

The Role of Social Studies Teachers in Student Character Building Through Problem-Based E-Learning

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the role of Social Studies teachers in building student character through the Problem-Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach in Grade IX at Budisatrya Junior High School, Medan. PBeL was selected as an innovative learning strategy that integrates contextual problem-solving with the use of digital technology in character education. This research employed a qualitative case study method, with data collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that Social Studies teachers serve as facilitators, motivators, and moral guides throughout the online learning process. Through the implementation of PBeL, students are encouraged to analyze real-life social problems and present solutions collaboratively. Character values such as responsibility, tolerance, empathy, cooperation, and digital discipline developed significantly during the learning activities. Despite challenges such as limited digital literacy and technological infrastructure, teachers were able to adapt instructional strategies to remain effective in fostering character values. These findings highlight the potential of PBeL to integrate character education into digital learning while contributing to the development of a 21st-century learning model that is both humanistic and contextual. The study recommends teacher training and the strengthening of digital infrastructure to support the sustainable implementation of PBeL in secondary school character education.

Keywords: Character Education, Educational Technology, Problem-Based E-Learning, Teacher's Role, Social Studies

A. Introduction

Along with the advancement of digital technology, the Problem Based E-Learning approach has emerged as an innovative learning method that combines PBL with the use of information technology (Wasiyem, 2023). Teachers can create more interactive, flexible, and in-depth learning situations by utilizing digital media such as videos, simulations, online discussion forums, and digital quiz platforms (Fauzi & Ayuni, 2024). The application of PBeL in social studies learning allows students to actively explore contemporary social issues, both individually and collaboratively, while simultaneously shaping a character that is responsive to social dynamics (Puastuti,

Ponidi, & Lubis, 2023). However, the implementation of this approach in schools is not without various challenges, including limited technology infrastructure, lack of teacher training in utilizing digital platforms, and minimal support from the school environment and parents (Wahyudi & Hidayat, 2023). Therefore, the success of the PBeL approach greatly depends on the competence, creativity, and commitment of teachers in designing meaningful learning that educates students' character.

The current development of the education world demands a transformation in the learning approach that is not only focused on academic achievement but also on the character development of students (Mainuddin & Tobroni, 2023). Character education has become an important agenda to prepare a generation that is not only intellectually smart but also mature morally and socially (Putra, Sulaicha, & Saputra, 2024). In this framework, the role of teachers becomes increasingly strategic, as teachers are the main figures who interact directly with students and serve as facilitators, motivators, as well as role models in daily life within the school environment (Ardi, Zulhanan, & Kesuma, 2023).

Character education is a fundamental aspect of the national education system aimed at shaping students to become individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess moral integrity, ethics, and social and environmental responsibility (Tarigan & Ponidi, 2025). In the midst of an era marked by technological advancement and shifts in social values, character formation becomes increasingly important to prepare the younger generation to face global challenges (Septiani, Nabila, & Situngkir, 2023). Strong character includes critical thinking skills, problem solving, collaboration, and effective communication, all of which are part of 21st-century competencies (Aini, Havita, & Sa'diya, 2024).

Teachers play a strategic role in strengthening character education, especially because they are the closest role models who interact directly with students in the learning process (Topan Iskandar, 2023). Teachers are not only educators but also character builders and mentors. A teacher who has integrity, empathy, and an understanding of the students' backgrounds and potential can have a significant impact on the formation of a well-rounded personality (Ponidi, Sinthiya, & Nagara, 2023). In the context of Social Sciences learning, the role of the teacher becomes increasingly crucial. The Social Studies subject substantially discusses various social, cultural, and community value issues that can serve as an effective means to instill character values in students (Lethulur, Juandi, & Dahlan, 2025). Furthermore, the Problem Based Learning (PBL) approach, which is based on solving real problems, provides space for students to develop empathy, a sense of responsibility, as well as reflective and critical thinking skills (Riberio, 2023).

Budisatrya Middle School Medan, as one of the private schools that has begun to integrate digital learning, provides opportunities for teachers to use innovative approaches such as e-learning based PBL. However, the success of this approach in

shaping students' character highly depends on the role of teachers as facilitators, motivators, and guides in the learning process. Teachers must be able to design meaningful learning scenarios, choose appropriate media, and guide students in the reflection process of the character values contained in problem-solving.

Problems arise when the implementation of this approach is not optimal, either due to limitations in technology mastery, limitations in facilities, or because there is not yet a full awareness of the importance of integrating online learning and character building. Therefore, it is important to conduct an in-depth study on the extent of the role of social studies teachers in character building of students through the Problem Based E-Learning approach, particularly in the ninth grade at Budisatrya Middle School in Medan. This research is important to meet the educational needs of the present, while also contributing to the development of social studies learning strategies that can address the challenges of the times without losing the essence of character education.

In the last few decades, various studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and e-learning approaches in the context of school learning. Research by (Adinda & Koderi, 2024) The study focuses on improving the cognitive aspects of learners, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and academic achievement. However, there is still a significant gap in the literature regarding how the Problem-Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach can be strategically harnessed to build student character, particularly in the subject of Social Sciences at the junior high school level.

Some previous studies are (Novibriawan, 2023) It shows that teachers tend to play the role of content deliverers (teacher-centered), especially in the context of online learning, so the potential of teachers as character-building agents has not been fully explored. Furthermore, studies on the integration of character education in problem-based learning are more often conducted at higher education levels or in schools based on international curricula, and they have not widely targeted private secondary schools in urban areas such as Medan.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach, which explicitly examines the role of social studies teachers in shaping students' characters through problem-based learning implemented in an e-learning format. This research presents a more holistic perspective on how teachers act not only as facilitators of material but also as guides of values, motivators, and moral models in a digital learning environment. The problem-based learning approach used not only focuses on solving contextual social problems but is also aimed at fostering character values such as responsibility, empathy, tolerance, cooperation, and digital discipline. Thus, this research fills the gap in the literature that has not extensively explored the synergy between the roles of social studies teachers, character education, and the Problem-Based E-Learning approach at the junior high school level. This study also offers practical contributions

to the development of technology-based character learning models that are adaptive to the needs of the digital generation and aligned with the principles of 21st-century education.

B. Methods

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the role of Social Science teachers in shaping students' character through Problem-Based E-Learning (PBeL) strategies in a real context, specifically in the ninth grade at Junior High School Budisatrya Medan. In line with the opinion of (Creswell, 2020), Qualitative approaches are very relevant when researchers want to explore social phenomena holistically in the participants' natural environment without external intervention. Case study methods are used because they can contextually reveal character education practices carried out in digitally-based social studies learning and problem-solving. This study answers the questions of "how" and "why" such practices occur, as emphasized by (Sugiyono, 2022) that case studies allow for in-depth exploration of complex phenomena in real life.

This research involves five informants who were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the implementation of PBeL learning. The five informants consist of one social studies teacher as the main informant, two ninth-grade students participating in the learning process, one school principal who understands the policies and learning context at the school, and one student's parent who monitors character impact at home. The selection of these informants is intended to obtain diverse and representative data from various complementary perspectives.

Data were collected through three main techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly during the online learning process to record interactions between teachers and students, the use of digital media, and student responses to the problems presented in the learning. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with an open guide, aimed at exploring the experiences, understanding, and perceptions of each informant regarding the character-building process. Documentation, such as lesson plans, digital teaching materials, and student works, was also analyzed to identify the integration of character values in the material and evaluation.

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach with the help of qualitative software NVivo, which was used to organize and code the interview transcripts and observation notes. The analysis was conducted in stages starting with the identification of initial codes, grouping of categories, and culminating in the formulation of main themes that represent the patterns and meanings of the research findings. In addition, an interactive analysis technique from (Putri & Iskandar, 2023).

It is also applied, consisting of three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction is carried out by sorting relevant information according to the research focus. The reduced data is then presented in the form of descriptive narratives to reveal certain patterns in character learning practices. Initial conclusions are re-verified through a data confirmation process (member checking) to enhance the validity of the findings.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, this study applies triangulation techniques of sources and methods. Data from observations are compared and confirmed with interviews and documentation to ensure information consistency. Data confirmation is also conducted through the member checking technique, which involves asking informants to review the researcher's interpretation of the interviews or observations conducted. This technique is in accordance with the guidelines (Sahputra, 2024) in maintaining trust in qualitative data.

Through this method, the research is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of how social studies teachers at Budisatrya Medan Junior High School design, implement, and reflect on problem-based learning in digital spaces that are not only oriented towards academic outcomes but also towards the character formation of students who are adaptive to the challenges of contemporary social life.

C. Results and Discussion

The Role of Teachers in Shaping Students' Character Based on Problem Based E-Learning

Based on the results of observations conducted during several Social Studies learning meetings in class IX Junior High School Budisatrya Medan, it is clearly visible how the Social Studies teacher plays a dual role as a facilitator of learning and a character builder for students. In the Problem Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach, the teacher no longer serves as the sole center of information, but acts as a guide and companion who directs students to explore various social issues independently and collaboratively through digital media.

During the learning process, the social studies teacher actively presents contextual problems related to current social issues, such as poverty, social inequality, and gender disparity. These issues are presented through digital platforms such as short videos, online articles, and infographics, and then students are asked to discuss and seek solutions based on their understanding. In this stage, the teacher appears to provide stimulus through open-ended questions that encourage students to think critically, for example by asking, *What is the social impact of economic inequality on people's lives? or How can teenagers play a role in creating a just social environment?*

The function of the teacher as a facilitator is also evident in how they encourage collaboration among students in virtual group discussions facilitated through Google Classroom and WhatsApp Group. The teacher not only supervises but also provides direction and clarification if the discussion starts to deviate from the focus of the issue. The teacher is also actively giving feedback on the arguments presented by students in a constructive and motivating manner.

From the perspective of character formation, the social studies teacher consistently emphasizes values such as responsibility, tolerance, cooperation, and respect for others' opinions. This is reflected in the way the teacher sets discussion rules, for example by encouraging students not to dominate the conversation and to give each group member a chance to express their opinions. The teacher also praises positive student behavior, such as when a student helps a classmate who is struggling to understand the material or shows empathy towards the social issues being discussed. The reinforcement of character values is done explicitly through reflection at the end of the session, where the teacher asks students to write down or verbally express the character lessons, they gained from the topics studied.

Observational findings also indicate that teachers are active in fostering habits of digital discipline, such as punctual attendance in online meetings, using polite language in digital discussion spaces, and demonstrating honesty in completing assignments. All of this is part of the effort to shape students' character in accordance with the challenges of technology-based learning. Thus, it can be concluded that social studies teachers at Budisatrya Middle School in Medan have played an important role as learning facilitators as well as character builders for students in a problem-based digital learning environment. Teachers not only play a role in delivering material, but also act as value agents who instill positive attitudes and behaviors directly through learning interactions and the appropriate use of digital media.

To support the observation data, in-depth interviews were conducted with five informants who are directly involved in the social studies learning process in the IX grade at Budisatrya Medan Junior High School. The five informants consist of one social studies teacher, two IX grade students, one school principal, and one parent of a student. The results of these interviews reinforce the findings that the social studies teacher plays a significant role as a facilitator and character builder for students in the Problem Based E-Learning approach. The result of the interview with the Social Studies teacher stated that *"I strive to position myself as a thinking partner for the students, not the ruler of the classroom. My goal is not only for them to understand social studies material, but also to care about and have an attitude towards existing social issues."*

The results of the interview with the Class IX students indicate that *"group discussions online make me more confident to speak and learn to appreciate my friends' opinions. Our teacher often reminds us to be honest and help each other, not to compete with one another."* The results of the interview with a ninth-grade student indicate that *"When I'm*

confused, the teacher gives me a question back. Not directly giving an answer, but making me think. I then understand how to find solutions by myself."

The result of the interview with the Principal, he said that *"We highly support the learning innovations carried out by social studies teachers. This Problem Based E-Learning approach not only makes students academically active but also begins to show that they are more caring, patient, and responsible in completing social tasks."* The results of the interview with the student's parents indicate that *"Now my child often talks about social issues, such as poverty and the environment. He said it was from his social studies assignment. I am happy because he has developed concern and a more mature way of thinking."*

Based on the results of observations and in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that the social studies teacher in the ninth grade at Budisatrya Medan Junior High School plays a strategic role as a learning facilitator while also shaping students' character through the Problem Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach. The teacher is no longer the main source of information, but rather a learning companion who encourages students to think critically, explore real social issues, and formulate solutions based on collaborative discussions. In the implementation of PBeL, the teacher consistently uses digital media such as videos, online articles, and discussion forums to present contextual issues that are close to the students' lives. The teacher promotes the formation of character values such as responsibility, cooperation, empathy, tolerance, and respect for others' opinions through online discussion mechanisms and value reflection at the end of the learning.

The interview findings support the results of the observation. Teachers confirm that the focus of learning is not only on academic achievement but also on the formation of students' social and moral attitudes. Students feel the direct benefits of this approach, such as increased speaking confidence, independent thinking skills, and a sense of mutual respect and assistance. The principal assesses that this approach successfully fosters student engagement academically while also strengthening their social awareness. Meanwhile, parents observe positive changes in their children's thinking and concern for social issues. Overall, the Problem Based E-Learning approach has opened opportunities for social studies teachers to instill character values through contextual, reflective, and technology-based learning. Teachers have not only succeeded in creating an active digital learning environment but also become agents of character change that are relevant to the demands of 21st-century education. The findings of this research show that social studies teachers in class IX of Budisatrya Middle School Medan play a strategic role in shaping students' character through the Problem-Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach. In practice, teachers no longer function solely as information centers, but rather as facilitators and guides of character values who actively accompany students in exploring and solving social issues independently and collaboratively. This strategy marks a shift in pedagogical paradigm from a teacher-centered approach to one that positions students as active subjects in the learning process.

This result is consistent with the findings (Asrofi, Islah, & Hadi, 2025) which shows that problem-based learning can enhance student engagement in understanding social realities and foster awareness of values such as empathy, responsibility, and justice. However, the PBeL approach in the context of online learning (e-learning) as implemented in Budisatrya is still relatively rare to be explored, especially in studies in secondary schools that face limitations in technological infrastructure. This is different from studies (Rosário & Dias, 2024) what is done in elite schools with adequate digital facilities, where teachers tend to use digital platforms as a medium for delivering material, but have not fully integrated character education explicitly into the online learning process.

In a theoretical perspective, the role of teachers in this research shows a strong relevance to moral development theory (Kohlberg, 1981), especially in the conventional and post-conventional stages. Through the provision of contextual social problems and reflective discussions, teachers encourage students to think beyond personal interests and consider social norms and more universal principles of justice. For example, when students are invited to analyze issues of social and environmental inequality, they are not only required to understand the problems factually, but also to position themselves morally, which is a hallmark of high-level moral development according to Kohlberg.

In addition, the implementation of PBeL in this digital space also affirms social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which emphasizes the importance of learning through observation and social interaction. Teachers in this study act as role models in the use of polite language, digital discipline, and empathetic attitudes, which indirectly serve as a stimulus for students to imitate such positive behaviors. The existence of digital discussion forums, such as Google Classroom and WhatsApp Group, creates a social environment that allows for learning through observation and feedback. The positive reinforcement provided by teachers towards students' behaviors also strengthens the concept of reinforcement in Bandura's theory, where good attitudes are more likely to be repeated if they receive recognition.

The findings of this study show that social studies teachers at Budisatrya Middle School in Medan play an active role as learning facilitators and character builders for students in the context of Problem Based E-Learning (PBeL) based on digital technology. This role is not only evident in the aspect of delivering material but also in instilling character values through contextual learning that emphasizes discussion, reflection, and problem-solving. These findings are in line with the results of previous studies (Benmesbah, Lamia, & Hafidi, 2023), which states that contextual learning in social studies is able to integrate character values such as responsibility and cooperation through situations that are relevant to students' lives. A similar finding is encountered in this study, where teachers utilize social issues such as poverty and gender inequality as material for digital-based discussions.

Furthermore, the PBL approach implemented by social studies teachers has also proven to enhance student engagement and social interaction. (Raimundo & Rosário, 2024) found that problem-based learning models encourage students to think critically and are able to work together in groups. In the context of SMP Budisatrya, the teacher successfully created a virtual discussion space that allows students to dialogue, respect each other's opinions, and build solutions together through platforms like Google Classroom and WhatsApp Group. Research by (Sukiastini, 2024) It also reinforces this finding. They state that PBL-based blended learning can foster character values and social responsibility among students in elementary education. At Budisatrya Middle School, the PBeL approach has proven to encourage active student engagement not only in completing academic tasks but also in understanding and responding to social issues in a critical and empathetic manner.

From the perspective of the formation of social and moral attitudes, (Sanjiartha, Suwindia, & Winangun, 2024) emphasizes that effective character education must involve teachers as moral role models who integrate values into daily learning. This is reflected in the findings of this research, where teachers not only facilitate discussions but also emphasize values such as honesty, discipline, and empathy through the reinforcement of positive student behavior. In line with that, (Robbi & Syafi'uddin, 2025) In the PBL Tri Kaya Parisudha model, it shows that this approach is able to enhance the values of empathy, cooperation, and responsibility. Social Studies teachers at SMP Budisatrya also demonstrate similar things through value reflection at the end of the learning session and giving rewards for students' positive attitudes.

The social awareness that arises from this approach is also supported by findings (Yemmaridotillah, 2024), which states that culture-based blended learning is effective in strengthening students' social identity and character. The application of local issues in the social studies learning material at Budisatrya Junior High School is a concrete example of how teachers contextualize social values with the daily lives of students. The results of interviews with the school principal and parents of students who stated that students have become more socially aware and caring towards the environment are also supported by the findings. (Do & Rahawarin, 2025), which states that PBL can enhance students' motivation, concern, and self-confidence from an early age. At Budisatrya Junior High School, students are not only actively discussing but also starting to show interest in social issues outside of school.

From the perspective of education digitalization, (Andriani & Bustam, 2023) shows that character education through online media can cultivate digital discipline and a sense of responsibility, such as the use of polite language and punctuality. This is evident in the online learning observations conducted by social studies teachers, where students are accustomed to ethics in the digital space. Ultimately, research by (Fauzi & Ayuni, 2024) highlighting the importance of synergy between teachers, schools, and parents in character education. The results of this study indicate that the

support from the school principal and the participation of parents contribute to strengthening the positive impact of digital-based character learning at Budisatrya Junior High School.

Based on the results of in-depth research conducted in class IX of Junior High School Budisatrya Medan, it can be concluded that social studies teachers have played a strategic role as learning facilitators and character builders of students through the Problem Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach. In this model, teachers not only deliver lessons but also encourage students to think critically, collaborate, and address various social issues with a reflective and contextual approach. Teachers utilize digital media such as videos, articles, and online discussion platforms to present current social issues that stimulate active student engagement. This process encourages students to develop character values such as responsibility, empathy, tolerance, discipline, and mutual respect. The role of the teacher is also evident in fostering digital discipline among students and creating a collaborative learning environment that supports moral development.

Character Values Developed Through Problem Based E-Learning Approach

The results of observations conducted during several sessions of social studies learning in the ninth grade at Budisatrya Middle School Medan indicate that the Problem Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach significantly plays a role in building and strengthening various character values in students. This approach not only focuses on cognitive achievement but also encourages the development of positive attitudes and behaviors in students through contextual and collaborative problem-solving based on digital means. In the learning process, the value of responsibility becomes one of the main character traits that stands out. This is reflected in the consistency of students completing individual and group assignments independently, even though learning is conducted online. Teachers entrust students to plan how to complete assignments based on their group's time and strategies, and students appear to be able to actively account for their work results.

The value of cooperation has also grown significantly. In the digital discussion forum through Google Classroom and WhatsApp Group, students are seen sharing roles, providing feedback on each other's ideas, and respecting differing opinions. This collaboration takes place democratically, with the teacher acting as a facilitator to maintain the group's dynamics focused on the social issues being discussed. The character of tolerance and mutual respect is evident in the verbal and nonverbal interactions of students during discussions. In situations where there are differing viewpoints, students do not display aggressive or dominant attitudes, but rather show an attitude of active listening. The teacher helps to strengthen this value by establishing fair participation rules and appreciating student behavior that demonstrates inclusivity.

The value of honesty is also built through the teacher's policies that emphasize integrity in the process of completing assignments and discussions. The teacher explicitly communicates the importance of being honest, both in expressing one's own opinions and in completing tasks. On several occasions, the teacher provides concrete examples regarding the consequences of plagiarism and the importance of originality in thinking. In addition, the value of digital discipline emerges as a result of the habituation process established by the teacher throughout the learning process. Being on time for online classes, using polite language in discussion forums, and adhering to assignment submission deadlines become part of the character that is consistently trained. The teacher provides positive reinforcement to students who demonstrate this discipline, both through verbal praise and by noting attitude scores.

Equally important, this PBeL approach also builds students' social empathy. Through exposure to current social issues such as poverty, social inequality, and environmental issues, students are invited to understand the conditions of others and develop a caring attitude towards society. Discussions focused on seeking concrete solutions to these issues encourage students to put themselves in others' shoes, broaden their social perspectives, and cultivate moral sensitivity. Overall, observations show that the implementation of the Problem-Based E-Learning approach has successfully become an effective means of instilling character values in the ninth grade at Junior High School Budisatria Medan. Teachers play a crucial role in designing learning activities that are not only intellectually educating but also shaping students into more responsible, honest, caring, tolerant, and disciplined individuals in the context of digital-based learning.

To strengthen the observations related to the character values built through the Problem Based E-Learning approach in social studies education, in-depth interviews were conducted with five informants who have direct roles in the educational process: a social studies teacher, two ninth-grade students, the school principal, and a student's parent. The findings from these interviews indicate a consistency between practices in the field and the perceptions of educational stakeholders.

The result of the interview with the Social Studies teacher, he said *"Every social issue that I raise in the learning process is not only to discuss theories but also as a tool to encourage students to think critically and take a stance. For instance, when discussing poverty, I invite them to discuss empathy and social justice. I also continually emphasize the importance of being honest in expressing opinions and being responsible for the tasks they undertake"*. The results of the interview with a ninth-grade student, he said *"During online discussions, we were divided into groups. So we had to split tasks and help each other. If I don't do my part, others will also have a hard time. Eventually, I learned to be disciplined and not disappoint my friends"*.

The results of the interview with a ninth-grade student, he said *"We once discussed about gender inequality. I learned that we must respect each other and not belittle friends just*

because of different genders. The teacher also always says that all opinions are important and must be valued". The result of the interview with the Principal, he said "I see real changes in the students' attitudes, especially in terms of responsibility and discipline. They are starting to get used to arriving on time for online classes, using polite language in forums, and beginning to care about social issues being discussed in class. This is a development that deserves appreciation".

The results of the interview with the student's parents indicate that *"My child now often talks about social studies topics discussed in class, such as poverty or environmental damage. He is asking more questions and appears to be starting to care about the conditions of others. I see this as a result of learning that is not just about subjects, but also about life values"*. Based on the results of observations and in-depth interviews conducted in the 9th grade of Junior High School Budisatrya Medan, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Problem Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach in social studies learning significantly builds and strengthens students' character values. This approach not only emphasizes understanding of academic material but also encourages the development of students' positive attitudes and behaviors through collaborative and contextual digital interactions. The character values successfully nurtured through PBeL include responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, honesty, digital discipline, and social empathy. Students appear capable of working independently and collectively in completing tasks, respecting each other's opinions in online discussions, and demonstrating discipline and concern for the social issues being discussed.

Social Studies teachers play a crucial role as facilitators who not only guide the learning process but also consistently instill moral values through relevant problem-solving approaches related to students' real-life experiences. Appropriate teacher interventions, including habituation in digital ethics and reinforcement of positive behavior, strengthen character formation in the virtual classroom. Interviews with teachers, students, principals, and parents support observational findings, indicating a positive change in students' thinking and attitudes. They become more caring, responsible, and active in understanding and responding to social issues around them. Overall, the Problem Based E-Learning approach has proven to be effective as a means of character education in the context of digital-based Social Studies learning in the modern era.

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of Problem-Based E-Learning (PBeL) in social studies learning in class IX at Budisatrya Middle School in Medan plays a significant role in shaping and reinforcing students' character. This approach encourages the growth of values such as responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, honesty, digital discipline, and social empathy through contextual and collaborative learning in a digital space. These findings affirm that PBeL is not only a cognitive learning strategy but can also serve as a technology-based character education platform.

Within the framework of moral development theory (Kohlberg, 1981), The PBeL learning process conducted by social studies teachers directly encourages students to move from the conventional stage to the post-conventional stage. For example, when students are asked to discuss issues of poverty and social inequality, they are not only required to understand the facts, but are also invited to reflect on justice, empathy, and social solutions. This reflects the development of moral stages 5 and 6, where students begin to consider universal ethical principles, not just obedience to rules. The role of the teacher as a moral facilitator, rather than just an instructor of content, becomes important in guiding this ethical reflection.

Furthermore, in the perspective of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), The learning process that takes place online demonstrates a mechanism of learning through observation and imitation. Teachers function as behavior models who provide concrete examples of attitudes such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance. When teachers emphasize the importance of respecting opinions in discussions or show the consequences of plagiarism, students learn not only through instruction but also from the role modeling and social reinforcement provided. Online group discussions on platforms like Google Classroom and WhatsApp Group create a social context that allows for the formation of behavioral norms through the process of vicarious learning. This result is consistent with the findings from (Asril, Jaenam, & Syahrizal, 2023) which found that problem-based learning approaches in online education can enhance students' collaborative skills and empathy values in urban junior high schools. However, this research expands on those findings by emphasizing the role of teachers in explicitly instilling character values through the reinforcement of attitudes in digital spaces. A significant contribution of this study also lies in the context of the school where the research was conducted. Unlike the elite schools studied by (Rozak, 2023), With high-tech facilities and professionally trained teachers in digital platforms, Budisatrya Middle School in Medan faces various limitations in infrastructure and digital literacy. However, these limitations do not hinder social studies teachers from performing their transformative roles. Instead, in such conditions, the high pedagogical creativity of teachers is evident as they can modify learning strategies, utilize simple platforms, and still maintain the essence of character education meaningfully.

This research found that the Problem Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach applied in Social Science education in grade IX at Junior High School Budisatrya Medan has a real contribution to the formation of students' character values. This approach does not only focus on cognitive achievement but also aims at strengthening students' positive attitudes and behaviors, such as responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, honesty, digital discipline, and social empathy. Observational results show that students are able to actively collaborate in digital discussions using platforms like Google Classroom and WhatsApp Group. They demonstrate behaviors of mutual respect, listening to peers' opinions, and completing group tasks with a high sense of responsibility. This is in line with the findings. (Novibriawan, 2023) which emphasizes

that PBeL can enhance students' social and collaborative skills in an online learning environment.

In addition, exposure to social issues such as poverty and gender inequality in social studies proves to foster empathy and social concern among students. This is in line with research. (Salisah, Darmiyanti, & Arifudin, 2024) which shows that problem-based learning is able to foster social sensitivity and empathy in students through the process of contextual exploration. Digital discipline also becomes one of the character values formed during the learning process. Punctuality, the use of polite language in discussion forums, and the honest completion of tasks are indicators of the development of discipline and responsibility in students. These findings are supported by studies (Septiani, Nabila, & Situngkir, 2023) which states that character education in the e-learning system plays a big role in the habituation of ethics and digital discipline.

In this context, social studies teachers play an important role as facilitators, not only in academic aspects but also in guiding students to internalize character values. This is reinforced by research (Aini, Havita, & Sa'diya, 2024) that mentions that teachers who act as facilitators in the problem-solving learning process can foster students' moral awareness through reflection and dialogue. The values reflection conducted at the end of the learning session plays a crucial role in instilling character awareness deeply. Each student is asked to write down or express the value lessons they have gained from the topics discussed. This finding is in line with the study (Wahyudi & Hidayat, 2023) which explains that reflection activities in PBL help students internalize values personally.

The use of local and contextual issues in social studies learning has also been proven to enhance the relevance of learning for students. Research (Putra, Sulaicha, & Saputra, 2024) shows that a local issue-based approach can strengthen students' character identity and social awareness, especially when those values are framed within real situations they encounter in their environment. The application of the PBeL approach also encourages the growth of 4C (Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration), which are essential competencies in 21st-century education. This is in line with the statement (Mainuddin & Tobroni, 2023) that PBL can significantly improve students' critical thinking and collaboration skills in a digital context.

From the perspective of environmental support, interviews with parents and school principals show that PBeL-based learning has a positive impact on students' attitudes and ways of thinking outside of school. Children are starting to show interest in social issues and are more open in expressing their opinions. This is in line with research (Ardi, Zulhanan, & Kesuma, 2023) that emphasizes the importance of synergy between schools, teachers, and families in technology-based character education. Furthermore, this approach has also successfully instilled inclusive attitudes and

tolerance. Interviews with students show an awareness of appreciating differences in opinions and backgrounds among group members. This is reinforced by findings (Adinda & Koderi, 2024) which states that the Tri Kaya Parisudha PBL model is effective in instilling the values of cooperation, empathy, and respect.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the Problem Based E-Learning approach in social studies learning at Budisatrya Junior High School in Medan not only succeeded in improving students' academic quality but also became an effective strategy in building strong character. Problem-based learning combined with digital media has proven capable of shaping students who are responsible, honest, disciplined, empathetic, and tolerant qualities that are essential in facing social and technological challenges in the 21st century.

D. Conclusions

Based on research results from observations and in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that Social Studies teachers in the IX grade of Budisatrya Junior High School in Medan play a strategic role in building students' character through a Problem-Based E-Learning (PBeL) approach. In this approach, teachers no longer serve as the sole source of information but rather as learning facilitators who encourage students to think critically, collaborate digitally, and analyze social issues contextually. The learning process conducted online through platforms such as Google Classroom and WhatsApp Groups becomes a space to foster a learning culture that values opinions, practices polite communication, and nurtures discipline and integrity. Teachers actively guide students to reflect on the moral values that emerge from the learning topics, aligning academic content with character reinforcement. The school environment and parental involvement also contribute to the supporting factors for the successful formation of students' character, both inside and outside the classroom.

The implications of these findings encompass three main areas. Schools need to invest in teacher training and strengthening digital infrastructure to optimally support the implementation of PBeL. Teachers can adapt PBeL by developing case-based learning modules relevant to the lives of students, making learning more contextual, reflective, and meaningful. Future studies are recommended to use longitudinal designs to measure student character growth more comprehensively and sustainably. Although it makes an important contribution, this research has limitations. The scope being limited to just one school makes the generalization of the findings restricted. In addition, the time constraints during the observation process may result in not all dimensions of character being observed comprehensively. This research also has not explored in depth the role of family background and other social environments in supporting the effectiveness of the PBeL approach.

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