

# Character-Based Thematic Learning: Integrating the Values of Honesty and Responsibility in Elementary Schools

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## Abstract

This research explores the integration of honesty and responsibility into thematic learning at MIS Nurul Yaqin Sambas and SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City. Thematic learning, which combines various subjects through real-life contexts, provides a unique opportunity to instill character values in students. A qualitative case study approach was used, with data collected via observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on students' behaviors, while semi-structured interviews explored teachers' and students' experiences. Thematic analysis was applied, followed by data triangulation to ensure validity. The findings show that incorporating honesty and responsibility into thematic learning significantly improved students' awareness and behavior related to these values. Students demonstrated increased honesty and responsibility in their daily activities, while teachers played a crucial role by creating a supportive environment, using real-life examples, and recognizing positive behavior. This study suggests that integrating character values into thematic learning is an effective approach for elementary education, fostering students with strong moral and responsible character traits.

## Keywords

Value Integration; Philosophy of Honesty and Responsibility; Thematic Learning

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The primary issue that elementary school children face is a lack of comprehension and practice of moral values, such as honesty and responsibility, in their daily lives (Anggraini & Rosyidi, 2022). This is evident through various instances of dishonest behavior and a lack of accountability in both the school and family environments (Ekowati, Restian, & Yayuk, 2020; Larasati & Ma'ruf, 2023). The insufficient integration of moral values into daily learning in elementary schools significantly contributes to this problem. Character education, which encompasses values like honesty and responsibility, is often only taught theoretically without adequate practical application, preventing students from internalizing these values deeply.

Moreover, many teachers still struggle to incorporate moral values into the existing thematic curriculum. Thematic learning, which integrates multiple subjects under a single theme, should offer



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broader opportunities for instilling character values. However, implementing these values often falls short in practice due to teachers' limited knowledge and skills in effectively managing meaningful learning experiences (Salsabillah, Moeis, Fatmariza, & Indrawadi, 2023).

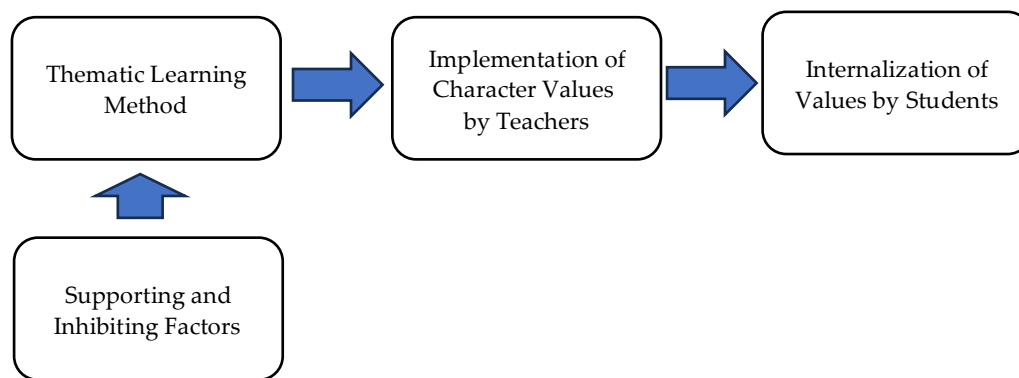
Prior research indicates integrating philosophical values such as honesty and responsibility into thematic learning can positively impact students' character development. (Pratiwi & Rohman, 2022). However, there is still a research gap regarding this approach's practical application and effectiveness in Indonesian elementary schools. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how integrating honesty and responsibility values into thematic learning can enhance students' moral awareness and promote positive behavior at MIS Nurul Yaqin Sambas and SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City.

The primary challenge encountered by elementary school children is their limited understanding and application of moral values, such as honesty and responsibility, in their daily lives (Anggraini & Rosyidi, 2022). According to Hutabarat, (2017) thematic learning in elementary schools adopts a comprehensive educational approach that organizes the curriculum around themes, integrating various scientific disciplines to help students grasp the interconnectedness of concepts and their real-world applications. However, instances of dishonest behavior and lack of accountability persist in both school and family settings. (Ekowati et al., 2020; Larasati & Ma'ruf, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate the philosophical values of honesty and responsibility into thematic learning to enhance students' understanding and practical implementation of these values within relevant contexts. (Fadillah, 2020).

Research demonstrates that character education, which emphasizes the values of honesty and responsibility, yields positive outcomes in students' moral and behavioral development, improved academic achievements, and greater adaptability. (Tanis, 2013). Integrating these values within thematic learning is a vital strategy encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects to foster students' profound comprehension and ability to apply these values in their everyday lives. (Hafidah & Sunardi, 2023; Ikromah, Santoso, & Ari Pratiwi, 2022; A. N. Sholikhah, Ikhrom, Karnadi, & Sutiyono, 2021; K. Sholikhah, 2021).

As per Republic of Indonesia Law no. 20 of 2003, schools, being formal educational environments, play a significant role in cultivating students' integrity through a structured educational process involving various components such as administration, curriculum, students, teachers, facilities, and infrastructure. In the context of the Three Education Centers proposed by Ki Hadjar Dewantara (Majid & Andayani, 2013), the significance of the family, school, and community environments is strongly emphasized in shaping students' character with high moral values. Consequently, a failure in the character formation process during elementary school can lead to disruptive and problematic personalities. (Ansori, 2020). By integrating the philosophical values of honesty and responsibility into thematic learning, it is hoped that students will develop into individuals with admirable character traits, ready to confront future challenges with integrity and a strong sense of responsibility.

Research on integrating the philosophical values of honesty and responsibility in thematic learning has been conducted at the Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Yaqin and SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City. Although efforts have been made to incorporate these character values, several practical problems are encountered. Teachers' and students' limited understanding and implementation of these values are among them. Teachers often have difficulty designing and implementing learning activities that effectively integrate the values of honesty and responsibility. Apart from that, students still show behavior that does not follow these values inside and outside the school environment. This shows a gap between character education goals and actual practice in the field. The focus of this research is to explore further how the values of honesty and responsibility can be effectively integrated into thematic learning in elementary schools. This research will explore the approaches teachers use in teaching these values and how students respond to and internalize these values in everyday life. Apart from that, this research will also identify factors that support and hinder integrating the values of honesty and responsibility in thematic learning.



**Figure 1.** Research Conceptual Framework

This research framework will help identify the relationship between thematic learning methods and the internalization of students' values of honesty and responsibility, as well as the important role of teachers and external factors that influence this process. Hopefully, this research can provide practical and theoretical contributions to character education, especially in elementary schools.

## 2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach, specifically a case study design (Thomas & Wangaard, 2016). Integrating moral values, such as honesty and responsibility, into the learning process is an important aspect of holistic education, especially in the elementary school context. The research will be carried out in several stages (Slameto, 2015). The research will be conducted at the Nurul Yaqin Sijang Private Madrasah, Sambas Regency, and SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City, with participants including students, teachers, and school principals. Data collection uses observation, interviews, and document analysis. The collected data will be analyzed using a qualitative approach, such as thematic analysis. The data collection instrument used was making observations. Instruments: observation sheets, interviews used were semi-structured interview guidelines, and document analysis instruments, namely document analysis rubrics. Stages of Data Analysis, Data Collection: Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with students, teachers, and school principals, and the analysis of learning documents, transcription, and data organization. All data from the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Observation notes and documents are analyzed and organized according to predetermined categories. Data Coding: The data were transcribed and organized later.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Implementation of Thematic Learning in Cultivating Honest and Responsible Characters at MIS Nurul Yaqin and SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City*

Based on the findings of field observations conducted at MIS Nurul Yaqin Sijang, it was observed that students displayed an increased inclination towards honest behavior during thematic learning. The evidence supporting this claim is derived from the observation sheets filled out by the observer during the lessons. These notes on student behavior, which indicate honesty, include instances where students admit their mistakes or ask questions when they do not comprehend the material.

Moreover, observations carried out at SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City, revealed the following evidence: teachers' daily notes or journals documenting student development about values of honesty and the presence of photos or videos capturing learning activities that highlight the application of honesty values. These visual materials showcase moments where students honestly confess their mistakes or actively participate in discussions. For instance, during group discussions, students are more forthcoming in admitting their lack of understanding or errors.

Field observation guides are typically stored in the school administration office, particularly in the research or curriculum development department. Additionally, the results of these field observations demonstrate that teachers employ real-life stories and case studies that underscore the significance of honesty. This approach motivates students to integrate honesty values into their everyday lives.

Furthermore, in an interview with teacher Yuspandi, it was expressed that integrating honesty values into thematic learning facilitated the establishment of an environment that fostered openness and trust within the classroom. A copy of the interview instrument employed for research or observation purposes may be retained in the school administration office. Teachers also emphasized that exemplifying honesty could cultivate stronger relationships with their students.

Moreover, interviews conducted with students from MIS Nurul Yaqin revealed that students reported an increased awareness regarding the importance of honesty, both within and outside of school. Several students felt more at ease and less apprehensive about admitting their mistakes. The questionnaire administered to students regarding the influence of thematic learning on their honest behavior solicited their perceptions of the value of honesty and its application; 80% of students acknowledged that they now admit their mistakes more frequently after learning about honesty.

Students improved their sense of responsibility towards assigned tasks based on the results of class observations at MIS Nurul Yaqin Sijang and SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City. They became more disciplined and accountable in completing tasks within the given timeframe. Teachers assigned group projects requiring students to work collaboratively and take responsibility for their roles. This fostered teamwork and a sense of responsibility among the students. Teacher Dian Hafiza also noted the students' increased proactivity in completing assignments and taking responsibility for their learning outcomes. Teachers used strategies such as learning contracts and personal targets to encourage student responsibility.

The following are the guidelines for the criteria to enhance responsible behavior:

- a. Identification of Responsible Behavior Aspects:
- b. Timely Task Completion: Assessing the extent to which students complete assigned tasks within the specified time frame.
- c. Group Cooperation: Evaluating students' level of responsibility in fulfilling their roles in group assignments.
- d. Proactivity in Task Undertaking: Measuring students' initiative in taking on tasks and responsibilities without explicit instruction from the teacher.
- e. Utilization of Learning Contracts and Personal Goals: Assessing the effectiveness of these strategies in promoting student accountability for their learning outcomes.

To instill honesty, schools/teachers provide award cards for students who demonstrate honest and responsible behavior while at school based on interviews with elementary school teachers at SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City "Holding Little Doctor training by inviting doctors, nurses from health centers who serve as medical teams who work together with schools as resource persons to train students in their duties and responsibilities as school health teams. They use technology and media to make short videos or images promoting honesty and responsibility. They teach students about digital ethics and how to use the internet honestly and correctly. They are given tasks in games on applications that support learning.

Development of a Rating Scale: Employing a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always"). By guiding students towards self-reflection and clarifying their attitudes, beliefs, and emotions regarding right and wrong, this approach can support the integration of honesty, responsibility, and other essential values into the curriculum (Wati, 2017). In education, instilling strong moral values is

paramount (Arumugam, Rafik-Galea, Mello, & Dass, 2013; Chaironi, 2019; Yovita & Dyah, 2014). As educational institutions, schools play a crucial role in shaping students' character. The values of honesty and responsibility are particularly relevant here, which form the foundation of ethical conduct and academic integrity (Berkowitz, 2011).

Thematic learning is an educational approach integrating various relevant subjects under a specific theme. (Alice, 2018; Pradita, Sahyar, & Siman, 2021; Qondias, 2022). This approach aims to enhance students' conceptual understanding and mold their character, encompassing virtues such as honesty and responsibility. (Murwati, 2020). Implementing these values within thematic learning endeavors to cultivate students' character with integrity and responsibility within their academic pursuits and social interactions. One viewpoint posits that schools should strive to foster values beyond honesty and responsibility, including autonomy, sociality, and critical sensitivity. Research findings in related fields suggest that students may derive greater benefits from approaches that foster their overall growth as ethical and pro-social individuals rather than placing narrow emphasis on specific values. (Berkowitz, 2011). Consequently, the thematic learning model for developing honest and responsible character necessitates careful design (Masyhuri & Suherman, 2020). Integrating honesty and responsibility into thematic learning should be done judiciously, balancing nurturing these virtues and fostering other important qualities such as creativity and independent thinking.

Applying the values of honesty and responsibility within a thematic learning framework demands a multifaceted approach. Interactional practices, such as open dialogue and modeling ethical behavior, can effectively cultivate these virtues. (Berkowitz, 2011). Additionally, incorporating service-learning opportunities and engaging parents can further enhance students' comprehension and application of these values (Berkowitz, 2011). Teachers should also leverage the influence of traditional cultural teachings and employ emotional education techniques to aid students in developing moral conduct (Ye, 2021). By fostering a learning environment that prioritizes the development of ethical character, schools can empower students to become responsible, trustworthy, and academically honest individuals (Mann, 2006). Through a comprehensive and intentional approach to moral values education, schools can ensure that honesty and responsibility are deeply ingrained in thematic learning experiences, equipping students with the integrity necessary to navigate the complexities of the academic and broader social landscape.

Honesty and responsibility in thematic learning contribute to students' development into individuals with noble characters, high academic integrity, and the capability to set positive examples in society (Prayoga, 2020). This thematic learning approach with a character focus goes beyond cognitive aspects, encompassing affective and psychomotor aspects to foster good habits. Through these habits, it is hoped that the values of honesty and responsibility will become firmly embedded in students' character. Moreover, there are implications related to thematic learning for students, such as fostering and cultivating tolerance, social awareness, and fair treatment of all members of the school community without discrimination (Abdulatif & Dewi, 2021).

A religious family is a family that understands religious laws and realizes them. However, obstacles are often encountered when forming a faithful, prosperous, and good-quality family, leading to conflicts. If this cannot be resolved, it will result in a family crisis, meaning that the family no longer has tenacity and determination and no longer has physical (material) abilities. And psychic (spiritual) to live independently, develop oneself, and live in harmony to improve physical and mental well-being. The resulting family crisis results in social relations or interactions that are disharmonious; social relations that are initially warm and intimate become full of suspicion and envy, which in turn creates divisions that lead to hostility or divorce. In the end, the husband and wife become depressed, feel like a failure, do not feel valued, have uncertain expectations, suffer, face confusion, and the willingness to live even filled with regret, and usually the child loses control of life and despair even leads to mental depression or becomes naughty (Syamsuddin, Syam'un, Ilham, Jasad, & Rasyid, 2024). Indonesia shows that early childhood living in the coastal areas of this island still lacks the character of responsibility,

honesty, discipline, compassion, care, courage, independence, and hard work as determined by community norms. This is because parents allow their children to behave freely without rules and explanations about good and bad things. The educational background of the people on this coast is relatively low, so parents are less able to provide examples and instill good and appropriate character values in their children (Nuraeni, Sarilah, Lestari, Yulianingsih, & Tahir, 2024).

***Thematic Learning Strategy Integrating the Values of Honesty and Responsibility in MIS Nurul Yaqin and SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City***

Based on the research findings, the teachers at MIS Nurul Yaqin employ an integrated thematic learning approach that combines various subjects, including Indonesian, Mathematics, and Civics, to promote values of honesty and responsibility. The interviews conducted by MIS Nurul Yaqin reveal that teachers frequently utilize moral stories and real-life case studies relevant to students' everyday experiences to elucidate the principles of honesty and responsibility. Well-structured group-based learning activities allow students to apply honesty and responsibility within collaborative work.

Meanwhile, at SD Inpres 6 Lolu, Palu City, the teacher mentioned that they more frequently employ the PBL learning model to facilitate KBM. During the core learning activities, students collaborate to solve the given problems and achieve the learning objectives of the taught material. Through this cooperation, students can take responsibility for the tasks of each member within their group and are held accountable for the discussion results during presentation activities. The distribution of tasks within each group is conducted fairly. Storytelling competitions are conducted to instill the values of honesty and responsibility through the messages conveyed or performed by students in folk tales. Additionally, once a month, community leaders such as police officers are invited to share stories about responsibility and honesty in their duties.

The enhanced comprehension of these values, as evidenced by the results of assessments, demonstrates that 90% of students can accurately identify and explain the values of honesty and responsibility after implementing thematic learning strategies. Observations within the classroom environment further support these findings, as they reveal an augmentation in positive behaviors displayed by students, such as owning up to their errors and assuming responsibility for assigned tasks. Moreover, students exhibit heightened engagement and participation in class discussions and group activities, displaying increased confidence in expressing their thoughts and ideas.

Teachers follow a series of stages to instill a sincere disposition within students. The initial stage involves imparting students an understanding of the significance of honesty, the advantages of honesty, the perils of dishonesty, and the rewards derived from embracing honesty. If a student is caught cheating, the teacher proactively addresses and rectifies the conduct. This approach aligns with Lickona, (1991) Perspective on the initial stage of fostering a sincere character, which involves acquiring moral knowledge. Acquiring knowledge of moral values encompasses comprehending a range of ethical principles, such as honesty, as well as having a grasp of how to apply these principles in diverse situations (Yasmin & Asyiah, 2022). Spontaneous activities identify students' negative attitudes, such as non-completion of homework, lack of attention in class, and disregard for group assignments. Consequently, educational sanctions and penalties are imposed on students, including task repetition, reminders of responsibilities, and encouragement to spend time in the library. It is integral not to dismiss students from class, as this can adversely affect their perception of school within the community. Collaborative activities present an opportunity for teachers to educate students on the significance of responsibility and cooperation, as highlighted (Rahayu & Yulianti, 2011). According to Yasmin & Asyiah, (2022), Positive collaboration contributes to achieving success. Thematic learning has been acknowledged to establish a more student-centric curriculum that facilitates student engagement, learning, and interest. If effectively implemented, thematic learning can enhance students' higher-order thinking abilities, promote collaboration with teachers, and encourage them to consider diverse perspectives (Ampofo & Dickson, 2020). However, the success of thematic learning relies on the careful

selection and integration of appropriate learning media (Larasati & Ma'ruf, 2023). As learning designers, teachers must leverage their knowledge, expertise, and skills to identify and develop media that align with students' characteristics and learning needs (Larasati & Ma'ruf, 2023).

One approach to enhancing thematic learning incorporates values-based education, emphasizing honesty and responsibility (Defirra & Zubaidah, 2019). By integrating these values into the learning process, teachers can assist students in establishing a stronger ethical foundation and becoming more engaged and motivated learners (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021). For instance, teachers can use authentic storytelling to facilitate the development of values (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021). Stories offer opportunities for students to contemplate the values that guide human behavior, both within the realm of fictional tales and their own lives (Estes & Vásquez-Levy, 2001). Incorporating the values of honesty and responsibility into thematic learning strategies can be a potent approach to enhance the overall effectiveness of the learning process. Teachers can foster ethical behavior, critical thinking, and student engagement by utilizing authentic storytelling and other values-based learning media.

The values of honesty and responsibility have been the foundation of character education since the time of Socrates. According to Socrates, the true purpose of education is to stimulate critical thinking and develop mental discipline that leads to continuous intellectual growth and high moral standards. Through his dialectical method, Socrates revealed that the best answers to moral questions are the ideals taught by the founders of religion. These ideals encompass a love for divinity, compassion for fellow human beings, justice, courage, knowledge of good and evil, respect for truth, moderation, kindness, humility, tolerance, honesty, and all noble virtues. (Septiwharti, 2024). One of Socrates' well-known beliefs is that knowledge is the ultimate power. Therefore, in Socrates' perspective, virtue cannot be solely taught conceptually but must also be practiced; hence, education cannot be disregarded. (Tang M, 2021). One of Socrates' famous arguments is "Know yourself and avoid arrogance." This argument appears highly philosophical and seems to serve as a guide for us (Zamzamy, 2022). Meanwhile, Redhana (Putra D, 2023) stated that this is where the awareness of the importance of truth values and the essence of thought stems from. Socrates' famous statement, "Know Thyself," illustrates that, according to Socrates, self-knowledge involves recognizing names and identities and understanding the essence of the soul that distinguishes humans from other lower creatures. On the other hand, Aristotle argued that education should encompass intellectual, moral, and physical learning to achieve well-rounded development. Education should shape responsible and critical-thinking citizens. Similarly, the national education figure Ki Hadjar Dewantara strongly emphasized the significance of character education. Teachers should impart moral, ethical, and personal values to students, such as responsibility, self-discipline, hard work, and love for the country. As role models to be emulated by children, educators must demonstrate attitudes and personalities that align with the child's religious beliefs, culture, and values. They must present themselves as individuals who possess integrity, including honest behavior, responsibility, good appearance, strong character, progressive thinking, the ability to inspire, readiness to face challenges, maturity, courage, independence, and the ability to impart knowledge to students (Septiwharti, 2024).

Halstead categorizes Islamic values into *akhlak* (duties and responsibilities), *adab* (manners), and noble morals (characteristics exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad), with education playing an important role in fostering positive behavior rooted in these values of noble Islam. (Tsani, Sufirmansyah, Makmur, & In'am, 2024).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that integrating the philosophical values of honesty and responsibility in thematic learning in elementary schools, especially in MIS Nurul Yaqin and SD Inpres 6 Lolu Kota Palu, has effectively developed students' characters. Through a learning approach combining various subjects in everyday life, students can comprehensively understand and apply the values of honesty and

responsibility. Interactive learning methods, such as storytelling, role-playing, and group projects, have increased students' awareness of the importance of these values. Thus, this approach improves students' character and prepares them to face future challenges confidently and consistently.

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