enables the identification of "hidden" or implicit theories, which may not always be explicitly stated in Social Studies curricula. This method ensures a broad yet in-depth exploration of character education frameworks through existing studies and theoretical literature.

All sources used in this study are appropriately cited to ensure academic integrity and transparency in research practices.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that character education in modern Social Studies learning integrates various hidden theories, particularly behaviourist and social learning theories, which guide the development of students' moral values, discipline, and social behavior. A synthesis of the ten articles analysed provides clarity on how these theories are applied and their implications for character education.

4.1 Behaviorist Theory in Character Education

Behaviorism, as explained by Muhja et al. (2024), Nasrallah et al. (2022), Lika et al. (2022), and Imron et al. (2021), has a significant contribution in developing the character of students through planned reinforcement and repetition methods. In the context of social studies learning, the principles of behaviorism are applied through regular rewards, sanctions, and habituation. Muhja et al. (2024) emphasized the success of this approach in controlled settings such as boarding schools, where student behavior is shaped in a planned manner to support moral and social values. Nasrallah et al. (2022) added that the 2013 curriculum included a behaviorist approach to encourage values such as responsibility, discipline, and honesty among students. Furthermore, Lika et al. (2022) indicated that behaviorist methods, including feedback and reinforcement, serve as essential tools for teachers in instilling moral values during social studies teaching. Imron et al. (2021) complements this by explaining how behaviorist learning methods can be utilized to improve students' soft skills, such as cooperation, communication, and leadership, which are crucial for character development.

4.2 Social Learning Theory in Character Education

Bandura's social learning theory, as discussed by He (2022), emphasizes the importance of modeling and learning through observation in character building. Social studies education, by its very nature, introduces students to historical and social role models, whose actions and attitudes serve as moral examples. He (2022) emphasizes that students gain an understanding of ethical behavior not only through direct instruction but also by observing teachers, peers, and historical figures. This concept adds a social learning aspect to behaviorism by shifting attention to real-life social interactions and experiences. For example, students are encouraged to imitate positive behaviors demonstrated by role models, which fosters the development of empathy, integrity, and moral reasoning skills. In the context of contemporary social studies education, the application of these social learning principles in depth helps connect theory to real-world character development.

4.3 Holistic Approaches to Character Education

Research conducted by Saputro and Murdiono (2020) and Mahbub et al. (2020) emphasizes the significance of a holistic approach to character education, which combines elements of behavioral and social learning. According to Saputro and Murdiono (2020), character education should not only be limited to the classroom, but should also include extracurricular activities and community participation to build meaningful learning experiences. This approach combines reinforcement with application in real contexts, ensuring that students absorb moral values through active involvement and observation.

Mahbub et al. (2020) further underscore the flexibility of behaviorism theory during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of steady reinforcement and attention to mental health as vital to supporting students' character development in challenging situations.

4.4 The Role of Teachers as Facilitators and Role Models

The critical role of teachers as facilitators and role models is evident in studies by Lian et al. (2020) and Nasrallah et al. (2022). Teachers act as the primary agents in shaping students' character by modeling positive behaviors, attitudes, and values. Lian et al. (2020) note that teachers' actions and teaching strategies significantly influence students' moral development. This aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, where teachers serve as live models for ethical behavior, discipline, and social responsibility.

4.5 Cultural and Contextual Relevance

Bahera and Ridha-Lutfiyani's (2023) findings emphasize the significance of cultural context in character education. They state that the success of character education programs depends on the suitability of cultural and social values. In social studies, educators need to combine national and local values to keep education relevant, so that students can teach moral lessons with their everyday experiences.

The synthesis of these studies shows that contemporary social studies education fundamentally integrates behaviorism and social learning theories as hidden frameworks in character education. While behaviorism emphasizes observable behavior through reinforcing factors, social learning theory focuses more on examples and the social environment as significant influences on students' moral development.

The combination of the two theories produces a comprehensive approach to character education:

1. Reinforcement of Behavior: Structured repetition, rewards, and consequences help shape students' discipline and moral behavior.
2. Social Learning through Observation: Role models, community leaders, and real-world interactions provide students with moral examples to emulate.

In addition, a holistic and culturally responsive approach, as recommended by Saputro and Murdiono (2020) and Bahera and Ridha-Lutfiyani (2023), ensures that character education remains relevant and effective across educational contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

This study states that hidden learning theories, especially "behaviorism" and "social learning theory", have important contributions in the development of character education through social studies subjects. Although these theories are not always clearly stated, they have an impact on the design and implementation of programs aimed at forming morals and character in today's education system.

Behaviorism, as revealed by studies conducted by Muhja et al. (2024) and Nasrallah et al. (2022), emphasizes the creation of visible behaviors using regular reinforcement, habituation, and feedback. This method has proven successful in building discipline, a sense of responsibility, and other moral values among students. Through the provision of rewards, consequences, and structured repetition, behaviorist strategies provide a reliable framework for educators to instill positive character traits in students.

On the other hand, the social learning theory proposed by Bandura, as discussed by He (2022) and Lian et al. (2020), emphasizes the important roles of observation, imitation, and modeling. Students acquire moral values by observing the actions of teachers, peers, and community leaders, which they then adopt in their daily lives. This theory emphasizes the importance of the teacher's role as a guide and role model who demonstrates ethical behavior, integrity, and social responsibility. The findings also emphasize the importance of "culturally relevant holistic methods" in character education. As explained by Saputro and Murdiono (2020) and Bahera and Ridha-Lutfiyani (2023), effective character education goes beyond the classroom to involve the community, activities outside the curriculum, and alignment with local values. This approach ensures that students not only learn the theory of moral principles but also apply them in real situations. In closing, the integration of behaviorist and social learning

theories provides a comprehensive framework for character education in Social Studies. When educators serve as both teachers and role models, and when instructional programs reflect cultural context and relevance, students are better prepared to develop strong moral character, preparing them to become responsible and ethical citizens.

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