

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika: the urgency of building character education in maintaining unity



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ABSTRACT

Character education is pivotal in enhancing the quality of national education implementation. Amidst a backdrop of dwindling moral integrity, characterized by a pervasive character crisis, the very essence of the nation's ethos and cultural integrity is under perpetual threat, particularly in the era of globalization. Recognizing the unstoppable tide of globalization, nations are compelled to formulate strategic policies to mitigate the infiltration of values detrimental to national unity and cohesion while upholding the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, advocating for complete unity. Indonesia, with its diverse tapestry of ethnicities, religions, races, and tribes, embodies a divine essence deserving of reverence. Nevertheless, the imperative of a unifying symbol remains paramount to fortify against potential fragmentation. Proactive interventions in character education are indispensable to address conflicts that imperil national unity and integrity. As an inherently preventative measure, character education is instrumental in nurturing and enlightening future generations, countering societal schisms. This study adopts a literature review methodology to explore pertinent references and address contemporary challenges. Character education, contextualized within the framework of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, resonates deeply with Indonesia's heterogeneous society, underscoring its significance in cultivating national character in harmony with the nation's motto. In conclusion, character education serves as a bulwark against the erosion of moral values amidst globalization, promoting unity and integrity within the diverse fabric of Indonesian society. This research contributes to the discourse on character education's role in fostering national cohesion, offering insights for policymakers and educators alike.



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1. Introduction

This *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, Indonesia's national motto, encapsulates the country's ethos of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, serving as a guiding principle for national identity and cohesion. Originating from ancient Javanese wisdom, the motto underscores the importance of unity amidst diversity, reflecting Indonesia's rich cultural tapestry comprising various ethnicities, languages, religions, and traditions [1]. This motto, deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the Indonesian people, holds immense significance in shaping the nation's character and fostering a sense of belonging among its citizens [2]. In the context of contemporary Indonesia, characterized by rapid globalization and technological advancement, the relevance of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* transcends mere symbolism; it becomes imperative for maintaining national unity and integrity [3]. As the country grapples with the challenges posed by globalization, including cultural homogenization and the influx of foreign influences, preserving Indonesia's cultural heritage and fostering a strong sense of national identity becomes paramount [4]. The multicultural landscape of Indonesia presents both opportunities and challenges for character education. On the one hand, the diversity of cultures and traditions offers a

rich reservoir of values and norms that can enrich character development efforts [5]. On the other hand, the pervasive influence of globalization and technological advancements poses a threat to traditional values, leading to a decline in moral integrity among the younger generation [6].

Character education, aimed at instilling ethical values and fostering civic virtues, emerges as a potent tool for addressing these challenges [7]. By incorporating the principles embodied in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* into character education curricula, educators can impart not only moral values but also a deep appreciation for Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage [8]. This holistic approach to character education not only equips individuals with the skills and virtues necessary for responsible citizenship but also reinforces their sense of belonging to a larger national community [9]. Currently, research on character education primarily revolves around the conceptual framework of value inculcation, with limited exploration into the incorporation of values derived from the state motto. Triyanto highlights the positive prospects of the digital era as a tool for character development through education [10]. This educational process not only enhances skills pertinent to contemporary times but also emphasizes tangible actions over mere promotion. The efficacy of character education significantly hinges on the involvement of parents and the domestic environment as educational partners [11]. Given the prevalent erosion of character values among the Indonesian populace, the revitalization of the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is anticipated to reignite the spirit of unity and integrity through extensive socialization programs across all societal strata. Moreover, the proposition that character education can intersect with various forms of citizenship education underscores the interconnectedness between moral formation and civic responsibilities [12]–[14].

However, the integration of these domains is impeded by prevailing negative perceptions, as elucidated by Althof and Berkowitz [15], necessitating concerted efforts to integrate character education into citizenship education seamlessly. Several studies provide insights into the implementation of character education, underscoring its broad scope. Research focusing on diverse approaches to character education holds particular significance in fostering national unity and state cohesion. This research contributes to the discourse on character education by proposing a comprehensive approach that integrates the principles of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* into character development initiatives. By delineating practical strategies and methodologies for incorporating the values encapsulated in the national motto into educational curricula and programs, this study aims to enhance the effectiveness of character education in fostering national unity and state cohesion. Furthermore, by emphasizing the interconnectedness between character education and citizenship education, this research seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering insights that can inform policy decisions and educational practices aimed at nurturing responsible and ethical citizens in contemporary Indonesia.

2. Method

This literature study's main goal is to examine and summarise the body of knowledge on character education that has already been written. It focuses especially on how character development programs might incorporate the ideas represented in the slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. The objective of this research is to examine diverse theoretical frameworks, pragmatic approaches, and empirical data concerning character education and its convergence with citizenship education within the Indonesian setting. In the first phase, a thorough search of academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and PubMed is necessary to find pertinent scholarly material. "Citizenship education," "national motto," "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*," "Indonesian culture," "character education," and similar phrases could be used as search keywords. Academic publications such as research reports, monographs, and peer-reviewed articles will all be included in the search. Selection of literature will be based on how well it addresses the study question [16]; scholarly works that address national identity, cultural diversity, character education, and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika's* role in character development in the Indonesian setting will be given special attention. Non-academic sources, research unrelated to character education or Indonesia, and publications that do not have scientific rigor or credibility are not used as references in determining reference sources. Relevant literature pertaining to the main research themes will undergo meticulous review and analysis, encompassing theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and empirical evidence [17]. The literature will be categorized and synthesized according to common themes, with the objective of pinpointing gaps, discrepancies, and points of convergence [18]. The gathered information will be organized utilizing suitable techniques, such as content analysis or thematic analysis. In order to give a thorough picture of the state of knowledge today about character education and how it aligns with *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika's* ideas, the

findings from the literature study will be combined. The synthesis will focus on the theoretical viewpoints, real-world applications, and possible difficulties related to using the national motto in character development programs. In order to elucidate the significance of these synthesized findings for Indonesian educational policy, practice, and research objectives, a critical analysis will be undertaken. The discussion will address the relevance of incorporating *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* into the character education curriculum, its potential impact on enhancing state cohesion and national unity, and the opportunities and challenges inherent in this endeavor. The main findings derived from this analysis are subsequently summarized in the conclusion, accompanied by suggestions for further research directions [19]. The objective is to foster moral and responsible citizenship in contemporary Indonesian society. This section will underscore the contribution of the study to the advancement of theoretical comprehension and practical solutions for enhancing character education in Indonesia.

3. Results and Discussion

Character education is an indispensable concept essential for establishing benchmarks for a nation's quality. Particularly in the era of pervasive globalization, where moral crises often ensue, character education becomes imperative [20]. Failure to implement rigorous filtering mechanisms risks the loss of national identity. In this context, the government plays a pivotal role as a key actor, primarily in fostering the reinforcement of the noble values of Pancasila, which serve as the nation's foundational principles. Strengthening these values within each individual is envisioned to enhance societal welfare. National character and cultural values serve as mutually reinforcing components, offering effective conduits for positioning positive values as normative ethics. According to Afifah *et al.*, there remains a significant portion of the population yet to fully embrace the implementation of character values in their lives. Moreover, existing values have not been adequately reflected and implemented [21]. Notably, individuals caring for young children are particularly susceptible to influence from an early age, with teachers traditionally regarded as exemplary figures for emulation [22]. A significant advantage of these epistemic virtues lies in the increasing recognition within the realm of education regarding their importance in achieving professional and teaching goals conducive to cultivating good character [23], [24]. Character virtues, objectively supportive of human well-being in the context of natural evolution, have garnered recognition from numerous contemporary positive psychologists across various cultures [25]–[27]. While moral judgments may be context-specific, the existence of a general ethical truth underscores the necessity of informed practical wisdom, drawing from normative theory and other pertinent factors.

The emphasis of character education should prioritize personal ethics over public ethics. This approach entails addressing significant moral and political issues at the individual level rather than at a broader societal level [15]. Conversely, proponents of character education acknowledge the importance of social context but advocate for prioritizing individual change over societal transformation [28]. Moreover, education aimed at character formation seeks to prepare individuals to become proficient citizens with noble, intelligent, participative, and responsible characters. The motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" assumes a pivotal role in nurturing a generation with robust character and a heightened sense of nationalism, capable of embracing diversity. Values in character education encompass aspects of knowledge, awareness, willpower, and behavioral patterns, facilitating their application in daily life. Instilling character values from a young age is crucial for habit formation, enabling individuals to embody these values instinctively and contribute to the cultivation of a virtuous citizenry, particularly in the face of globalization-induced identity threats to the Indonesian nation.

3.1. Understanding Character Education

The term "character" originates from the Greek word "charassein," meaning to carve. It encapsulates the idea that character serves as a reflection of the soul, manifesting through behavior. Frazer *et al.* equates character with personality, which he defines as the amalgamation of one's nature, character, style, and traits shaped by environmental influences, ultimately forming an individual's identity [29]. Meanwhile, Althof *et al.* delineate character education as a pedagogical process involving students and educators in the cultivation of ethical values such as compassion, justice, virtue, citizenship, and responsibility towards oneself and others [15]. Almazroui elaborates on character education as a deliberate endeavor aimed at fostering comprehension, concern, and action based on fundamental ethical principles [30]. It entails consciously instilling a sense of empathy and ethical conduct. Lickona emphasizes the importance of aligning words with actions, asserting that consistent demonstration of positive behavior cultivates habitual virtuous conduct. In essence, character education imparts positive values to guide individuals' conduct in various spheres of life—

be it familial, educational, communal, or national—thus contributing to the realization of unity amidst Indonesia's diverse fabric when implemented effectively.

3.2. Character Values

The Ministry of National Education has identified 18 character values [31], which are described as follows: (1) Religious: Demonstrating obedient behavior and attitudes in practicing the teachings of one's religion, along with religious tolerance and the ability to coexist harmoniously with followers of other faiths. This includes ensuring the undisturbed implementation of religious worship, rituals, or celebrations of other religions, as well as fostering peace and tranquility among followers of diverse religious beliefs; (2) Honesty: Upholding integrity in all actions, including refraining from plagiarizing others' work and respecting copyright by refraining from altering or misattributing content from external sources; (3) Tolerance: Embracing and respecting differences in religion, ethnicity, race, and other forms of diversity present within Indonesian society, recognizing Indonesia's multifaceted nature and striving to uphold national unity and integrity; (4) Discipline: Adhering to orderly conduct, including observing appropriate dress codes in designated areas and consistently respecting punctuality; (5) Hard work: Demonstrating diligence in overcoming obstacles, such as exerting maximum effort to complete tasks with dedication and utilizing available abilities to their fullest extent; (6) Creativity: Engaging in innovative thinking and problem-solving, contributing to environmental progress through the generation of novel ideas and initiatives, whether on an individual or national scale; (7) Independence: Exhibiting self-reliant attitudes and behaviors, minimizing dependence on others to accomplish tasks, and prioritizing contributions to the nation over expectations from it; (8) Democracy: Fostering a mindset and behavior that values equality in rights and responsibilities, including active participation in democratic processes such as elections and engagement in civic affairs; (9) Curiosity: Pursuing knowledge acquisition through thorough exploration and empirical inquiry, discerning between verifiable information and unproven claims; (10) National Spirit: Prioritizing the interests of the nation and state over personal interests, exemplified by achieving international recognition or competing at global levels while upholding national pride; (11) Patriotism: Demonstrating loyalty and dedication to the unity of Indonesia by embodying the principles of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution in everyday life, thereby serving as a guide for citizens; (12) Appreciation of Achievement: Encouraging personal utility within society and acknowledging and celebrating the achievements of others without harboring envy; (13) Sociability and Communication: Exhibiting an amicable demeanor and respectful communication within the community, valuing differing perspectives and fostering mutual respect; (14) Peace-loving: Cultivating feelings of joy and security among others, fostering a culture of kindness and empathy without instigating animosity; (15) Love of Learning: Cultivating a habit of continuous learning and information acquisition to broaden one's horizons, distinguishing between factual information and misinformation; (16) Environmental Care: Undertaking measures to preserve the natural environment, including proper waste disposal, maintenance of government-provided infrastructure, and participation in community clean-up efforts; (17) Social Responsibility: Demonstrating empathy and providing assistance to those in need, such as fundraising for disaster relief efforts to support fellow Indonesian citizens; (18) Responsibility: Fulfilling duties and obligations in accordance with established regulations, demonstrating dedication and commitment in performing assigned tasks and responsibilities.

The notion that character education prioritizes individual character is frequently associated with the perception that character education aligns with a socially conservative and economically liberal agenda, as articulated by critics [32]–[34]. In critiquing character education programs, Boyd asserts that the majority of literature on character education tends to exhibit a pronounced conservative bias across various dimensions [35]. While acknowledging this perspective, Boyd suggests that much of this literature is plagued by conceptual and empirical shortcomings.

3.3. Character Education Objectives

The objective of Character Education is to instill virtuous values in the next generation, fostering a just, secure, and prosperous society [36]. As exemplified by one of the government's Strengthening Character Education initiatives, the primary goal of the program is to provide guidance and foster character development within educational institutions. Another objective is to promote equitable dissemination of moral and high-quality education throughout Indonesia, in line with the provisions outlined in Presidential Regulation Number 87, Article 2 of 2017 [37], which include: (1) Cultivating and empowering the nation's youth with the principles of Pancasila and sound character education to navigate future challenges; (2) Establishing a national educational framework that prioritizes character

education as its core ethos, bolstered by community engagement and attentive to the nation's cultural diversity; (3) Revitalizing and enhancing the capabilities and competencies of educators, educational personnel, students, families, and society as a whole.

3.4. The importance of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, the motto of the Indonesian nation, embodies superior values to be promoted in advocating the significance of preserving unity and solidarity. As the state motto, it naturally resonates across all societal strata, as it is constitutionally enshrined in Article 36A of the 1945 Constitution, appearing on the state symbol depicted by the Garuda bird. The essence of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* lies in the acknowledgment of our diversity while emphasizing our unity. Conceptually, "*Bhinneka*" signifies diversity, while "*Tunggal Ika*" denotes unity, encompassing distinctions in ethnicity, religion, race, and creed. Failure to grasp the importance of upholding integrity renders us susceptible to division and exploitation by vested interests. Indonesia, renowned for its multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural makeup, embodies a plural society. From a social structural standpoint, this diversity manifests through both horizontal (social differentiation) and vertical (social stratification) dimensions. In essence, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* mirrors the delicate balance between diversity and equality, emblematic of unity. Practically, the strategy underscores the pivotal role of character education in harnessing the potential inherent in our differences. While perceived as a threat by some, these differences ought to be regarded as assets deserving protection as they constitute the nation's wealth. Normative integration is exemplified by adherence to established rules, while value integration entails embodying fundamental values that guide communal living. Given the inexorable march of globalization, it is imperative to reinvigorate strategies aligned with Indonesia's motto of "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*," emphasizing the imperative of fostering national character and cultural education across all segments of Indonesian society to foster unity within the nation and state.

4. Conclusion

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika embodies the essence of the Indonesian people's understanding of diversity. As a pluralistic nation, it serves as the national motto, encapsulating a philosophy that guides the nation's ethos towards unity and oneness. Acknowledging and embracing differences as inherent gifts from the divine, citizens are tasked with preserving integrity by synergizing these diversities, which constitute the nation's wealth. This unity fosters a collective awareness to care for one another, instilling character values rooted in the nation's rich culture. The pursuit of national unity and cohesion through character education necessitates the cultivation of character values among citizens at large. Equipped with these values derived from their cultural heritage, citizens become pivotal in fortifying the foundation against division in an era marked by globalization while upholding the nation's integrity. The motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" plays a pivotal role in reinforcing unity and integrity, integral to which is the cultivation of values. Character, being shaped by various values, finds expression in the principles of Pancasila. This individual character can be delineated through two approaches: firstly, via the principles encompassing heart, thought, exercise, feeling, and intention, and secondly, through the embodiment of values encompassing obligations towards God, oneself, family, society, nation, and the environment. Thus, enhancing the role of citizens as the nation's future generation becomes imperative, fostering individuals of quality with virtuous character and morals in alignment with Pancasila, the guiding ethos of the nation.

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