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A Contextual Teaching and Learning–Based Framework for Character Education: A Conceptual Proposal

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes an operational framework for character education grounded in Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL). A narrative conceptual synthesis connects established CTL principles with literature on character formation, teacher modeling, classroom questioning, and assessment. The framework organizes constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment into teacher practices, student activities, and situated behavioral indicators. An illustrative learning sequence demonstrates how the components could be aligned around a shared ethical problem. The proposed contribution is an explicit planning structure rather than a new set of CTL principles or a validated intervention. Prior CTL-based character education frameworks are acknowledged, and the distinction between conceptual plausibility and demonstrated effectiveness is maintained. The article recommends expert appraisal, feasibility assessment, and evaluation using appropriate outcome measures before broader implementation claims are made.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education requires clarity about what is being developed and how educational activities relate to it. Baehr distinguishes performance and intellectual dimensions of character while examining their relationships with moral and civic character [1]. This distinction cautions against treating every desirable classroom outcome as the same construct. A recent review integrating Islamic and global moral perspectives discusses moral knowing, feeling, and action as recurring elements in character education [2]. The present article therefore treats knowledge of a value, reasoning about its application, and action in a situation as related but distinguishable educational concerns.

Recent Indonesian reviews describe a range of approaches rather than a single instructional solution. Undayani et al. recommend contextual and collaborative moral education [3]. Hadi et al. likewise describe adaptive combinations of strategies tailored to school culture and student characteristics [4]. These are review-level syntheses and recommendations, not evidence that the particular framework proposed here has been tested.

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) provides an existing pedagogical vocabulary. Sihono describes constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment as its principal components [5]. Hidayat emphasizes connecting subject matter with real-life situations and its application in everyday behavior [6]. This connection makes CTL relevant to a planning question: how can opportunities to discuss values be aligned with opportunities to act and reflect?

The connection between CTL and character education is not new. Ramdani proposes a contextual model based on local wisdom and community experiences [7]. Maryati and Priatna discuss integrating character values through contextual mathematics learning [8]. More directly, Solissa et al. present CTL components as a basis for a character education model [9], and Laksana proposes a model grounded in the same components [10]. The present article must therefore be read as an operational elaboration of an established connection, not the first proposal to combine CTL and character education.

The guiding question is: How can established CTL components be translated into a coherent planning framework linking teacher practices, student activities, and situated behavioral indicators? The proposed contribution is the explicit alignment of these elements and an illustrative classroom sequence. Neither novelty in the underlying principles nor empirical effectiveness is claimed.

2. METHODS: APPROACH AND SCORE

This article presents a narrative conceptual synthesis. It uses literature on contextual instruction and character education to develop a planning proposition, rather than reporting an intervention or an exhaustive review. The bibliography is a set of sources cited in the argument, not a systematically selected sample of studies. No participant recruitment, classroom observation, or outcome analysis was conducted for the proposed framework.

Literature is organized by its role in the argument: conceptual definitions; earlier CTL–character frameworks; instructional processes; implementation; and assessment. Existing CTL principles provide the organizing structure, while the activity examples and behavioral indicators are proposals developed for subsequent appraisal. Findings from teacher perspectives, qualitative studies, and reviews are distinguished from recommendations and conceptual propositions.

The original review procedures are not sufficiently documented to reproduce source identification and selection. The article therefore makes no claim to systematic-review status, comprehensive coverage, or formal certainty assessment. Bibliographic expansion does not itself establish methodological rigor. The proposed applications are presented transparently as design recommendations, not as activities observed during an implemented study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Implementation as a Design Problem

Connecting material to everyday experience does not guarantee learner participation in planning or responsibility. Kovačević and Barbir's teacher-questionnaire study reports relatively limited involvement of pupils in planning and responsibility for learning [11]. Its relevance is to implementation, not a demonstrated effect on character. A review of teachers' contributions discusses guided ethical inquiry in relation to autonomous moral reasoning [12], while a review of primary-school teachers' beliefs identifies support for curriculum integration and role-model pedagogy [13]. Together, these sources motivate attention to teacher practice and learner participation, without validating the present design.

3.2. Constructivism: Connecting Experience and Understanding

Sumarna and Gunawan discuss CTL as linking learning with real-life situations and daily application [14]. In this framework, teachers begin with a familiar ethical situation and invite students to articulate and compare initial judgments. Students identify the values at stake and reconsider their reasons. A discussion about returning borrowed materials can distinguish ownership, responsibility, and concern for others. Revision of an explanation is proposed as evidence of a learning process, not proof of a stable change in character.

3.3. Inquiry: Investigating a Manageable Problem

Kuter and Özer report that student teachers' inquiry experiences linked constructivist theory with practice and supported awareness of implementation constraints [15]. This provides a process-level analogy, not evidence about children's moral development. The proposed application is a guided examination of an anonymized classroom situation: students identify what happened, distinguish observations from assumptions, consider affected persons, and compare possible responses. Teachers should not ask children to investigate accusations against identifiable peers. The intended opportunity is evidence-sensitive deliberation, whose outcomes remain to be evaluated.

3.4. Questioning: Exploring Reasons and Alternatives

Questioning requires more than asking for the teacher's preferred answer. Myhill and Dunkin describe whole-class teaching dominated by predetermined answers, with relatively little space for speculative or process questions [16]. The proposed framework therefore uses prompts such as "Who is affected?", "What reasons support this choice?", and "Would the same rule be fair to everyone?" These prompts invite explanation and reconsideration. Their use is proposed here; the cited study does not establish that these particular prompts improve character.

3.5. Learning Community: Practicing Shared Responsibility

A learning community is part of the established CTL formulation [5]. In the proposed application, students complete a shared task with explicit responsibilities and rotating roles. They practice listening, negotiating decisions, and accounting for contributions. Teachers record individual opportunities and actions as well as the collective product. Successful completion of a group task should not be equated with durable cooperation or responsibility in every member. This is an assessment safeguard within the proposed design, not a finding from an implemented program.

3.6. Modeling: Explaining the Ethical Significance of Action

Sanderse recommends that teachers explain the moral significance of modeled qualities and how learners can develop them [17]. A qualitative study by Safitri also connects contextual learning and teachers' consistent modeling of values [18]. The proposed practice is to make reasons visible: a teacher acknowledges an error, explains its consequences, and demonstrates repair. Students then consider how the response might apply elsewhere. Modeling should invite judgment rather than imitation without understanding. Lickona's discussion of approaches to controversial issues further illustrates the need to consider how ethical disagreement is handled [19]. The present framework proposes allowing reasoned disagreement rather than treating agreement with the teacher as the sole evidence of character.

3.7. Reflection: Reviewing Actions and Planning Alternatives

Pawelski conceptualizes character in terms of ethical self-government and proposes that students gain increasing control over habit formation through critical self-reflection [20]. Here, reflection asks learners to describe an action, consider its effects, and identify a feasible alternative. Younger learners may use drawings or supported oral responses. Teachers should not require disclosure of sensitive personal experiences. A reflective account is treated as one perspective on an event, not independent proof that behavior has changed outside the classroom.

3.8. Authentic Assessment: Gathering Situated Evidence

Komalasari and Masyitoh's living-values assessment model combines attitude, self-, and peer assessment and relates attitude assessment to everyday phenomena [21]. The proposed framework similarly gathers task-linked observations, explanations, and reflective accounts, but does not assume that a published assessment model validates the indicators developed here. Person et al. offer a framework for describing and selecting outcome measures in character-education research [22]. Accordingly, the choice of a measure should follow the intended construct rather than convenience.

Teacher records should specify the behavior, task, opportunity, and context. Returning shared materials, completing an agreed responsibility, and explaining a fairness judgment are different observations. A single incident should not become a fixed moral label. Oldham and McLoughlin's scoping review identifies methodological weaknesses in quantitative character-education research and recommends stronger measures and designs [23]. This supports caution about evaluation quality, not a claim that any particular rubric has already met those requirements.

3.9. Operational Alignment and Classroom Illustration

Table 1 translates the established CTL components into proposed practices and indicators. Its organizing components are drawn from the CTL formulation [5]; all activities and indicators are author-proposed applications for appraisal, not validated measures.

Table 1. Proposed operational alignment of CTL components

CTL component	Teacher practice	Student activity	Illustrative indicator
Constructivism	Interpret a familiar ethical situation	Compare initial judgments	Explain a judgment and its revision
Inquiry	Examine an anonymized case	Distinguish facts from assumptions	Use relevant information in a response
Questioning	Ask about reasons, fairness, and effects	Consider alternative choices	Give reasons addressing another perspective
Learning community	Set shared tasks with rotating roles	Negotiate and complete responsibilities	Document contribution and turn-taking
Modeling	Demonstrate and explain ethical action	Discuss and practice a response	Apply the demonstrated action in a task
Reflection	Review a specific action	Identify effects and alternatives	Give a concrete account and feasible next step
Authentic assessment	Observe specified actions across tasks	Act and explain choices	Record task-linked behavior and context

Note: Activities and indicators are proposed, not validated.

The illustrative problem concerns fair use and return of classroom materials. This sequence was not implemented or evaluated. The teacher invites students to recall familiar difficulties and explain why they matter. Students examine an anonymized scenario, identify affected people, and discuss what information is needed before assigning responsibility. Groups compare rules through questions about fairness, feasibility, and consequences.

The teacher models acknowledging a mistake and returning an item. Groups then undertake a materials-sharing task with rotating responsibilities. Afterward, students describe what they did, what worked, and what they would change. The teacher documents specified actions alongside the opportunities available to demonstrate them.

The sequence illustrates internal alignment, not a mandatory order or a tested lesson protocol. Sustained character development cannot be inferred from successful participation alone.

3.10. Contribution, Limitations, and Evaluation Priorities

The intended contribution is an explicit relationship between instructional components and possible evidence of situated action. It is narrower than introducing a new CTL-based character model, because directly related frameworks have already been published [9] [10]. The proposed alignment itself remains open to expert criticism and empirical examination.

Evaluation should distinguish knowledge, reasoning, and action and should not equate verbal fluency or classroom compliance with moral development. Lovat and Dally summarize qualitative and quantitative data from values education in relation to the learning environment and educational aims [24]. This supports considering multiple forms of evidence, without establishing the validity of the present indicators. Syahri et al. recommend integrating moral values into curriculum and learning practices [25]; that recommendation likewise does not demonstrate effectiveness of this CTL proposal.

The conceptual synthesis is limited by its non-systematic source selection and lack of an original implementation study. Some literature is available only as abstracts, limiting appraisal of the underlying methods. The proposed activities and indicators have not undergone expert validation, reliability testing, or feasibility assessment. No claim is made about persistent effects, transfer beyond school, or superiority over existing programs.

A staged evaluation is proposed: expert appraisal of conceptual coherence and developmental appropriateness; a feasibility study of workload, acceptability, participation, and implementation fidelity; and subsequent comparative evaluation using suitable measures. Repeated observations and follow-up could examine whether any change extends beyond the original task. These are recommendations for future work, not procedures already completed.

4. CONCLUSION

Established CTL components can be organized into an explicit planning proposition for character education. This article aligns those components with teacher practices, learner activities, and situated indicators while acknowledging earlier CTL–character frameworks. The contribution is an operational elaboration, not a validated intervention or a claim of first discovery. Practical usefulness, measurement quality, and effects on behavior require evaluation before broader effectiveness claims are warranted.

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