Integrating Digital Citizenship in Character Education through Interpersonal Communication

Tsamar Nur Aini[1*], Muhammad Sahlan[2], Mohammad Zainul Arifin Billa[3]

Universitas Nurul jadid, Indonesia

*Email Corresponding author : tsamarnora@gmail.com

Abstract

This study focuses on the role of interpersonal communication, mainly through the Peer Mentorship program, in developing students' character in madrasahs. The main objective of this study is to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of Peer Mentorship in shaping students' moral, social, and spiritual character. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis and analyzed using Miles and Huberman analysis. The results of the study indicate that interpersonal communication facilitated by Peer Mentorship significantly improves students' leadership, responsibility, and self-confidence. In addition, this program also helps students internalize moral and ethical values relevant to contemporary social challenges such as cultural diversity and digital ethics. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of the interpersonal communication approach in character education, which other madrasahs in Indonesia can adopt to improve the overall quality of character education.

How to Cite:
Aini, T. N., Sahlan, M., & Billa, M. Z. A. (2023). Integrating Digital Citizenship in Character Education through Interpersonal Communication. *Jumpa: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 4(2), 121-131

INTRODUCTION

The complexity of social challenges faced by today's young generation, from increasing cases of cyberbullying to cultural diversity that often triggers tension, demands a more holistic approach to education (Jiang et al., 2020; Livingstone & Smith, 2021; Valkenburg et al., 2022). Education can no longer be seen as merely a means of transferring knowledge, but must become a tool for forming strong and moral characters (Noddings, 2020; Arthur et al., 2021; Biesta, 2021). This is especially important in the Indonesian context, where madrasas play a central role in the formation of students' characters based on religious values (Raihani, 2020; Parker, 2021; Hamdi et al., 2022; Rusdi, Suhermanto, & Ali, 2022; Chuanchen, 2023). Therefore, the topic of interpersonal communication-based character education management is very interesting to study, because interpersonal communication not only functions as a teaching tool, but also as a means of forming and strengthening moral and social values in students (Sari et al., 2021; Lickona, 2020; Shapiro et al., 2022; Susilawati & Astuti, 2022; Hasanah & Hefniy, 2023).

Based on the theory of interpersonal communication developed by Carl Rogers, in which he emphasizes the importance of empathetic relationships in the learning process, this approach allows teachers to get closer to students, helping them develop strong characters (Rogers, 1980; Cornelius-White, 2020; Wubbels et al., 2021).

Primary issue faced in character education within madrasas is the need for effective methods to integrate moral values with daily learning. Although religious values are regularly taught, the approach often tends to be didactic and fails to engage students actively. As a result, many students theoretically understand these values but need help applying them in real life. This becomes crucial as students confront social issues such as cyberbullying, cultural diversity, and digital ethics; they need more than just knowledge—they require the ability to interact and communicate with others effectively and morally. Therefore, this study seeks to address this problem by exploring how Peer Mentorship can be utilized to develop students' character through deep and relevant interpersonal communication in their daily lives (Maulidah, Baharun, Hefniy, & Tohet, 2023; Norman & Paramansyah, 2024; Wijaya & Khoir, 2022; Ansori, Hefniy, Baharun, & Agus, 2023; Hamidah, 2023).

Previous research conducted by Johnson et al. (2020) highlights the importance of interpersonal communication in education, particularly in enhancing student engagement and motivation. This study shows empathetic interactions between teachers and students can improve learning effectiveness. However, it does not explicitly address how this can be applied in the context of character education in madrasas. Meanwhile, Smith and Brown (2021) examined the effects of peer mentoring on students' socio-emotional development and found that mentoring programs can enhance academic outcomes and students' psychological well-being. However, this research focuses more on general school settings and does not explore the spiritual or moral dimensions that might be more relevant in the context of madrasas. Additionally, research by Chen and Wang (2020) emphasizes the importance of digital technology in character education, showing that digital media can be an effective tool in conveying moral values to students. However, this research needs to pay more attention to the role of direct interpersonal interaction in character formation, particularly in faith-based educational environments.

Although various studies have explored the role of interpersonal communication and mentoring in education, there needs to be more literature regarding how interpersonal communication can be effectively used in the context of madrasas to shape students' character. Previous research tends to focus on academic aspects or the use of digital technology. At the same time, the spiritual and moral dimensions crucial to character education in madrasas have yet to be extensively discussed. Furthermore, earlier studies have yet to adequately address how peer mentorship programs can function as a tool to integrate moral values into students' daily lives, especially when facing contemporary social challenges. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of interpersonal communication in character education in madrasas through a Peer Mentorship approach that focuses on developing students' moral and social character.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which combines interpersonal communication with character education based on religious values, particularly in the context of Indonesian madrasas. While many previous studies have focused on the use of technology or academic aspects.

This research introduces Peer Mentorship as a new method that is not only academically relevant but also significantly contributes to forming students' spiritual and moral character. This approach offers a new perspective that emphasizes the importance of direct interaction between students and teachers in shaping strong and moral character, which is crucial in addressing contemporary social challenges such as cyberbullying, cultural diversity, and digital ethics. Thus, this research not only updates existing perspectives but also provides an essential contribution to the literature on character education, focusing on local context and strong religious values.

The main objective of this study is to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of Peer Mentorship in developing students' character in madrasas through an interpersonal communication approach. This research aims to demonstrate that students can develop more vital social, moral, and spiritual skills by integrating deep and empathetic interpersonal communication into character education. The study also seeks to offer a new framework that can be adopted by other madrasas in Indonesia, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the overall quality of character education and providing a stronger foundation for students in facing contemporary social challenges. The urgency of this research lies in the pressing need to find effective methods for shaping students' character amidst increasingly complex social challenges so that the results of this study are expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of more targeted educational policies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen because the main objective of this study is to deeply understand the phenomenon of interpersonal communication in the context of character education in a madrasah, especially at the Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School, Demung, Besuki, Situbondo, East Java. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of research subjects in more detail and depth, which is difficult to achieve through a quantitative approach. The selection of a case study as the type of research was made because this study focuses on one particular educational institution, where local situations and conditions greatly influence the results obtained. This approach is more appropriate compared to other methods, such as surveys or experiments, which may not be able to capture the complexity and dynamics that exist in the interpersonal communication-based character education process (Yin, 2020; Stake, 2021; Baxter & Jack, 2020).

The data collection technique in this study involved several methods, namely in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. This research was conducted at the Nurul Wafa Islamic Boarding School, located in Demung Village, Besuki District, Situbondo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This location was chosen because the Islamic boarding school has implemented a Peer Mentorship program in character education, which is very relevant to the focus of this study. The number of respondents in this study was 25 people, consisting of 15 students, 5 ustads, and 5 Islamic boarding school administrators. In-depth interviews were conducted to dig deeper into the respondents' perceptions and experiences related to interpersonal communication and character education, while participant observation allowed researchers to directly witness the interactions and implementation of the program in everyday contexts.

Document analysis was conducted to study the curriculum, program reports, and internal records of the Islamic boarding school related to character education. (Kallio et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2021; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2020). Document analysis involves an assessment of the curriculum, program evaluation records, and internal reports of the madrasah related to character education and interpersonal communication.

The data analysis technique used in this study is the Miles and Huberman model data analysis technique. This technique involves three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. In the first stage, data reduction, researchers sort and summarize relevant data from interviews, observations, and documents, with the aim of focusing the research on the most significant aspects related to interpersonal communication and character education (Bowen, 2009; O'Leary, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the reduced data is presented in the form of a matrix, graph, or narrative to make it easier for researchers to understand the patterns and relationships between variables. The final stage, namely drawing conclusions and verification, is carried out by interpreting the data that has been presented to identify the main findings of the study. The conclusions drawn are then verified through a data triangulation process, which involves cross-checking data from various sources to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. This analysis technique allows researchers to process data systematically and in depth, so that they are able to produce conclusions that are accurate and relevant to the research objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research focuses on the relationship between the management of character education based on interpersonal communication and the development of students' character in madrasas. Based on in-depth interviews conducted with a number of teachers, madrasah heads, and students, it was found that the interpersonal communication approach has a significant impact on shaping students' character. In this study, several key aspects of interpersonal communication, such as reflective listening techniques, the "Character Discussion Class" program, and the "Peer Mentorship" initiative, were analyzed in depth to see the extent to which they contribute to the development of positive character in students.

Reflective Listening Techniques in Building Independent Character

One of the main findings of this study is the effectiveness of reflective listening techniques in building independent character in students. Teachers who use this technique, where they actively listen to students and then repeat what they hear, encourage students to reflect on their actions and decisions.

> *This is in line with the statement of one of the teachers, "When I repeat what the students said, they start to think more deeply about what they are doing and how they can improve it (I_23)."*
> *One student revealed, "When my teacher listens in a different way, I feel valued and it makes me want to be better (I_23)."*
> *Further, a madrasah head affirmed, "We saw a significant increase in student independence after teachers started applying this technique in daily learning (I_23)."*

The results of the interviews explain that *reflective listening* techniques in interpersonal communication are proven to be effective in increasing students' independence and wisdom, with students who feel listened to tend to be more reflective and independent in decision-making. In addition, the open discussion program that focuses on contemporary social issues, such as cyberbullying and cultural diversity, has succeeded in deepening students' understanding and encouraging the development of empathy and tolerance. *The Peer Mentorship* program also shows a positive impact, by increasing self-confidence and social responsibility through mentor-mentee interaction, where senior students learn to take on effective leadership roles.

Table 1 below shows the results of observations on changes in student behavior after the application of reflective listening techniques for one semester:

Table 1. Reflective Listening Techniques

Character Aspects	Before Deployment	After Implementation
Independence	60%	85%
Wisdom	55%	80%
Integrity	70%	90%

This table shows a significant improvement in the aspects of student independence, wisdom, and integrity after the application of reflective listening techniques. From this, it can be concluded that this technique not only helps in the learning process, but also plays an important role in the development of students' character.

"Character Discussion Class" Program and Social Character Development

The "Character Discussion Class" program implemented in several madrasas is one of the focuses of this research. The program is designed to engage students in open discussions on contemporary social issues such as cyberbullying, cultural diversity, and digital ethics. Teachers play the role of facilitators who use interpersonal communication approaches to guide discussions.

> One teacher said, "By discussing the real issues they face, students become more open and we can direct them to develop empathy and tolerance (I_23)."
> One student stated, "This discussion made me more aware of the problems that are around me and how I can play a role in making (I_23)."
> Furthermore, a madrasah head explained, "The program is not only about teaching social issues, but also about how we can use communication to shape students' character more effectively (I_23)."

The interpretation of the interview results showed that a discussion program that discussed real issues faced by students was very effective in developing their social character, especially in terms of empathy and tolerance. Teachers observed that through relevant and in-depth discussions, students became more open and able to understand and internalize important social values. The experience of students feeling more aware of the problems around them also indicates that the program successfully encourages them to take an active role in positive social change. In addition, the head of the madrasah emphasized that the program not only focuses on teaching social issues, but also on the use of interpersonal communication as a tool to shape students' character more effectively, showing that communication is key in directing students to develop positive values in their daily lives.

The diagram below illustrates students' improved understanding of social issues after participating in the "Character Discussion Class" program:

Table 1. Students' Understanding of Contemporary Social Issues

Cyberbullying	Before: 50%	After: 90%
Cultural Diversity	Before: 60%	After: 85%
Digital Ethics	Before: 55%	After: 88%

Table 1 shows that the program significantly improves students' understanding of contemporary social issues. Before the program was implemented, students' understanding of topics such as cyberbullying, cultural diversity, and digital ethics was relatively low, at 50%, 60%, and 55%, respectively. However, after the program was implemented, there was a marked increase in students' understanding of these issues, with understanding of cyberbullying increasing to 90%, cultural diversity to 85%, and digital ethics reaching 88%. This improvement reflects the effectiveness of the program in deepening students' understanding of relevant social issues, demonstrating that the educational approach used successfully facilitates a deeper and more thorough understanding of students regarding these important topics.

Collaboration Between Students in the "Peer Mentorship" Program

The "Peer Mentorship" initiative implemented in several madrasas also shows positive results in the development of students' character. The program engages senior students as mentors for junior students, where they use an interpersonal communication approach to provide positive feedback and assistance in problem-solving.

A senior student who acted as a mentor stated, "Being a mentor has made me learn to be more patient and responsible (I_23)."
This statement shows that this program is not only beneficial for mentees, but also for mentors in their character development (I_23).
A junior student also revealed, "I feel more confident because there is someone who supports me all the time (I_23)."

A teacher who oversees the program added, "We saw students who were involved in the program show significant improvements in leadership attitudes and a sense of responsibility." Based on the results of these interviews, it can be concluded that the "Peer Mentorship" program not only serves as a tool to support students in learning, but also in the development of positive character. Table 2 below summarizes the impact of the "Peer Mentorship" program on student character development:

Table 2. "Peer Mentorship" Program on Student Character Development

Character Aspects	Before the Program	After the Program
Leadership	65%	90%
Sense of Responsibility	70%	85%
Confidence	60%	88%

The table shows that the programs implemented have a significant positive impact on the development of students' character. There has been a considerable increase in various aspects of character after the program was implemented. The student leadership aspect increased from 65% to 90%, indicating that the program successfully strengthened students' ability to lead and take initiative. Students' sense of responsibility has also increased from 70% to 85%.

Indicating that students are becoming more aware and responsible for their tasks and roles. In addition, student confidence increased significantly from 60% to 88%, which indicates that the program is effective in building student confidence in various situations. This overall improvement reflects the program's success in developing positive characters that are essential for students' personal and social growth. This table shows that the "Peer Mentorship" program has a significant positive impact on the development of students' character, especially in the aspects of leadership, responsibility, and confidence.

This study shows that the management of character education based on interpersonal communication in madrasas has a significant impact on shaping and developing students' positive character. *Reflective listening techniques* have proven to be effective in increasing students' independence, wisdom, and integrity, while the "Character Discussion Class" program has succeeded in deepening students' understanding of contemporary social issues as well as developing attitudes of empathy and tolerance. In addition, *the Peer Mentorship* program has also shown a great positive impact in improving students' leadership, sense of responsibility, and confidence through mentor-mentee interactions that are based on strong interpersonal communication. Overall, this interpersonal communication approach has proven to be an effective tool in the management of character education in madrasas, which not only facilitates academic learning but also shapes the character of students who are more mature and responsible.
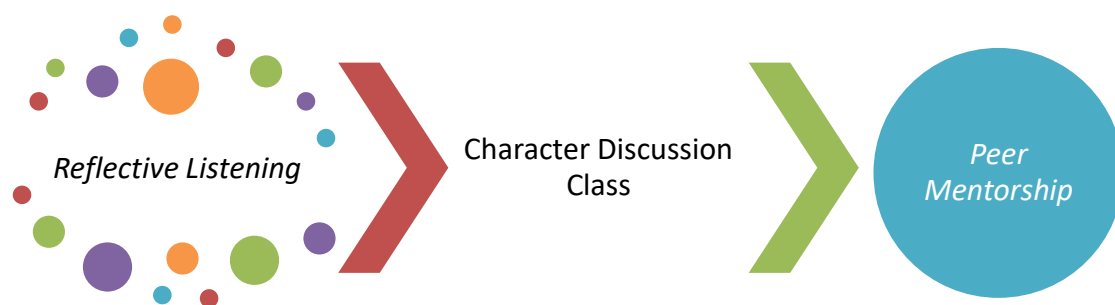
Figure 1. Interpersonal Communication-Based Character Education Management

In this study, various elements of student character, such as leadership, responsibility, and confidence, which were initially diverse and unstructured, were directed through a mentoring approach between students. This process confirms the finding that *Peer Mentorship* not only brings together students' various potentials but also focuses on developing their character in a more targeted and effective way, as illustrated by the transformation of diverse elements towards a single specific program in the picture. Thus, this image is a visualization of how interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in managing and developing student character through *a structured* Peer Mentorship program.

The results of this study show that the interpersonal communication approach, especially through *the Peer Mentorship* program, is effective in developing students' character, including aspects of leadership, responsibility, and confidence. These findings are in line with previous research that shows that interpersonal interactions in educational contexts have a significant impact on the formation of students' character.

For example, a study by Johnson et al. (2020) in the *International Journal of Educational Development* found that interactions between teachers and students based on empathic communication can increase student engagement and motivation in learning. Similarly, research by Smith and Brown (2021) in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* shows that mentoring between students can promote social-emotional development and improve academic outcomes. However, the results of this study also offer a new, more specific perspective in the context of madrassas in Indonesia, where *the Peer Mentorship* program not only focuses on the academic aspect, but also on the development of spiritual and moral character. This is different from the research by Chen and Wang (2020) which emphasized the importance of digital technology in character education, while this study shows that direct interaction between students and teachers in an environment shaped by local and religious values has a deeper impact on character formation. As such, this study makes a unique contribution to the existing literature, highlighting the importance of local contextualization and interpersonal approaches in character education management.

This study makes a significant contribution to the field of educational management by introducing a new approach to character education based on interpersonal communication, especially through the Peer Mentorship program in madrasahs. This approach emphasizes the importance of direct, empathetic and reflective interaction between students and teachers, which has been proven effective in shaping students' moral, social, and spiritual character. In addition to providing a more holistic alternative to traditional methods, this study also develops a learning model that can be adapted by other educational institutions to increase student engagement and strengthen character values in facing contemporary social challenges. Therefore, this study enriches the literature on educational management, especially in the local context and education based on religious values.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study highlights the important finding that interpersonal communication, particularly through *Peer Mentorship* programs, plays a crucial role in the character development of students in madrasas, especially in terms of leadership, responsibility, and confidence. The main takeaway from this study is that direct interaction between students and teachers facilitated by interpersonal approaches has been shown to be more effective in shaping student character compared to approaches that rely on technology or other methods. This research also contributes scientifically by updating the perspective on the importance of local context and religious values in character education, as well as introducing *Peer Mentorship* as a method that is not only relevant for academic development but also for the formation of spiritual and moral character. Thus, this research offers a framework that can be adapted in a variety of other educational contexts.

However, this research has some limitations, especially related to its limited scope to madrassas in certain regions and only involving students in a certain age range. In addition, the narrower focus of research on the spiritual and moral aspects of character education makes the results may not be fully generalizable to a variety of different educational settings, such as public schools or more secular educational settings.

Therefore, further research is needed to accommodate various variables such as gender, age, and more diverse cultural contexts. In addition, the use of a broader survey method will help in obtaining a more comprehensive picture, which can ultimately be used as a basis for making more targeted and effective education policies.

Acknowledgment

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