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The Role of Digital Media in Strengthening Student Responsibility and Ethical Character at State Elementary School 3 Tarowang

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Abstract

Advances in information technology have transformed how elementary school students interact with learning resources while simultaneously shaping their daily behaviors. This study aims to examine the role of digital media in strengthening students' character traits of responsibility and ethics at UPT SDN 3 Tarowang, Jeneponto Regency. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, this research involved the school principal, classroom teachers, students, and parents as informants selected via purposive sampling. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies, and subsequently analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which comprises data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. The findings reveal that the integration of digital media into instruction contributes to reinforcing students' sense of responsibility in managing time and academic tasks, as well as heightening their ethical awareness when interacting in digital spaces. Teachers play an active role in designing digital media-based instructional strategies integrated with character value inculcation, despite encountering inhibiting factors such as limited technological infrastructure and variations in parental supervision. These findings offer both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of digital-based character education strategies at the elementary school level.

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Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the ways in which elementary school students learn, communicate, and interact with their surrounding environment (Aliyyah et al., 2025). Digital media including instructional videos, interactive applications, and social media platforms have become an integral component of students' learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom (Kurniawan & Zabeta, 2025). The integration of these technologies presents substantial opportunities to foster more engaging, interactive, and contextualized learning experiences (Im, 2024). Nevertheless, ease of access to digital media introduces distinct risks, particularly for elementary school students who are still in the formative stages of moral and socio-emotional development (Sugiarto & Farid, 2023).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the use of digital media without adequate guidance and character education can lead to a decline in academic responsibility and the emergence of unethical behaviors in digital spaces, such as plagiarism, the dissemination of misinformation, and a lack of online communication etiquette (Almethen & Alomair, 2024; Sholeha, et al., 2024). This phenomenon underscores that digital media function not merely as instructional aids, but also as new social arenas that actively shape student character (Kaur & Saukko, 2022; Tisna Nugraha & Hasanah, 2021). Consequently, schools, as formal educational institutions, bear a critical responsibility to ensure that the utilization of digital media aligns with the reinforcement of student responsibility and ethical values (Nurazizah, 2025). UPT SDN 3 Tarowang, an elementary school in Jeneponto Regency, similarly navigates these dynamics amid the growing use of digital devices by students in both instructional settings and everyday routines. This phenomenon serves as the primary rationale for the present study to investigate in depth how digital media genuinely contribute to strengthening student responsibility and ethical character at the school.

While previous studies have examined the nexus between digital media and character education, the majority have relied on quantitative approaches that measure the statistical impact of digital media (Nurazizah, 2025). Other research has predominantly focused on general digital literacy without specifically exploring how the process of cultivating responsibility and ethical character unfolds within everyday elementary classroom instruction (Arifin et al., 2025; Sugiarto & Farid, 2023). Meanwhile, international studies on digital citizenship at the elementary level indicate that the integration of digital ethics into the curriculum varies considerably in implementation and relies heavily on the teacher's role as a facilitator (Almethen & Alomair, 2024). Research on elementary school teachers' digital literacy further confirms that digitally mediated instructional strategies critically determine the extent to which character values are effectively internalized by students (Aliyyah et al., 2025).

The research gap lies in the scarcity of in-depth qualitative inquiries examining the processes, strategies, and supporting and inhibiting factors involved in strengthening student responsibility and ethics through digital media at the elementary level, particularly within rural school contexts such as UPT SDN 3 Tarowang. Yet, a nuanced understanding of these processes is essential for formulating contextualized and actionable character education strategies (Kurniawan & Zabeta, 2025). The urgency of this research is heightened by the fact that responsibility and ethical integrity constitute foundational competencies for students navigating the challenges of an ever-evolving digital landscape (Im, 2024). Without an adequate

empirical grasp of how digital media tangibly shape student character in practice, character education initiatives risk remaining purely normative without addressing underlying behavioral realities (Kaur & Saukko, 2022). This study seeks to bridge this gap through a contextualized, in-depth qualitative exploration.

The novelty of this study lies in its application of a qualitative case study approach to deeply investigate the processes, pedagogical strategies, and enabling and constraining factors in fostering student responsibility and ethics via digital media, rather than merely measuring statistical effects as commonly done in prior literature. Furthermore, this research offers an empirical contribution situated within a rural elementary school setting, a context that has received relatively limited scholarly attention in the discourse on digital media and character education. Based on this background, the central research question formulated for this study is: How do digital media contribute to strengthening student responsibility and ethical character at UPT SDN 3 Tarowang?

Specifically, this study aims to describe how digital media are utilized in the instructional process, uncover their role in shaping students' responsibility and ethical character, identify teachers' strategies in leveraging digital media for character reinforcement, and analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered throughout the process. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the scholarship on digital-based character education; practically, it offers strategic recommendations for teachers and schools to optimize digital media utilization for character building. Moreover, the findings can serve as an evaluative reference for school principals and local education authorities in formulating policies on technology integration that align with character education values. Thus, this research extends beyond mere description to provide actionable insights for advancing character education practices in the digital era.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research method with a case study design, selected for its capacity to yield an in-depth, contextualized, and naturalistic understanding of how digital media are utilized to strengthen student responsibility and ethical character (Nurazizah, 2025). The research was conducted at Unit Pelaksana Teknik (UPT) SDN 3 Tarowang, Jeneponto Regency, chosen for its relevance to the emerging phenomenon of digital media adoption within rural elementary school environments (Kurniawan & Zabeta, 2025). Informants were selected using purposive sampling, comprising the school principal, classroom teachers, several students, and parents as supporting informants, based on the primary criterion that they possessed direct knowledge of and active involvement in the use of digital media at the school (Aliyyah et al., 2025). The objects of inquiry encompassed the utilization of digital media in classroom instruction, the reinforcement of student responsibility, the cultivation of student ethics, teachers' instructional strategies in leveraging digital media, and the enabling and inhibiting factors affecting implementation. Data were collected through three primary techniques: (1) direct observation of digital media-based instructional processes alongside students' responsible and ethical behaviors; (2) in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and students; and (3) documentation analysis involving teaching modules, photographs of learning activities, school regulations, character-building program records, and the digital

learning media utilized (Almethen & Alomair, 2024). These three techniques were employed concurrently to obtain comprehensive and mutually reinforcing data across sources (Im, 2024). The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2020), consisting of data condensation, data display, and continuous conclusion drawing and verification throughout the research process. To ensure data trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation (cross-checking information across the principal, teachers, and students), methodological triangulation (comparing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation), and member checking with key informants where feasible (Sugiarto & Farid, 2023). Through these rigorous procedures, this study was designed not to test statistical causality, but rather to elucidate how digital media are integrated into instruction, how they shape student responsibility and ethics, what strategies teachers deploy, and what facilitating or constraining factors emerge in this character-building process at UPT SDN 3 Tarowang.

Results and Discussion

Results

This section presents the empirical findings regarding the role of digital media in strengthening student responsibility and ethical character at UPT SDN 3 Tarowang, derived from observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis. The findings are presented narratively by integrating verbatim excerpts from informants, visual documentation of instructional activities, and thematic mapping to provide a comprehensive account of the phenomenon under investigation. Qualitative data in this study are illustrated through verbatim quotes from informants to capture authentic accounts of their experiences using digital media during classroom learning. One upper-grade student shared the following reflection:

> *"When learning with videos or applications on the projector screen, I feel more motivated and try to submit my assignments on time because my classmates can also see my work."* (Student Informant, Grade V)

This statement demonstrates how the use of digital media in instruction fosters a heightened sense of accountability toward assigned tasks while simultaneously cultivating awareness of peer social accountability. Similar excerpts from other informants were coded and analyzed to identify recurring themes, such as improved time discipline, academic honesty in completing tasks independently, and polite communication when using digital devices in groups, all of which align closely with the objectives of this study. In addition to verbatim excerpts, visual documentation in the form of classroom photographs provides richer contextual insight into the learning atmosphere and the practical integration of digital media, aiding readers in grasping situational dynamics that are difficult to convey through text alone. Figure 1 illustrates the classroom environment as students engage with digital media during a lesson, highlighting active student participation and positive peer interactions throughout the instructional session.



Figure 1. Classroom Learning Environment Utilizing Digital Media

Alongside qualitative quotes and visual records, the results of the thematic analysis across observation, interview, and documentation data are summarized in Table 1 to provide a concise overview of the prevalence of the core themes.

Table 1. Summary of Core Theme Emergence from Data Analysis

Theme	Number of Sources	Observation Frequency	Interview Frequency	Documentation Frequency	Emergence Rate (%)
Responsibility	5	4	4	3	80%
Ethics	5	3	4	3	73%

As shown in Table 1, both responsibility and ethics consistently emerged across all three data collection methods, indicating that the integration of digital media at UPT SDN 3 Tarowang tangibly contributes to strengthening both dimensions of student character. The theme of responsibility was most prominently captured through direct observations of students' behaviors in managing time and completing digital-based tasks, whereas the theme of ethics was more extensively revealed through in-depth interviews exploring students' awareness of respectful communication and conduct when utilizing digital devices.

Discussion

The discussion in this study is framed within a qualitative case study paradigm that prioritizes a contextualized understanding of digital media utilization in character education, ensuring that the analysis is both scientifically rigorous and directly relevant to the setting of UPT SDN 3 Tarowang. The findings address the core research questions by demonstrating how digital media are embedded into classroom instruction and how they actively shape student responsibility and ethical character. The use of instructional videos and interactive applications not only enhances student engagement during lessons, but also cultivates disciplined habits in

task completion and ethical awareness in digital interactions, directly aligning with the study's objectives outlined in the introduction (Manobi, et al., 2024; Gultom, 2025).

These findings corroborate the work of Sugiarto and Farid (2023), who demonstrated that digital literacy serves as an effective pathway to reinforce responsibility, honesty, and empathy among learners. Furthermore, the results align with Aliyyah et al. (2025), who emphasized that teachers' pedagogical strategies in integrating digital literacy into the curriculum play a decisive role in the successful inculcation of character values in elementary schools. Nevertheless, this study also uncovered variations in the intensity of responsibility and ethical character development among individual students. These discrepancies appear to be influenced by differing levels of parental guidance at home, a factor similarly highlighted by Almethen and Alomair (2024) regarding the critical role of family involvement in shaping students' digital citizenship.

Several limitations of this study warrant transparent acknowledgment. First, the scope of the research was confined to a single elementary school, meaning the findings cannot be broadly generalized to other educational settings with distinct institutional or demographic characteristics. Second, the limited duration of classroom observations constrained the depth of inquiry into the long-term consistency of students' responsible and ethical behaviors. Consequently, questions regarding how these patterns of character reinforcement persist or evolve over time require further longitudinal investigation. Looking ahead, expanding upon these findings can help address broader questions concerning how rural elementary schools can sustainably optimize digital media for character development. Future research is recommended to examine the collaborative dynamics among schools, teachers, and parents more comprehensively, as well as to explore actionable strategies for overcoming structural barriers such as limited digital infrastructure and inconsistent home supervision, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of digital-based character education in the future.

Conclusion

This study concludes that digital media play a pivotal role in strengthening student responsibility and ethical character at UPT SDN 3 Tarowang through instructional processes consistently integrated with character value inculcation by teachers. The utilization of instructional videos, interactive applications, and educational social media encourages students to exercise greater discipline in time management and task completion, while fostering ethical awareness in their digital communication and conduct. Teachers act as primary facilitators through guided mentoring, role modeling, and the establishment of clear rules governing digital media usage, although these efforts remain challenged by inhibiting factors such as limited technological facilities and varying degrees of parental supervision at home. These findings underscore that character development in the digital era cannot be separated from strong synergy among schools, teachers, and families in cultivating a supportive digital ecosystem. As a practical implication, schools are advised to formulate clear guidelines for digital media usage integrated into character education programs, while future studies should broaden the geographical scope and observation timeframe to gain a more comprehensive understanding of digital-based character reinforcement at the elementary school level.

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Authors' Note

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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