



# Character Education and Responsible Behavior in Waste Management

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## Abstract

The aim of this essay is to explain the difficulties of teaching character education, especially responsible behavior. This happens because parents, teachers and other adults find it difficult to provide role models for responsible behavior. Apart from that, the teaching method is not immediately applicable. The strategy proposed in this article is for children and adults to learn responsibility at the same time through waste management. This is because everyone produces waste, and therefore everyone should also be responsible for their waste. In fact, in general, people are reluctant to take responsibility for their own waste. To foster responsible behavior towards waste, there are two proposed suggestions. First, the individual should interact socially with the waste care community. Second, make waste processing activities as a project, not just a mere responsible behavior forming. This second suggestion actually is a unique strategy to change cognition to lighten the burden of responsible behavior which is always perceived as burdensome.

**Keywords:** Responsible behavior, Waste management, Change cognition

## Introduction

Character education in Indonesia has been around for a long time. This is because the Indonesian people are famous for their commendable characters such as friendly, happy to help, work together, care for others, and other good behaviors.<sup>1</sup> Even this character education has also been formulated in various regulations. The first regulation is the 1945 Constitution, especially in Article 31 paragraph 3 which sounds "The government is trying and organizing a national education system that increases faith and piety as well as noble character in the context of educating the life of the nation, which is regulated by law".<sup>2</sup> This regulation explains that the government also interferes with educating and directing the character of the community, encouraging the community to be smart and at the same time good character.

The second regulation on Character Education is the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2018 concerning Strengthening Character Education in Formal Education Units. The regulation reiterated the importance of character education that began from kindergarten to high school.

Character education should be carried out through the curriculum of lessons and also habituation in schools. The lessons that usually relevant for character education are religion, Pancasila national ideology,<sup>2</sup> and scout extracurricular activities. The provision of character education in this school is actually a habituation of various behaviors that are considered good for children. Being the habituation, the teacher therefore is a figure that must be able to become a role model.

In other countries, the character education commonly is also given to school children. Character education in Europe has different names such as ethical education, philosophy of life, humanist character education and citizenship. In 14 countries in Europe, character education is given separately or not mixed with certain subjects. This character education is not mandatory, not related to religion, is also not related to an ideology. In the Netherlands, for example, character education focuses on humanist developments.<sup>3</sup>

The explanation above shows that character education is very common throughout the world and is very important for children's development. Character education is very important

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for the community, and therefore the government participates in regulating it. Although there are many rules, the character of children is still a problem in society. There are still often other criminal behaviors carried out by children. This situation shows that there is something that needs to be improved in character education in Indonesia, especially in terms of the application of character education in everyday life.

### **Responsible Behavior**

One of the most problematic behaviors that need attention in the application of character education in daily life is responsible behavior.<sup>4</sup> Responsible is the ability and willingness of a person to accept the consequences of all his actions. Although it is very important but the responsibility behavior is difficult to be accustomed. There are three reasons that form the basis of these difficulties.

Firstly, the responsibility behavior has a negative connotation or is always related to an unpleasant consequence for individuals. As a result, teachers have difficulty holding a significant negative event as learning material in class. Examples of irresponsible behavior that are often put forward at various meetings are men who escape because they are reluctant to be responsible after impregnating a woman. This is important to be stated because individuals behave in certain behavior often without taking into account the consequences. Individuals only pursue positive results (fun) from their behavior. When it turns out that his or her behavior has a serious negative impact and may bring severe sanctions, the individual wants to escape. So, this responsible behavior is actually driven by internal motivation and self-guidance, not because of fear of sanctions or compliance with a regulation.<sup>5</sup> In other words, people who mastered by external motivation tend to show responsible behavior when there are clear sanctions. When sanctions are not upheld, the individual will behave irresponsible.

Secondly, the method of teaching character education in general is only discussion in class and group work. Therefore, responsible behavior tends to be taught cognitively. The educational material of responsible behavior in schools is directed narrowly such as submitting tasks on time, able to complete assignments or homework independently (not cheating), and accomplish tasks seriously.<sup>6</sup> It is very rare that the practice of responsible behavior is associated with concrete problems, such as the task of managing daily households.

Thirdly, the regulations regarding character education are clearly aimed at children. Teachers, school principals and parents are the figures who accompany and direct children in choosing commendable behavior when children face a problem. It means that those adults always see themselves as figures who can be role models for good behavior. Ironically, those adults' behaviors are often not commendable. They have become bad examples for

children. This situation also occurs among politicians who prioritize making regulations regarding the behavior that society should carry out. Because they neglect to provide real examples, these regulations just become a pile of documents only. This is clearly visible in environmental issues, where politicians are diligent in making regulations on various environmental issues, ways to maximize economic benefits from the environment (for example mining excavations) and ways of environmental conservation and reclamation. The reality is that the environmental situation in Indonesia is getting worse, becoming a source of conflict between regions and between countries, as well as becoming a field for corruption.<sup>7,8</sup> Situations like this give rise to a paradox, whether these adults should also take part in character education.

### **Strategies for Habituating Responsible Behavior**

What strategies can be used to habituate responsible behavior to children and adults? The proposed strategy that can be implemented is to teach, show and provide real role models regarding household waste management in everyday life. There are several reasons why the topic of waste is suitable as character education material for both children and adults.

Firstly, someone's waste should also be everyone's private matter. Trash is the same as private waste or feces, which everyone should be responsible for cleaning up. Responsible behavior towards one's own waste has been taught and accustomed to since a person was born. This habit is carried out because humans are generally 'uneasy' about rubbish, so various methods are used to get rid of rubbish for hygiene reasons.<sup>9</sup> A person is unable to clean their own waste because they have physical limitations (illness, incomplete body parts) and psychological reasons (mental retardation, mental disorders). Therefore, ideally every person (who is not physically and psychologically disturbed) can manage their own waste and therefore their environment is clean.

Secondly, nowadays rubbish is scattered everywhere and ironically this is even considered as a normal event. Everyone did not protest because they did not feel disturbed. In fact, the presence of waste that is not managed environmentally will certainly create an unhealthy environment. Examples of irresponsible behavior towards waste include: throwing rubbish carelessly, not sorting rubbish by type, burning rubbish, throwing rubbish in gardens or empty areas, throwing rubbish into water sources, expecting rubbish officers to clean the environment, throwing rubbish on street corners at night days, and 'leave' the rubbish in shops' rubbish bins secretly. In fact, the existence of a dirty environment is actually an opportunity for us to get used to responsible behavior towards our waste. This is because environmentally friendly waste management should start from our own firstly.

Thirdly, besides bringing up responsible behavior, the activity of processing waste environmentally also raises a series of other

beneficial and good behavior. Actually, good and beneficial behaviors are the content of a person's good character, such as creativity, innovative, diligent, prudent (not consumptive), and patient. In Kenya, plastic waste has been banned. This situation actually triggered the creativity and innovation of Kenyan community to make bags from leaves.<sup>10</sup> In Yogyakarta, Indonesia, reusing of used plastic bottles of bottled drinking places is useful for hydroponic farming.<sup>11</sup> Even handicraft items whose basic materials from plastic waste have become business commodities.<sup>12</sup> In the process of making innovative craft items, individuals are also trained to work carefully and persistently.

When processing waste, individuals are also encouraged to behave diligently, and that means overcoming procrastinate behavior. Processing kitchen organic waste should be done immediately after the waste is produced. If it is late, the garbage will bring up a rotten aroma and maggots that are disgusting. The impact of waste processing becomes uncomfortable. Such waste conditions encourage the emergence of diligent behavior and not delay tasks.<sup>4</sup>

When sustaining managing waste environmentally, actually it promotes prudent behavior. One is encourages not to impulsive in buying stuffs. And therefore the task of managing waste becomes light. A lesser amount of waste can be obtained if people buying goods cautiously.<sup>4</sup> Restraining the passion not to buy the item is very difficult, but can be trained.

Recycling waste also promotes patience behavior. For example, making eco-enzym derived from fruit skin waste turns out to take a minimum length of 3 months. The waiting period to get maximum results promotes patience behavior. It means that patience character becomes trained (habituated) when someone processes waste in an environmentally friendly manner.

### **Change the Perception of Waste**

Although managing waste can arouse a variety of good characters including responsible behavior, it is not very easy to change the perception of waste. Waste is always perceived negatively because it is considered to have no intrinsic value. Based on internal motivation, it is difficult for someone to 'get close' to garbage.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of changing perceptions about waste from negative to positive is that individuals are expected to be able to behave responsible for their own waste even though no one sees it. This is because perception is the basis of the occurrence of a behavior, and the motor of responsible behavior is internal motivation.<sup>5,14</sup> Hence, with the changing perception, it is expected that individuals manage do their own waste not because they avoid sanctions, but because they feel they have to do it. In this essay I propose two ideas that can help someone to change negative perceptions about waste to be more positive.

The first idea, individuals should be among communities that care about garbage. That is, community members will often strengthen their friends to care about garbage, help each other and give each other new ideas to process waste. Being in a strong external support will make the individual not ashamed, not lonely, and more eager to process waste. This situation is important especially for people with collective culture, such as Indonesia, where the social environment is very strong in determining the emergence of a behavior. This pleasant and mutually reinforcing social environment will make individual motivation arise to process waste. In situations like this, individuals tend to contribute more, and therefore the community remains sustainable. Individuals who feel supported by their friends will also provide new ideas to solve the problem of waste in an environmentally friendly manner. Such contributions when it becomes a habit, tends to change external motivation into internal motivation.

The second idea which I proposed is that making the activity of processing waste as a project, not as a mere responsible behavior. It is unique since this idea is a strategy to change cognition to ease the burden of responsibility that is always perceived as a severe thing. The project activities, for example, are creating content on social media about waste management. Hence, individuals feel they are working on fun creative activities rather than processing waste that is very burdensome. The project activities can be sustainable, if the individual is observant seeing positive things even though it is trivial. These positive thoughts can make the project activities bring rewards.

### **Conclusion**

As mentioned above, character education, especially responsible behavior, tends to be difficult to habituate to children. This is because adults (teachers and parents) also cannot provide appropriate and real role models in everyday life. This situation makes irresponsible behavior seem to be 'inherited' to the next generation. This situation is of course very alarming. The unique and effective strategy is that children and adults can learn to behave responsibly through waste processing. This strategy is very appropriate because the Indonesian Government has not been able to fully overcome the waste problem.<sup>15</sup> In order to easily run this strategy, I propose two suggestions. Firstly, individuals should interact socially with the waste management community. The initiator for the formation of this community may come from many NGOs. The invitation from community members to behave responsibly towards waste is in accordance with the collective culture of Indonesian society. The second suggestion is to change cognition. The aim is to lighten the burden of responsible behavior which is always perceived as negative and burdensome. The simple way to change this is by turning the activity of processing waste into a project, not just a responsible behavior. Changing this cognition requires an open mind and positive thoughts.<sup>16,17</sup>

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## Conflicts of Interest

Regarding the publication of this article, the author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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