

Humane Education and Child Character Development: A Conceptual Review of Correlation Between Animal Welfare Education and Prosocial Behavior

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Abstract

Humane education is an educational program that does not only focus on supporting the animal's well-being but also generally gives positive impacts on children's character development. Characters were born from the process of learning and habit practices that were carried out at early age. Therefore, character education should be taught early. Positive character development in children, for example, empathy and compassion, will contribute to the emergence of prosocial behaviour. This could become preventive action or solution to anticipate the increasing violence trend that is directed either to humans, animals or, the environment.

Keywords: *Humane Education; Character Development; Childhood; Animal Welfare Education; Prosocial Behaviour; Child Psychology*

Introduction

Human resource qualities will determine how a nation could develop to become a strong, independent, and empowered nation in global competition. The development process of human resource does not only focus on physical aspects but also consider psychological or mental aspects. One psychological factor which is of concern in creating good human resources is character. Lickona (2004) explained that character is a personality of a person who could be relied on to respond to various situations with good morals. A character's development

process begins at an early age. In fact, at the age of 6 months, a child could already start showing the ability to develop empathy (Altmann, 2007). Character building and character education are a must because education does not only make the nation's children smart but also has good manners and politeness so that their existence as members of society could become generally meaningful for themselves and society (Kaimuddin, 2018). This goes hand in hand with the crisis of social conditions which recently is becoming more concerning. The increased *bullying case*, destruction of others' belongings, sexual harassment, drug abuse and narcotics, destruction of the environment, to rampant violence or abuse towards animals surely need special attention. Cases of violence against animals are quite high in Indonesia. Based on data from Asia for Animals Coalition, Indonesia is dominating the world that uploads the most animal cruelty content on social media. Of the total of 5,480 contents collected, 1,626 contents of those are coming from Indonesia (downloaded from dpr.go.id, December 7, 2022). Easy access through social media makes it more possible for those who want to repeat or imitate similar things, including kids. Children are at a crucial age when they can easily imitate and absorb what they see or hear from their surroundings where they grow (Ormrod, 2008). When this is not balanced with adequate education character, surely the chance of making violence towards animals could be considered normal and it would be okay if the cases are high. Character education with a knowledge base on animals' well-being could be considered in the hope it could disconnect the chain of this condition.

Humane education is one of the forms of a learning system that can become an alternative for introducing and teaching the exact method of how to behave towards animals with animal welfare principles in mind (Taylor & Signal, 2005). *Humane education* could be introduced to children at the start of early age. Educational programs in *humane education* will not only help reduce violence trends and develop empathy in animals but also in humans. Various studies

have mentioned that empathy is an important contributor to prosocial behaviour (Roberts and Strayer, 1996; McDonald and Messinger, 2011). Prosocial behaviour could be defined as purposeful action to help, give benefits, or support other people. Prosocial behaviour in children could become a medium to predict low internalization and externalization problems, diminish future aggression trends, increase social function, and achieve better academics (Samuels, 2018). This study aimed to provide answers related to the question of whether the application of *humane education* that focuses on animal welfare education could support the development of characters in children, in particular prosocial behaviour. Besides that, this research is expected to become a base for related field studies in Indonesia with the implementation of *humane education*.

Methodology Study

Type of Research

This study used an approach method in the form of *Library Research* or literature studies. Though considers as research, research with literature studies is research that does not require the researcher to go to the field or meet with the research's respondents. Prastowo (2012) revealed that literature study is one of the methods used in qualitative research where it is done in a library. Documents, archives, and various types of documents that can be traced scientifically are used as materials in order to gather information and data. The purpose of this study is to get the base theory of the problem that is going to be researched by learning various references or results from studies that have been done before (Sarwono, 2006).

Procedure Study

This literature research is used to arrange a draft about the influence of *humane education* applications (with a focus on animal welfare education) in the development of children's character, specifically prosocial behaviour. Kuhlthau (2002) mentions there are steps in literature study as follows:

1. Topic selection
2. Information exploration
3. Determine the focus of the study
4. Data sources collection
5. Data presentation preparation
6. Organize the report

Research Data Sources

This study used relevant data which focuses on humane education to develop prosocial behaviour character in children. Various literature such as journals or scientific articles is obtained by downloading necessary materials through *e-journal* sites, such as sciencedirect.com, researchgate.net, academia.edu, journal.sagepub.com, etc.

Techniques and Instruments of Data Collection

The data collection technique used in this study is documentation, which is the process of searching materials that are connected to this study's variables in the form of written sources

such as_ articles or journal research (Scott & Marshall, 2015). The instruments used in this study are a classification list of research sources, a writing scheme, and a research note format (Imah and Purwoko, 2018).

Data analysis technique

The researcher used the analysis content method (*content analysis*) as a data analysis technique. This method is used to form a valid conclusion from some written source through sets of systematic procedures. The content analysis technique makes the researcher possible to do quantification and analysis of the meaning and relationship between words, sentences, or drafts of certain written sources (Elo et al., 2014). This process covers selecting, sorting, comparing, and merging various definitions so that relevant conclusions can be found.

Results and Discussion

Results

Humane education can be defined as a form of education that encourages humans to better understand animal welfare and how to treat animals with compassion and love. In *cross-cultural* research, *humane education* can also be implemented in an educational program in order to introduce the understanding that animal also has the intelligence and awareness to feel emotion similarly to humans (Balcombe, 2016; Bekoff, 2013). In relation to animal welfare education, *humane education* introduces 5 principles of animal welfare, namely (1) freedom from Hunger and Thirst; (2) freedom from Discomfort; (3) freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease; (4) freedom to Express Normal Behavior; (5) freedom from Fear and Distress (Susanto & Gandha, 2015).

Apart from being related to the principle that carries attention to animal welfare, *humane education* could also be a medium for character education, social and emotional skills learning and support the development of emotional ability to empathize and be compassionate to humans, animals, and the environment. Learning programs of *humane education* would not close the possibilities that will give the opportunity to evaluate whether those three things could be related to one another. When *humane education* is implemented as part of children's education, then it will become a medium which will contribute to developing skills outside of class. *Humane education* would help children to become part of and be responsible figures for the environment around them (Itle-Clark, 2011).

Related research conducted by Samuels (2018) about the application of *humane education* to first and second-grade students in a school in China exhibits significant good results in connection with prosocial behaviour. *Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation–Checklist (TOCA-C) Prosociality subscale* is used as a tool to measure prosocial behaviour. Dimensions of measurable prosocial behaviour are friendly attitude, compliance, emotion management when angry, capability to feel empathy, sporty, likeable among classmates, and capability of accepting different opinions. A number of other studies also support this statement. Sprinkle (2008) found that the *humane education program* that is carried out in schools would increase the ability to empathize and reduce trends of violence in elementary and middle high school students. Samuels, Meers, and Normando (2016) also found that *humane education* could improve prosocial behaviour in experiment groups compared with the control group who received a *non-humane educational* program. The findings of Piek et al. (2015) even explain that improvement in prosocial behaviour tends to stay for 6 to 18 months after participating in animal-focused educational programs.

Ngai et al. (2021) demonstrated that *animal-assisted humane education* provides positive

impacts on self-regulation, human behaviour, also growth in academic ability. Sustainable monitoring is recommended in that study to see the consistency of the provided educational program. Arbor, Signal, & Taylor (2009) described that *human education program* brings a significant influence on ways to behave toward animals, especially on empathy abilities.

Discussion

Character is a set of traits possessed by a person and become signs of goodness, virtue, and moral maturity of an individual. Good character consists of knowledge about *knowing the good, desiring the good*), and *doing the good*. In this case, it required habitational thought (*habit of the mind*), habitational heart (*habit of the heart*), and habitational action (*habit of the action*). When we think about the characters that parents want to be instilled in their children, Clearly, parents wish their children to be able to judge whether they really care about human rights and act accordingly (Zubaedi, 2011). Of course, this ability does not only limit to other humans but also expected could be applied when interacting with animals and the environment.

There are many traits within the character traits framework that a child could have and develop, some of which are being able to empathize, respect others (*respect*), being responsible (*responsible*), compassionate (*compassionate*), and being able to display kindness (*kind*). Empathy is included in related characters in which an individual is able to express his emotions because empathy could be measured through his insight on emotion, emotional expression, and one's ability to take on the role of another individual. Furthermore, empathy will be related to the behavioural responses that are displayed when interacting with the surrounding environment. Empathy becomes the limit of the individual whether he will do or actualize the prosocial ideas

they have into their behaviour or not (Asih & Pratiwi, 2010). Thus, children's character development is tightly related to the implementation of prosocial behaviour.

The research's results related to the application of humane education describe that this educational program could be a promising tool for character development. One of the traits that can be the focus of development is empathy. Good empathy development will enable a child to understand the feelings and emotions of other people as well as the ability to imagine oneself in someone else's place. This ability to empathize begins to be owned by someone when he reaches early childhood (6 years), thus it can be said that all individuals have the basic ability to empathize, it is just that the level of depth and how to actualize it varies with age. (Hurlock, 1999 in Asih & Pratiwi, 2010).

The development of empathy character has a close relationship with prosocial behaviour (Decety et al., 2016). When a person is able to understand the conditions and needs of the environment around him, be it humans, animals or the natural environment, then his behaviour will show a caring attitude to reach the welfare of the surrounding environment. A caring attitude will certainly reduce the tendency to engage in violent behaviour, including when interacting with animals. A child would be able to have empathy for animals when he is interested in understanding animals. This interest would allow children to have satisfactory knowledge of the basic needs of animals and how to treat animals properly. Programs in humane education will facilitate and make it easier for children to access the learning materials needed related to these topics.

Conclusion

Humane education could become one of the programs of character development education that have long been developing in Indonesia. This program would benefit Indonesian children to have alternative ways of learning related knowledge of character development through

deeper knowledge regarding animal welfare. With comprehensive character development, it is hoped that children will not only be able to show prosocial attitudes towards fellow humans but also animals and the natural environment. This research has limitations in collecting material related to the implementation of humane education in Indonesia since this concept is a new thing in Indonesia. It is hoped that the reviewed concept can become a reference for subsequent research to further echo the importance of implementing humane education for the character education of Indonesian children.

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