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Internalization of Environmental Care Characters in Children from Marginal Villages Through Community-Based Education

Nofita Nur Safitri[1], Murdianto[2], Hidar Amaruddin[3]
[123] Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Yogyakarta; email: nofita.nur.pgs22@student.unu-jogja.ac.id, murdianto@unu-jogja.ac.id, hidaramaruddin@unu-jogja.ac.id

Abstract
Permasalahan sampah dan kerentanan lingkungan di kawasan bantaran sungai membutuhkan respons pendidikan yang dekat dengan kehidupan anak-anak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan strategi internalisasi kepedulian lingkungan pada anak-anak sekolah dasar melalui pendidikan berbasis masyarakat di Kampung Ledhok Timoho. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain etnografi pendidikan. Data diperoleh melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi dengan tujuh informan yang terdiri dari koordinator komunitas, relawan pengajar, tokoh masyarakat, dan orang tua, serta observasi terhadap anak-anak. Keabsahan data diuji melalui triangulasi teknik dan sumber, sedangkan analisis data dilakukan dengan menggunakan model Spradley yang meliputi analisis domain, taksonomi, komponensial, dan tema budaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa internalisasi terjadi melalui tiga tahapan: perencanaan partisipatif, pelaksanaan berbasis pengalaman, dan evaluasi reflektif. Kegiatan berkebun, pengelolaan sampah, kerja bakti, pembiasaan, serta keteladanan relawan menghubungkan antara pengetahuan moral, kepekaan moral, dan tindakan moral. Anak-anak tidak hanya memahami pentingnya menjaga lingkungan, tetapi juga menunjukkan inisiatif dengan memungut sampah, merawat tanaman, dan mengingatkan orang-orang di sekitar mereka. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan berbasis masyarakat dapat membentuk karakter ekologis secara kontekstual ketika sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat terlibat secara konsisten.

Keywords: anak sekolah dasar; etnografi pendidikan; karakter peduli lingkungan; pendidikan berbasis masyarakat

Abstract
The problem of waste and environmental vulnerability in riverbank areas requires an educational response that is close to children's lives. This study aims to describe strategies for internalizing environmental awareness in elementary school children through community-based education in Ledhok Timoho Village. The study used a qualitative approach with an educational ethnography design. Data were obtained through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation with seven informants consisting of community coordinators, teaching volunteers, community leaders, and parents, as well as observations of children. Data validity was tested through triangulation of techniques and sources, while analysis was conducted using the Spradley model, which includes domain analysis, taxonomy, componential analysis, and cultural themes. The results showed that internalization occurs through three stages: participatory planning, experience-based implementation, and reflective evaluation. Gardening activities, waste management, community service, habituation, and volunteer role models connect moral knowledge, moral sensitivity, and moral action. Children not only understand the importance of protecting the environment but also demonstrate initiative by picking up trash, caring for plants, and reminding others around them.

These findings confirm that community- based education can shape ecological character contextually when schools, families, and communities are consistently involved.

***Keywords**: elementary school children; educational ethnography; environmental care character; community-based education*

1. Introduction

Environmental issues in Indonesia are still characterized by high levels of waste generation, low levels of source segregation, and limited sustainable management practices. Indriyani et al. (2021) position environmental literacy as a crucial prerequisite for building ecological awareness, especially among the younger generation. Therefore, environmental education cannot simply be understood as imparting knowledge about nature, but must be directed toward fostering responsible attitudes and actions. Bauto et al. (2025) also emphasize that conservation awareness will be stronger when knowledge is combined with real-life social experiences.

This urgency is even more acute for communities living in marginalized urban areas. Ledhok Timoho Village, located on the banks of the Gajahwong River, faces challenges with waste, limited environmental services, and uncertain living conditions. Despite this, the community possesses social capital in the form of mutual cooperation, collective agreements, the habit of helping each other, and knowledge derived from experience in dealing with river conditions. This social capital opens up the possibility for character education that is not solely based on formal classrooms but rooted in community life.

At elementary school age, character formation needs to be carried out through a repetitive and concrete process. Marwiyati (2020) explains that habituation provides space for children to transform values from knowledge to habits. Saharani et al. (2024) add that character education in elementary school children must address the dimensions of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. In the environmental context, a caring character is evident in the willingness to maintain cleanliness, care for living things, use resources wisely, and take action when encountering problems in the surrounding environment Amaruddin (2023).

Lickona (1991) framework helps explain this process through three interrelated components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Moral knowing provides children with the foundation for recognizing right actions; moral feeling fosters conscience, empathy, and a sense of belonging; and moral action embodies values in behavior. These three components are important because environmental awareness is not solely measured by a child's ability to explain the concept of cleanliness. Values can only be considered internalized when children develop sensitivity and voluntarily act in their daily lives.

Several studies have addressed environmental character education through formal school programs. (Afriana & Hidayat, 2022) found that internalization of values can be achieved through habituation and institutional culture, while (Mashuri & Karimah, 2020) demonstrated the role of zero-waste school programs in shaping ecological habits. (Karunia et al, 2020) specifically described the environmentally friendly culture at Gajahwong School. However, discussion of how these strategies are planned, implemented, and evaluated as a community-based educational process remains limited. The relationship between local practices and the stages of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action has also not been fully explained.

This study views Ledhok Timoho Village not as a passive setting, but rather as a cultural space where environmental knowledge and values are produced and passed down. The

novelty of the study lies in its ethnographic reading of the character internalization process in an alternative school that grew out of a marginalized community. The study aims to describe strategies for internalizing environmental character in elementary school children through the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages, and to interpret their relationship with the Lickona character education components. The findings are expected to enrich contextual elementary education practices and provide a foundation for the development of a community-based educational ecosystem..

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with an educational ethnography design. This design was chosen to understand the patterns of behavior, values, symbols, and meanings that exist naturally in the daily lives of the community. This research is considered micro-ethnography because it focuses on a single social situation, namely the practice of character education at Gajahwong School. The researcher was present during community activities so that interpretations could be integrated into the socio-cultural context in which the educational practices take place (Spradley, 2006).

The research was conducted at Gajahwong School, Ledhok Timoho Village, Umbulharjo District, Yogyakarta City, from March 2025 to January 2026. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement and knowledge of educational activities and village life. The seven informants consisted of one community coordinator as a key informant, two volunteer teachers, two community leaders, and two parents. Elementary-aged children were observed as natural participants who directly experienced the internalization process.

Primary data was obtained through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and direct interaction during learning and community activities. Secondary data came from program plans, community archives, activity documentation, volunteer schedules, field notes, and relevant literature. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, assisted by observation guides, interview guides, recording devices, and documentation sheets. The use of multiple techniques was intended to capture the congruence between informant statements, observed practices, and documentary evidence (Creswell, 2017).

Data validity was maintained through technical and source triangulation. Information regarding learning was confirmed between coordinators and volunteers, while changes in children's behavior were examined through statements from volunteers, parents, community leaders, and observations. Researchers also conducted member checks on information requiring confirmation. Data analysis followed Spradley (2006) model, including domain analysis to identify general categories, taxonomic analysis to establish relationships between categories, componential analysis to compare elements within each domain, and cultural theme analysis to identify the overall thread of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

a. The Context of Community-Based Education at Gajahwong School

Gajahwong School has grown as an alternative educational space for the children of Ledhok Timoho Village. Its existence is inseparable from the residents' history of building a safe space for children and championing access to learning amidst socio-economic limitations. Learning is not conducted through a rigid administrative structure. The program develops through volunteer discussions, understanding children's needs, and utilizing the village environment as a learning resource. Thus,

the school functions simultaneously as a learning space, a child protection space, and a community gathering space.

The conditions in the villages along the Gajahwong River provide ecological experiences that are close to children. Waste brought in from upstream, changes in river conditions after rain, limited living space, and the practice of community service become part of everyday life. This environment is fraught with vulnerabilities, but it also provides an authentic context for understanding the relationship between human actions and environmental quality. Children learn not from abstract examples, but from the problems they see, feel, and face together.

The strengthening of local wisdom in the educational process is evident in mutual cooperation, deliberation, mutual care, the use of reusable materials, and intergenerational involvement. These findings align with Luthfi & Elan (2021: 62–71), who stated that local values can be a medium for developing an environmentally conscious character if they are present in social practices that children understand. At Gajahwong School, local knowledge is not taught as a list of concepts but is brought to life through collaborative activities.

b. Planning: Constructing a Contextual Moral Space

The planning phase begins with a commitment to providing a safe, inclusive, and meaningful learning space. The educational vision is not developed solely to meet administrative needs, but rather serves as a shared direction for volunteers and residents. Environmental values are incorporated into the planning process, as river and waste issues are a significant part of village life. School policies are participatory: rules and activities are discussed based on field experience, children's developmental needs, and reflection on previous activities.

Program planning also involves mapping out volunteer potential. Volunteers' backgrounds and skills are used to enrich learning activities, such as gardening, creating crafts from recycled materials, nature exploration, and cleanup activities. Learning materials are selected with accessibility, safety, and zero-waste principles in mind. Used goods are not simply treated as waste, but as learning resources that can foster creativity and promote responsible consumption.

Collaboration with parents and external parties is planned to ensure that habituation doesn't stop at school. Parents are given the opportunity to share information about their child's development and family circumstances, while external collaborations are used to expand learning experiences and program support. While not fully documented in the standard curriculum, this planning pattern demonstrates that educational decisions emerge from close social relationships with the community.

From Lickona (1991) perspective, the planning stage primarily builds a foundation of moral knowledge. Children gain a framework for recognizing the reasons for maintaining cleanliness, understanding the impact of waste on rivers, and viewing the environment as a shared living space. However, planning also prepares the conditions for the growth of moral feeling and moral action because activities are designed to involve direct experience, role modeling, and participation.

c. Implementation: Experience, Habituation, and Role Model

Implementation is the main stage of internalization. Environmental-based learning is realized through gardening, plant care, sorting and utilizing waste, cleaning the classroom, community service, riverbank exploration, and post-activity reflection.

Children are given the opportunity to touch the soil, observe plant growth, observe waste flow, and work together. These experiences help environmental concepts acquire a meaning that is close to their lives.

Experiential activities connect knowledge and emotion. When children see trash floating in the stream or find a dirty yard, they feel discomfort and concern. These feelings are then channeled into possible actions, such as picking up trash, rearranging learning materials, watering plants, or sharing tasks with friends. This type of contextual learning supports ecological literacy because children understand cause-and-effect relationships and their place as part of the environment (Kesha et al., 2025).

Habituation occurs through simple actions repeated consistently. After learning, children are accustomed to tidying up, arranging sandals, returning utensils, and ensuring no trash is left behind. Over time, some children begin to perform these actions without prompting. Parents also observe changes at home: children sweep the yard, no longer litter food wrappers, and remind family members to use the trash can. These changes demonstrate a shift from obedience based on instructions to initiative stemming from awareness.

The role models of volunteers provide a crucial link between messages and practice. Volunteers not only instruct children to maintain cleanliness, but also participate in picking up trash, maintaining classrooms, and working together without assuming authority. An egalitarian culture helps children see that environmental care is a shared responsibility. Rahmat & Febriani (2025) emphasize that role models are effective because children acquire behavioral models that can be observed and imitated in real-life situations.

The findings demonstrate the integration of Lickona's three components. Moral knowing is evident when children can explain the impact of waste, distinguish appropriate behavior, and understand the benefits of caring for plants. Moral feeling is evident in discomfort with a dirty environment, empathy for affected residents, a sense of belonging to the school, and satisfaction after completing activities. Moral action is present when children are able to use cleaning tools, participate in community service, volunteer to maintain space, and remind friends and family members.

Table 1. Strategy for Internalizing Environmentally Caring Character

Stage	Main Practices	Changes in Children	Character Components
Planning	Discussion, mapping of volunteer potential, selection of low-waste materials, parental collaboration	Understand the rules, reasons, and consequences of actions on the environment	Moral knowing; moral feeling readiness
Implementation	Gardening, community service, waste management, nature exploration, habituation and role modelling	Sensitive to environmental conditions, able to cooperate, and act voluntarily	Moral knowing, moral feeling, moral action
Evaluation	Behavioral observation,	Demonstrate	Strengthening

	volunteer reflection, communication with parents, program follow-up	consistency, initiative, and responsibility at school and home	moral action

Source: Research data, 2025–2026

d. Evaluation: Reflectively Reading Behavior Change

Character evaluation isn't conducted through academic tests. Volunteers observe children's involvement, initiative, responsibility, and consistency of behavior during and after activities. Indicators considered include willingness to tidy up without being asked, ability to work collaboratively, courage to remind friends, concern for plants, and how children respond to a dirty environment. Observation results are discussed in volunteer reflections to determine improvements to future activities.

Communication with parents extends the evaluation space into the home. Parents' accounts indicate that some habits learned at school are carried over into the family environment. Children are not merely recipients of grades but can also serve as reminders for adults. On a small scale, this position demonstrates children's potential as agents of change, connecting school and family.

Reflective evaluation allows educators to view character as a process, not a temporary outcome. The shift from following directions, imitating examples, to acting without prompting demonstrates development toward moral action. However, consistency of behavior remains dependent on ongoing experience and environmental support. Therefore, evaluation at Gajahwong School also serves as a basis for program review, strengthening the role of volunteers, and improving communication with families.

e. Challenges and Implications of Strengthening

The internalization process faces differences in children's ages, characteristics, and emotional readiness. Not all children can participate in activities with the same duration, level of concentration, and type of support. Volunteers need to adapt their approach to prevent learning from becoming demanding and neglecting developmental needs. Limited volunteer numbers and changing facilitators also impact the consistency of the habituation process.

Another challenge arises from the gap in habits between school, home, and the village environment. Values practiced in school can be weakened when children encounter different examples in their surroundings. Family socioeconomic conditions, dense housing, waste brought in from outside the village, and uncertain land status limit the community's ability to structurally change the environment. This means that character education should not place the burden of resolving environmental issues solely on children.

The implications of the findings are the need for an educational ecosystem that connects schools, families, communities, and external partners. Schools need to document goals, activities, and progress indicators more systematically without diminishing community flexibility. Volunteers need space for reflection and capacity building to maintain consistent role models. Families and community members need to be involved in simple, repeatable activities so that environmental values gain social support outside of school hours.

Theoretically, this research shows that moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action do not develop in a completely linear sequence. They reinforce each other in a cycle of experience. Children may act by imitating volunteers, then understand the reasons for their actions through reflection; conversely, knowledge about the impact of waste can foster concern and encourage action. Community-based education is effective when this cycle occurs repeatedly within safe, contextual, and participatory relationships.

4. Conclusion

Internalizing environmental awareness among elementary school children at Gajahwong School takes place through community-based education integrated into the life of Ledhok Timoho Village. The strategy is implemented through participatory planning, experience-based implementation, and reflective evaluation. Planning begins with children's needs and local environmental issues; implementation is realized through gardening, waste management, community service, habituation, and role modeling; while evaluation is conducted by observing behavioral changes and confirming these with volunteers and parents.

This practice connects moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Children not only understand the reasons for protecting the environment but also demonstrate sensitivity and initiative in their daily actions. Successful internalization is supported by immersive experiences, consistent role models, an egalitarian culture, and community involvement. Future strengthening needs to be directed at program documentation, continued volunteer mentoring, and more consistent collaboration between schools, families, communities, and external parties.

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