



How Do Teachers Promote Honesty and Responsibility at the Elementary Education Level? A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

In Indonesia, a crisis in moral and values education is emerging among elementary school students, posing a serious threat to the development of a superior generation if these values are not firmly instilled. The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers promote honesty and responsibility in their students. Using a narrative inquiry approach, the research explored teachers' lived experiences to deepen understanding of how moral values are cultivated in elementary schools. The findings reveal that fostering honesty and responsibility is a long-term, ongoing process underpinned by consistent role modeling, empathy, and daily practice. Teachers emphasized that values are best instilled through example rather than instruction alone. Challenges include inconsistent implementation among educators, the influence of social media, and limited parental understanding. Nevertheless, teachers' experiences highlight strategies such as culturally responsive practices, Classroom agreements, and restorative approaches that support more effective value formation. This study suggests expanding pedagogy toward moral pedagogy, positioning teachers as moral agents whose reflective experiences contribute to the development of contextual theory and practice. It is recommended that future research and curriculum design emphasize integrating honesty and responsibility through modeling, reflection, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Moral education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals and society by developing character through cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions, extending beyond merely distinguishing right from wrong (Atsani et al., 2023; Murjani & Nurjaman, 2022; Sri Armini, 2024). In the context of increasing concerns about moral decline, particularly among younger generations, the urgency of strengthening character education has become more evident. Rapid industrialization and modernization have shifted perspectives on moral values, often contributing to moral degradation (Pabbajah et al., 2020). In Indonesia, this issue is reflected in the growing crisis of moral values among elementary school students, which may threaten the formation of a quality future generation if not addressed early (Galuh et al., 2021). Without adequate moral education, individuals may struggle to distinguish between right and wrong, leading to irresponsible behavior (Grant & Matemba, 2013).

Childhood is widely recognized as a critical period for moral development, as children begin to internalize social norms and values that shape their behavior (Annisa et al., 2020; Rachmawati et al., 2025). At the elementary school level, this process becomes more structured and influential, as students are in a formative stage of character development (Arifin, 2022; Mulyadi, 2019). Schools, therefore, serve as a key environment after the family in instilling moral values. In a broader context, studies across different cultures consistently emphasize the importance of moral education at the primary level, despite variations in approaches, with the shared goal of cultivating morally responsible individuals (Johansson et al., 2011; Osman, 2019; Tse & Zhang, 2017; Wong et al., 2017). Moreover, human behavior is largely shaped during childhood, reinforcing the strategic importance of early moral education (Winkler, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, moral development can be understood through Kohlberg's stages, which classify moral reasoning into pre-conventional,

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conventional, and post-conventional levels, reflecting increasing moral maturity (Ma, 2013; Suparno, 2020; Tutuop & Sihotang, 2023). At the elementary level, children generally operate within the transition from pre-conventional to conventional stages, where moral judgments begin to shift from self-interest to adherence to social norms. In this regard, moral values function not only as behavioral guidelines but also as essential mechanisms for maintaining social harmony and resolving conflicts (Mohd Yusoff et al., 2022). This theoretical foundation highlights that moral development is a gradual, context-dependent process requiring consistent guidance.

Among various moral values, honesty and responsibility are considered fundamental in character education, as they form the basis for developing individuals with integrity and strong moral awareness (Ahsanulhaq, 2019). Honesty reflects consistency between words and actions, while responsibility encompasses accountability, independence, and commitment in fulfilling duties (Azeera et al., 2022; Azzarima et al., 2023; Syifa et al., 2022). Individuals with honest character tend to avoid deceit and align their actions with their inner convictions (Juningtias et al., 2024; Noptario, 2022), while responsibility prepares students to face life's challenges and social demands (Rosita et al., 2022; Yudo Handoko, 2025). These values are also aligned with Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes the development of morally grounded and responsible citizens (Putri, 2022).

Teachers play a central role as both educators and moral exemplars in fostering these values through daily interactions and consistent behavior (Cahyaningrum et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2024). They are regarded as primary moral agents whose personal values must align with the principles they aim to instill (Ying & Jackson, 2025), and their influence extends through relationships within the school community (Gellel, 2023; Wati et al., 2021). However, previous studies tend to emphasize the importance of the moral education conceptually or normatively, while paying limited attention to exploring teachers' lived experiences of implementing moral values such as honesty and responsibility in authentic Classroom contexts. In addition, moral education is a complex form of social learning influenced by multiple factors, and its outcomes are not always predictable (Rehren & Sauer, 2024; Kropfreiter et al., 2024). Therefore, there remains a gap in understanding how teachers practically navigate, interpret, and enact moral education in real settings, particularly at the elementary level. To address this gap, this study employs a narrative inquiry approach to explore teachers' experiences in promoting students' honesty and responsibility, providing a more in-depth and contextualized understanding of moral value cultivation in schools.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Time and Place

This study was conducted in elementary school settings, involving teachers from different schools. The data collection process took place over a specific period during which participants engaged in individual interview sessions with the researcher. The study setting reflects authentic educational environments where teachers carry out their professional roles, enabling exploration of real-life experiences in moral education practices.

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach using narrative inquiry as the primary design. Narrative inquiry focuses on understanding human experiences as a source of knowledge and meaning (Clandinin, 2016). This approach enables researchers to explore lived experiences in depth while considering broader socio-cultural, historical, linguistic, political, familial, and environmental contexts (Caine et al., 2022). Narrative inquiry is particularly suitable for capturing the complexity of educational experiences, as it traces sequences of actions and events over time (Carr, 1986; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Furthermore, this approach emphasizes the relational and contextual nature of research, involving a collaborative interaction between researcher and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It attends to both personal and social dimensions, including internal aspects such as emotions, moral choices, and aspirations, as well as external factors such as social relationships and environments (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, narrative inquiry provides a comprehensive framework to understand how teachers experience and interpret the cultivation of moral values in educational settings.

Population and Sample / Subject and Object

In this exploratory study, three teachers from different schools were involved as research participants. Participants were selected using a network sampling technique, which enabled the researcher to identify individuals with relevant experience in the research focus. The subjects of this study were teachers who actively foster students' moral values, particularly honesty and responsibility, while the object of the study was the teachers' lived experiences implementing these values in Classroom contexts.

Research Procedure

Before data collection, the researcher clearly explained the study's aims and procedures to each participant. Verbal informed consent was obtained, and participation was entirely voluntary. Ethical considerations were strictly followed in accordance with standard research protocols, including ensuring confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with each participant taking part in an approximately 30-minute session. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Data collection was conducted until sufficient and relevant information was obtained to address the research questions. Throughout the process, the researcher maintained a reflective and interactive stance, consistent with the principles of narrative inquiry.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process followed the principles of narrative inquiry by organizing participants' experiences into meaningful narratives. The transcribed interview data were systematically coded and categorized to identify key themes and patterns. These categories were then constructed into narrative texts that reflect the participants' lived experiences.

In line with Clandinin and Connelly's framework, the analysis was guided by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space: sociality, temporality, and spatiality

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006). Temporality refers to the continuity of experience across past, present, and future, highlighting how narratives evolve (Clandinin & Connelly, as cited in Haydon & van der Riet, 2014). Sociality emphasizes personal and social conditions, including emotions, relationships, and interactions that shape the narrative. Spatiality refers to the physical and situational context in which experiences occur (Clandinin & Connelly, as cited in Haydon et al., 2015).

Additionally, narrative analysis acknowledges the dynamic interaction between individual experiences, cultural contexts, and the search for meaning and coherence in storytelling (Huber & Yeom, 2017). Through this approach, the study aims to develop an in-depth, contextualized understanding of how teachers construct and apply moral values in their professional practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

First Conversation

The first story introduces Soleh, an elementary school teacher with nineteen years of teaching experience.

Soleh's story

I began my journey as a temporary teacher in 2006. In practice, instilling the values of responsibility and honesty is challenging, especially in a school with over 200 students. I once faced a situation where students lost their stationery almost every day. When approached gently and with prayers for their well-being, one student eventually admitted to the wrongdoing voluntarily. This demonstrates that moral awareness can develop through a compassionate and non-judgmental approach. Another example occurred in the school canteen, where many students claimed to have paid when they had not. As teachers, we regularly provide guidance every morning. Although the impact is neither immediate nor permanent, I believe that consistent advice can gradually change behavior. In the prayer room, children once hid a friend's shoes, and there were also cases of missing donation money due to teachers' negligence in instilling honesty. However, thanks to continuous character-building efforts, similar incidents have been reduced in higher grade levels.

I also reinforced character education at my previous madrasah (previous school). When a student committed theft, we accompanied them and provided opportunities for them to change. If the behavior persisted, parents were called in, and if no improvement occurred, stern warnings were issued, even threats of school transfer. Sometimes, statements like, "Other schools will not accept you if you do not change," became a turning point in their awareness. I firmly believe that character is the essence of education. School is not merely a place to seek knowledge but a place to shape good, faithful, and pious individuals. I feel proud when I see children praying in congregation, leading prayers as an imam, or even succeeding in other professions—these are the fruits of strong character education.

However, the challenges today are increasingly complex. Technology enables children to learn quickly, but also makes them lose sensitivity toward their environment and parents. My youngest child was able to operate a smartphone before learning to read, influenced by an older sibling who enjoys playing games. While engrossed in play, he sometimes fails to respond when called. This is the new challenge we face: balancing technological advancement with the early instillation of moral values. As a teacher, I remain optimistic. If parents and teachers work together, I am confident that children can grow into honest, responsible individuals with strong character.

Reflection and Analysis

Soleh emphasizes the importance of a gentle and consistent approach in instilling the values of honesty and responsibility in students. Reinforcement in the Classroom also helps students remember the significance of honesty, although behavioral changes take time. Soleh also emphasizes the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents in educating children, helping them grow into responsible and honest individuals despite the increasing challenges posed by technology.

Second Conversation

The second story comes from Hadi, an elementary school teacher with six years of teaching experience.

Hadi's story

I began teaching in 2020 and have since recognized that the crisis of honesty among students is a serious challenge. One contributing factor is the lack of exemplary behavior from teachers. Many educators deliver theoretical content without embodying the values they teach, making it difficult for students to find role models to emulate. Additionally, the influence of social media, which often promotes negative values, further weakens children's character. If schools do not take moral education seriously, students will be easily influenced by external environments.

My experience has shown that a personal approach is crucial in character development. I once mentored a student who frequently arrived late and was dishonest when asked for the reason. After establishing a close and trusting relationship, he eventually revealed that each morning he had to cook and bathe his younger sibling because his parents worked at the market. From this, I learned that children can be honest and responsible when approached with empathy. Moral awareness does not develop instantly; rather, it is a long-term process that must begin early. Instilling values such as honesty and responsibility requires consistency, perseverance, and a collective commitment from all teachers, as the impact will be limited if only one teacher makes the effort. Collaboration with parents is

also essential, as character formation cannot be entrusted solely to schools.

In our school environment, we strive to integrate local cultural values, such as *awik-awik* (customary rules), to shape students' behavior. Our principle is that education should be firm but not harsh. However, challenges persist, such as parents' misunderstandings of disciplinary actions, which are sometimes perceived as burdensome tasks imposed on children. This highlights the need for a shared understanding between school and home regarding the importance of responsibility in education. For me, being a teacher is not merely a profession, but a moral responsibility. As K.H. Dewantara wisely stated, a teacher must be *'digugu dan ditiru'* (a figure to be trusted and emulated), not merely those who excel academically.

Reflection and Analysis.

Hadi recognized a crisis of honesty among students, which he attributed to the lack of role modeling from teachers. Moreover, the influence of social media, which often promotes values that conflict with moral principles, has also affected children's character development. Therefore, he emphasizes the importance of a personal approach and the continuous cultivation of moral values such as honesty and responsibility. Hadi also realized that character education cannot be carried out in isolation; it requires collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community.

Third Conversation

The third teacher is named Wayan, an elementary school teacher with fifteen years of teaching experience.

Wayan's Story

My name is Wayan. I have taught in various regions, including private schools and underserved 3T: 'Terdepan' (Underdeveloped), 'Terluar' (Remote), and 'Tertinggal' (Border areas). This experience has broadened my perspective on the fact that education is about both academic achievement and shaping students' character, particularly regarding the values of honesty and responsibility. I have come to realize the importance of instilling moral values when dealing with students who exhibit dishonest or irresponsible behaviors, such as cheating, failing to pay at the school canteen, or neglecting Classroom cleanliness. I applied two main approaches to address these issues: class agreements and restitution. At the beginning of the school year, I involve students in collaboratively formulating Classroom rules, so they feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the agreements. This approach fostered intrinsic responsibility and accountability. Meanwhile, I used restitution to help students reflect on their mistakes without shaming them. When a rule is broken, I do not immediately resort to punishment; instead, I invite the student to consider the impact of their actions, who they are accountable to, and how they can make things

right. This becomes a meaningful process of cultivating honesty through conscious reflection rather than fear of punishment.

When I participated in the Pendidikan Guru Penggerak (Teacher Leadership Program), I developed a deeper understanding that teacher role modeling is a key to character education. The changes I implemented began with consistency in my own behavior and speech. I also realized that the success of this approach heavily depended on a supportive environment. Challenges arose when teachers differed in approach or when students came from family environments that did not align with the values promoted at school. I believed that value-based education, such as honesty and responsibility, could only be effective if there was synergy among teachers, parents, and the school. Consistency was essential to ensure that students did not receive conflicting moral messages. I felt proud when my students demonstrated responsible behavior, such as sweeping the classroom without being told, refraining from cheating, or submitting assignments on time. However, I was also aware that these values might not be instilled evenly unless there was strong collaboration among teachers and active parental involvement.

At our school, the cultivation of values was also reinforced through school culture, including weekly IMTAQ (faith and piety) activities held every Friday, which featured tilawah (Qur'anic recitation), short sermons, and themes focused on honesty and discipline. Additionally, community activities in Terara Village, such as religious gatherings and short-term Islamic boarding programs (pesantren kilat), also played a role in strengthening students' sense of social responsibility. Based on these experiences, I planned to develop a practical module on positive discipline that included strategies for fostering honesty and responsibility through agreement-based and restitution approaches. I hoped this module could be shared with fellow teachers in our school cluster forums, so that the approach could be applied consistently and comprehensively. With collective effort, I believed that the values of honesty and responsibility could grow into a strong and sustainable learning culture.

Reflection and Analysis

Wayan emphasizes the importance of instilling the values of honesty and responsibility among students, which he encountered through his teaching experiences in various regions. To address dishonest behavior, such as cheating or failing to pay at the canteen, he uses class agreements and restitution. In addition, Wayan recognizes that teacher role-modeling is essential, as is the need for synergy among teachers, parents, and schools to consistently instill these values. In his school, the values of honesty and responsibility are also reinforced through school culture and community-based activities, such as IMTAQ (faith and piety programs) and religious gatherings.

Discussion

Teacher Role Modeling as the Core of Moral Internalization

One of the central findings of this study highlights that the cultivation of honesty and responsibility is strongly rooted in teacher role modeling. Across all three narratives, teachers emphasized that students internalize moral values more effectively through consistent behavioral examples rather than through verbal instruction alone. This finding reinforces the perspective that teachers function not only as knowledge transmitters but also as moral agents whose actions serve as reference points for students (Cahyaningrum et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2024).

This aligns with Yuliati (2020), who argues that character formation is a shared responsibility between teachers and parents, both of whom act as primary role models. Similarly, Hudi (2017) and Purnaningtias et al. (2020) emphasize that moral development is shaped through real-life examples demonstrated by significant figures in children's environments. Munandar (2022) further strengthens this argument by stating that modeling is the most effective strategy for fostering moral, spiritual, and social awareness, as students tend to imitate consistent behavioral patterns observed in their surroundings.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding can also be interpreted through social learning principles, in which observation and imitation play a crucial role in the formation of behavior. The narratives reveal that when teachers demonstrate honesty, fairness, and responsibility in everyday interactions, students are more likely to internalize these values as lived practices rather than abstract concepts. Therefore, the effectiveness of moral education is highly dependent on the congruence between what teachers say and what they do.

The Role of Empathy and Personal Approach in Moral Development

Another significant finding is the importance of empathy and personal engagement in fostering students' honesty and responsibility. The narratives from Soleh and Hadi particularly illustrate that students are more likely to express honesty when they feel emotionally सुरक्षित and understood. Rather than applying punitive measures, teachers employed dialogue, reflection, and relational approaches to uncover the underlying causes of students' behavior.

This finding supports Fitri and Na'a'imah (2020), who assert that moral development is shaped by both internal factors (such as conscience and reasoning) and external influences, including social interactions. The teachers' experiences demonstrate that honesty is not merely an individual moral choice but is often influenced by socio-economic and familial contexts. For instance, cases of tardiness or dishonesty were linked to students' responsibilities at home, highlighting the intersection between moral behavior and life circumstances.

Furthermore, this aligns with the view that moral awareness develops gradually and requires supportive environments. The use of empathy allows teachers to move beyond surface-level discipline toward deeper moral understanding. This also reflects the narrative inquiry perspective, in which personal and social dimensions (sociality) are central to shaping human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, moral education

becomes a relational process grounded in trust, emotional safety, and meaningful interaction.

Moral Education as a Long-Term and Collaborative Process

The findings also indicate that the development of honesty and responsibility is a gradual process that requires consistency, time, and collaboration. Teachers acknowledged that character formation does not produce immediate results, but rather evolves through continuous reinforcement and habituation. This reflects the temporality dimension of narrative inquiry, in which experiences are understood as ongoing processes that connect the past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This perspective is consistent with Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, as cited in Antara (2019), which emphasizes that character education is a shared responsibility among family, school, and society. The narratives further reveal that without alignment between these environments, students may receive conflicting moral messages, weakening the effectiveness of character education.

In addition, Rehren and Sauer (2024) argue that moral education is a form of social learning influenced by multiple contextual factors, and its outcomes are not always predictable. Kropfreiter et al. (2024) also highlight that holistic approaches to character education—integrating cognitive, affective, and social dimensions—can strengthen both moral development and academic learning. These findings suggest that moral education must be approached systematically, with coordinated efforts among educational stakeholders to achieve sustainable impact.

Contextual and Cultural Strategies in Cultivating Moral Values

The study also reveals that effective moral education strategies are deeply contextual and culturally embedded. Teachers implemented various approaches, including class agreements, restitution, and the integration of local cultural values such as awik-awik, as well as religious and community-based activities. These strategies foster students' sense of ownership, responsibility, and reflective thinking rather than mere compliance.

This finding is consistent with Rohman et al. (2024), who emphasize that achieving moral education objectives requires well-designed strategies and the effective management of values, knowledge, and skills. Similarly, Cohen de Lara et al. (2024) identify key strategies in character education, including habituation, reflective practices, engagement with role models, and moral dialogue. Lamb et al. (2022) further support the use of adaptive strategies, including virtue-based discussions, moral reminders, and peer support systems.

Moreover, the integration of local culture supports the spatial dimension (place) in narrative inquiry, where the physical and socio-cultural context influences how experiences are constructed and interpreted (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Cultural diversity, when incorporated into educational practices, can enrich character education and enhance students' social awareness (Alifia et al., 2021; Kuswantara, 2023). These findings suggest that culturally responsive approaches are essential in making moral education more relevant, meaningful, and sustainable.

Challenges of Moral Education in the Digital and Contemporary Era

Another important finding concerns the growing challenges of moral education amid technological advancement and social change. Teachers highlighted how digital exposure and social media influence students' behavior, often promoting values that conflict with moral principles. This situation complicates the process of instilling honesty and responsibility, as children are exposed to diverse, sometimes contradictory, value systems.

These findings reinforce Pabbajah et al. (2020), who note that modernization and technological development can contribute to shifts in moral perspectives and potential moral degradation. The narratives also show that technology not only accelerates cognitive development but may reduce social sensitivity and responsiveness in children. This creates a new dimension of challenge for educators, requiring them to balance digital literacy with moral education.

In this context, the role of teachers as moral guides becomes even more critical. As Ying and Jackson (2025) argue, teachers are primary moral agents whose values must remain consistent amid changing societal dynamics. Gellel (2023) also highlights that teachers influence moral development through their interactions within broader social networks. Therefore, addressing contemporary challenges requires adaptive strategies, critical awareness, and strong collaboration between schools and families.

Narrative Inquiry as a Lens for Understanding Moral Education Practices

Finally, this study demonstrates that narrative inquiry provides a powerful framework for understanding how moral education is experienced and enacted in real educational contexts. By analyzing teachers' stories through the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and spatiality, this study offers a comprehensive view of how honesty and responsibility are cultivated over time, through relationships, and within specific contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006).

The findings confirm that moral education is not merely a set of prescribed practices but a lived and evolving process shaped by personal experiences, social interactions, and environmental conditions. This supports the view that narrative inquiry captures the complexity of educational experiences across time and context (Carr, 1986; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Furthermore, it aligns with Huber and Yeom (2017), who emphasize that narratives reflect the dynamic interplay between self, culture, and context in the search for meaning and coherence. Thus, the teachers' narratives in this study not only provide individual reflections but also contribute to broader insights into the practice, challenges, and possibilities of character education in elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the experiences of three teachers with diverse backgrounds, cultivating honesty and responsibility in elementary education is a continuous, long-term process grounded in consistent role modeling, empathy, and daily practice. Teachers agree that values are best instilled through example rather than instruction alone. Empathetic engagement fosters deeper moral awareness, such as

understanding the root causes of student misbehavior and encouraging reflection rather than punishment. Parental involvement and the surrounding social environment reinforce these values beyond the school setting. Challenges remain, including inconsistent application among educators, the influence of social media, and limited parental understanding of character education. However, teachers' experiences show that strategies such as culturally responsive practices, Classroom agreements, and restorative approaches can support more effective value formation. Character development requires patience, persistence, and a strong commitment from schools, families, and communities to shape students who embody honesty and responsibility daily. This research has implications for the expansion of pedagogical studies towards moral pedagogy, which places teachers as scientific subjects and primary moral agents in the formation of student character. As a result, teachers' reflective experiences can serve as the basis for developing contextualized moral education theory and practice. Therefore, it is recommended that further research and curriculum development emphasize integrating the values of honesty and responsibility through exemplary-based approaches, reflection, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Table of Author Contribution

Contribution Indicator	Author					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conceptualization	✓	✓				
Literature Review			✓		✓	✓
Research Design / Methodology	✓			✓		
Instrument Development		✓	✓			
Data Collection	✓	✓	✓			
Data Curation			✓	✓	✓	
Formal Analysis				✓	✓	✓
Data Interpretation			✓			✓

Writing – Original Draft	✓	✓				
Writing – Review & Editing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Visualization / Tables	✓				✓	
Supervision				✓		

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