

Ethical Leadership and Character Education: Addressing the Digital Dilemmas of Society 5.0

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the integration of ethical leadership and character education in addressing the digital challenges of Society 5.0. It explores how educational institutions can equip students with ethical frameworks to navigate both physical and digital environments. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research investigates current educational practices, highlighting gaps in digital ethics integration within curricula and inconsistencies in teacher training. The findings reveal a pressing need for a structured, comprehensive framework that embeds ethical leadership into digital education, enabling students to apply ethical principles in real-world digital interactions. Furthermore, the study identifies key barriers, such as the lack of standardized digital ethics guidelines and limited institutional support for teachers. To address these challenges, the research proposes several recommendations: enhancing digital ethics education through structured curricula, improving teacher preparation programs to include digital ethics training, and fostering collaboration between educators, policymakers, and technology experts. By combining traditional character education with digital ethics, educational institutions can better prepare students for the ethical complexities of Society 5.0. These measures are crucial for developing responsible digital citizens who can critically assess ethical dilemmas and contribute positively to a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Key Words: *Ethical Leadership, Character Education, Digital Ethics, Society 5.0, Educational Technology*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology and its integration into every aspect of daily life has created both opportunities and challenges for contemporary societies. In particular, the rise of Society 5.0, a society that integrates the physical and digital worlds through advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and robotics, presents a new landscape for education and leadership (Syafi'i & Ikwandi, 2023). This research is crucial as it addresses the pressing need for ethical leadership and character education in a society that is increasingly interconnected and dependent on digital systems. With the proliferation of digital platforms, individuals face constant ethical dilemmas, from online privacy concerns to cyberbullying. Therefore, it is essential to explore how education systems can cultivate individuals with strong character, capable of navigating this complex digital world. This study is important as it bridges the gap between technological advancement and the development of ethical, responsible citizens, fostering a more ethical digital society for future generations (Parhan dkk., 2024).

In the digital era, society is increasingly confronting ethical challenges that undermine trust, integrity, and social harmony. Misinformation, digital surveillance, and cybercrime are just a few examples of the ethical dilemmas faced by individuals in the connected world (Habibulloh, 2024). The rapid pace of technological change often outpaces the development of corresponding ethical guidelines, leaving individuals vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation (Azah, dkk., 2024). Furthermore, the lack of a cohesive framework for integrating character education with the digital landscape has led to gaps in developing ethical leadership in schools and organizations (Habibulloh dkk., 2024). This problem becomes even more pronounced in Society 5.0, where traditional approaches to leadership and education are no longer sufficient (Sholeh, Lestari, dkk., 2024). Thus, this research aims to address the challenge of creating ethical leaders who can foster integrity in digital spaces, ensuring that character education evolves alongside technological innovations (Radjak dkk., 2024).

Across the globe, the integration of technology into everyday life has led to a significant shift in how individuals interact, learn, and lead. In many educational institutions, there is a growing recognition of the importance of teaching not only academic knowledge but also ethical values that will help students navigate digital spaces responsibly (Ma dkk., 2024). However, despite these efforts, students often struggle to uphold integrity online, where the anonymity and distance afforded by technology can diminish accountability. Moreover, the rise of digital platforms has led to the proliferation of online bullying, misinformation, and unethical practices. In the corporate world, leaders face the challenge of leading teams through these ethical dilemmas while maintaining trust and transparency (Azah dkk., 2024). These phenomena highlight the need for a new approach to leadership and education, one that integrates character development and ethical decision-making with technological competence. This study explores how ethical leadership and character education can work synergistically to address the dilemmas of Society 5.0 (Mahbubi & Hidayat, 2023; Mulyasa, 2023; Qowim dkk., 2024).

Previous research has explored the role of character education in promoting ethical behavior in the digital age, with some studies focusing on the integration of digital literacy into educational curricula (Koesoema, 2023; Mahbubi, 2013; Qowim dkk., 2024). Others have examined ethical leadership and its importance in guiding organizational behavior in the digital world. However, there is a notable gap in research regarding how these two areas—ethical leadership and character education—can be integrated to address the unique challenges of Society 5.0. While individual studies have tackled aspects of either character development or leadership ethics, few have explored their combined potential in shaping a new generation of leaders and citizens who can

navigate the ethical complexities of the digital world. This research contributes to filling this gap by examining the intersection of ethical leadership and character education in a technologically advanced society (Mahbubi dkk., 2024; Parhan dkk., 2024).

The previous body of literature has largely focused on either the development of ethical leadership in a traditional context or the role of character education in non-digital settings. However, the rapid expansion of digital technologies in education and leadership has created a new set of challenges that require a more integrated approach. Research on ethical leadership in the digital age is still limited, especially when considering its role in shaping character education. Moreover, while there have been attempts to incorporate technology in character-building programs, the effectiveness of these initiatives in creating ethical leaders who are capable of addressing digital dilemmas remains under-explored. Thus, there is a need for research that specifically addresses the confluence of ethical leadership and character education in the context of Society 5.0, and how these concepts can be adapted to foster individuals who are ethically sound in both the physical and digital realms (Hastini dkk., 2020; Parhan dkk., 2024).

As technology continues to advance, it is increasingly important to integrate character education into digital platforms and leadership frameworks. The state of the art in this field involves the recognition that ethical decision-making is crucial not only in physical spaces but also in the digital environments where much of our social interaction and business transactions now occur. This shift necessitates a rethinking of educational practices and leadership strategies, particularly in how we cultivate integrity, responsibility, and ethical awareness among students and leaders. The need for innovation is clear: traditional models of leadership and character education are no longer sufficient to meet the demands of Society 5.0 (Fathoni dkk., 2024; Junaidi & Mahbubi, 2023). New approaches must be developed that integrate technology with ethical principles, ensuring that future generations can thrive in a digital world while upholding the values of honesty, integrity, and social responsibility (Ilfi & Manaf, 2024).

This research seeks to answer the question: How can ethical leadership and character education synergize to address the digital dilemmas of Society 5.0? The central argument is that a combined approach, where ethical leadership guides educational systems in the digital age and character education is integrated into digital learning platforms, is essential for developing ethical individuals capable of thriving in a digital society. This research contributes to the field by proposing a new framework for ethical leadership and character education in the context of Society 5.0, one that accounts for the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era. By examining the interplay between these two elements, the research will offer practical

insights for educators, leaders, and policymakers on how to cultivate ethical decision-makers who can navigate the complexities of the digital age.

This study is essential for addressing the pressing need to prepare individuals who are not only technologically savvy but also ethically grounded. The fusion of ethical leadership and character education in the digital age represents a transformative opportunity for society. By exploring this synergy, this research aims to provide actionable strategies for education systems and leaders to foster integrity and responsibility in the digital realm. As we continue to evolve into Society 5.0, the insights from this research will be vital in shaping a future where individuals act with moral clarity, regardless of the digital complexities they face.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative case study design, which is particularly suited for understanding complex phenomena within their real-life context (Brondz, 2012; Conway & Stanley, 2006). The aim of this study is to explore the intersection of ethical leadership and character education in addressing the digital dilemmas of Society 5.0. A case study approach is appropriate because it allows for in-depth exploration of the subject in a specific context, focusing on how these two concepts interact within educational institutions and digital spaces. This design enables the research to capture nuanced perspectives on the challenges and strategies associated with developing ethical leaders and fostering character education in the digital age. Moreover, qualitative research allows for a flexible, inductive approach to understanding these phenomena, which is crucial given the rapidly evolving nature of both digital technology and the ethical dilemmas it creates (Hennink dkk., 2020).

The research will be conducted in educational institutions (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and digital platforms where character education and leadership development programs are being implemented. Specifically, the study will focus on schools and universities that have integrated digital technologies into their curricula and leadership programs, as well as online platforms that offer character education tools. The reason for selecting these locations is twofold: first, educational institutions play a central role in shaping the ethical and leadership behaviors of students; second, digital platforms are increasingly becoming the primary environment for education, creating a need to examine how character education and leadership development can be adapted to these platforms. By focusing on these locations, the research aims to understand how educational settings in both traditional and digital formats can contribute to the ethical development of individuals in the context of Society 5.0 (Kallio dkk., 2016).

To gather comprehensive insights into the role of ethical leadership and character education in addressing the digital dilemmas of Society 5.0, multiple data collection methods will be employed:

- 1) **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with educators, school administrators, and leaders who are involved in character education and ethical leadership programs. These interviews will allow for a deeper understanding of their experiences, perspectives, and strategies for integrating character education into the digital age.
- 2) **Focus Groups:** Focus groups with students will be used to explore their views on the importance of ethical leadership and character education, as well as their experiences in navigating ethical challenges in digital spaces. This method will help capture collective insights and provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon.
- 3) **Document Analysis:** Relevant documents such as school curricula, educational policies, leadership guidelines, and digital education materials will be analyzed to identify how character education and ethical leadership are integrated into these frameworks. This will help provide a historical and contextual understanding of the practices being studied.
- 4) **Observations:** Direct observation of classroom interactions and online educational activities will also be conducted to examine how ethical issues are addressed in real-time and how educators and leaders model ethical behavior in digital environments (Iskandar, 2022).

The data analysis will follow a thematic analysis approach, with a focus on identifying patterns and themes related to ethical leadership and character education in the context of digital dilemmas. The analysis will be conducted in the following stages:

- 1) **Condensation:** Initially, the raw data from interviews, focus groups, documents, and observations will be transcribed and categorized into broad themes. This process will involve summarizing the data to capture key ideas related to the research questions.
- 2) **Reduction:** The data will then undergo a process of reduction, where irrelevant or redundant information will be eliminated, and the remaining data will be organized into more focused categories. This will help in narrowing down the themes to those most relevant to the research objectives.
- 3) **Display:** The categorized data will be displayed in a way that highlights the relationships between the themes and the research questions. This could involve the creation of tables, charts, or diagrams to visually represent the findings, making it easier to interpret and draw conclusions.

- 4) **Verification:** Finally, the validity of the findings will be checked by cross-referencing the data across multiple sources. This triangulation process will help ensure that the conclusions drawn are well-supported by the evidence. The researcher's interpretations will also be verified through member checking, where participants are asked to review the findings and provide feedback on their accuracy and relevance (Pugu dkk., 2024).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, several strategies will be employed:

- 1) **Triangulation:** By using multiple data sources (interviews, focus groups, observations, document analysis), the research will cross-check findings to ensure consistency and reduce bias.
- 2) **Member Checking:** After conducting interviews and focus groups, participants will be invited to review the findings to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations and ensure that their perspectives are represented accurately.
- 3) **Peer Review:** The research process and findings will be subject to peer review, where colleagues in the field of education and leadership will provide feedback on the research design, data collection methods, and analysis. This external validation will further enhance the credibility of the study.
- 4) **Audit Trail:** A detailed record of the research process, including decisions made during data collection and analysis, will be kept. This audit trail will allow others to follow the research steps and understand how conclusions were reached, further ensuring the transparency and reliability of the study.
- 5) **Reflexivity:** The researcher will engage in reflexive practice, regularly reflecting on their own biases, assumptions, and the impact these may have on the research process. This will help maintain objectivity and ensure that the findings are grounded in the data rather than preconceived notions (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015).

By employing these rigorous methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and reliable understanding of how ethical leadership and character education can address the digital dilemmas faced by individuals in Society 5.0.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

In this study, the primary sub-theme focuses on the integration of ethical leadership and character education in the context of Society 5.0. Ethical leadership, as defined operationally, refers to leaders who exemplify integrity, fairness, transparency, and accountability in their actions, particularly in digital spaces. It is not just about making ethical decisions but also about setting a positive example and creating a culture

where ethical practices are emphasized. Character education in this research is operationalized as the systematic teaching and reinforcement of moral values—such as respect, honesty, responsibility, and empathy—in both traditional and digital learning environments (Mahbubi & Husein, 2023). The concept of Society 5.0, with its emphasis on the fusion of physical and cyber spaces, introduces new challenges in maintaining ethical standards. As digital technologies such as AI, IoT, and big data become integral parts of everyday life, ethical leadership and character education must adapt to address issues like privacy concerns, digital surveillance, cyberbullying, and misinformation. Therefore, this study investigates how educational institutions and leaders can model ethical behavior and integrate character education to help students navigate these new challenges effectively in Society 5.0 (Parhan dkk., 2024).

One of the major findings of the study from the observations conducted in educational institutions was that the implementation of digital tools to teach ethics was inconsistent across different institutions. Some schools and universities have developed comprehensive programs using digital platforms to teach ethical decision-making, providing students with real-world scenarios where they can make choices that reflect ethical dilemmas in the digital age. For example, in some cases, schools implemented simulations that asked students to engage in digital environments where they were required to solve ethical challenges, such as handling data privacy or responding to cyberbullying. These activities were designed to help students develop critical thinking skills while navigating moral issues in the context of technology (Qowim dkk., 2024; Radjak dkk., 2024).

However, not all institutions utilized digital tools effectively. In some cases, the use of technology to reinforce ethical leadership was limited or superficial. Some teachers and administrators reported that while digital tools were introduced as part of the curriculum, they were not always seamlessly integrated into the broader educational experience. Teachers would use apps or online resources to demonstrate ethical issues in isolated lessons, but there was little follow-up or sustained engagement with digital ethics beyond these occasional sessions. This fragmented use of technology to promote ethical leadership led to uneven outcomes in terms of students' ability to apply ethical principles to real-world digital environments. The lack of a clear and structured framework for digital ethics within the educational curriculum was evident. Consequently, students struggled to understand how ethical decision-making in digital spaces could be generalized to their everyday online behaviors.

Moreover, an important observation was that many educators had limited training in digital leadership and ethics, which affected their ability to teach students how to navigate ethical dilemmas in the digital age. While most educators recognized

the importance of character education, many were not equipped with the tools or knowledge to integrate it effectively into digital learning contexts. For example, some teachers who were well-versed in traditional ethical discussions found it challenging to translate those lessons into the digital realm. They lacked the confidence and resources to address digital-specific issues, such as the ethics of online behavior, digital privacy, and the consequences of misinformation. This gap in training highlights a significant challenge for educational systems in the digital age, where technology is evolving faster than educators' ability to keep pace with the digital literacy and ethical competencies required to address these changes.

The data clearly showed a disconnect between the theoretical understanding of ethical leadership and its practical implementation in digital education. Educators who received training in traditional character education were aware of the importance of instilling values like honesty, integrity, and responsibility in students. However, they often lacked the specific skills to adapt these lessons for the digital age, where ethical challenges differ significantly from those in physical spaces. For example, ethical leadership in face-to-face situations may involve teaching students about respecting others' opinions or avoiding cheating, but the ethical dilemmas students face online—such as managing their digital footprint, dealing with cyberbullying, or making responsible decisions about the information they share—require a different set of competencies.

Furthermore, students also struggled to transfer the ethical principles learned in the classroom to their behavior in digital spaces. Although many students could articulate the importance of ethical decision-making in their academic and personal lives, they found it difficult to apply these principles when interacting on social media, gaming platforms, or in online communities. Interviews with students revealed that while they understood the concepts of honesty and integrity, they often felt that these values were difficult to uphold online, where anonymity and the lack of face-to-face interaction made it easier to disregard ethical standards. This inconsistency between classroom learning and real-world application underscores the need for a more integrated approach to ethical education—one that incorporates both traditional ethical values and the specific ethical challenges posed by digital technology.

From the observations and interviews, several patterns emerged that highlight the disconnect between the digital tools used in character education and the real-world ethical challenges students face online. First, the lack of integration of digital ethics into everyday learning was a common issue. While some schools used digital tools to teach ethics, these tools were often used in isolation, without embedding ethical decision-making into the overall curriculum or daily student activities. This meant that students

did not always have the opportunity to practice or reflect on ethical issues in the context of their digital interactions, such as on social media or when browsing the internet.

Second, there was a noticeable gap in the confidence and preparedness of educators when it came to integrating ethical leadership into digital learning environments. Educators with traditional teaching backgrounds were often unprepared to deal with the specific ethical issues arising in digital contexts. This discrepancy created challenges for both students and educators, as it hindered the ability of teachers to guide students in making ethical decisions in the digital world. Educators often expressed frustration at not having sufficient training or resources to address the complex ethical dilemmas posed by technology. Without the proper training, they were unable to provide the support and guidance that students needed to develop digital ethics and responsible online behavior.

Lastly, the student responses further highlighted the need for real-world applications of ethical principles in digital spaces. Many students expressed that the ethical lessons they learned in the classroom were difficult to apply in their everyday digital interactions. This suggests that while traditional character education may be effective in fostering values in offline settings, it needs to evolve to address the complexities of digital behavior. For example, students acknowledged that it was easy to understand the ethics of personal integrity and respect in real life, but these principles became more challenging to uphold in the online environment, where they were often influenced by peer pressure, anonymity, and the speed at which information is shared.

The overall pattern observed in this study suggests that while there is a desire to integrate ethical leadership and character education into digital learning, significant challenges remain. The use of digital tools in teaching ethics is often inconsistent, and the application of these tools to address real-world digital dilemmas is limited. Additionally, both educators and students lack the necessary training and confidence to navigate the ethical challenges posed by digital platforms. To address these issues, it is recommended that educational institutions develop a comprehensive framework for digital ethics education that integrates ethical leadership across all subjects and grade levels. This framework should include practical exercises, discussions, and real-world applications to help students navigate the ethical complexities of the digital world. Moreover, educators must be provided with specialized training in digital ethics and leadership, equipping them with the skills to guide students in making ethical decisions both online and offline. Only by addressing these gaps can we ensure that students are prepared to face the ethical dilemmas of Society 5.0 with integrity and responsibility.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the crucial role that ethical leadership and character education play in addressing the digital dilemmas faced by individuals in Society 5.0. As digital technologies continue to reshape our society, the ethical challenges associated with these advancements have become more complex. This research reveals that while educational institutions are beginning to adopt digital tools for teaching ethics, there is a significant gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, both in terms of student behavior and educator readiness.

A primary issue identified in the study is the lack of integration between traditional ethical leadership frameworks and the realities of digital environments. While ethical leadership in traditional contexts focuses on values such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness, digital spaces introduce new challenges that require a different set of competencies. The anonymity provided by the internet, coupled with the rapid dissemination of information, complicates the application of these values. As the findings suggest, many educators struggle to adapt their ethical teachings to the unique circumstances of the digital world, which often leaves students unprepared for the ethical dilemmas they face online.

Moreover, the inconsistent use of digital tools in teaching ethics points to a broader issue within educational systems—there is no unified approach to digital ethics education. While some educators are successfully integrating digital platforms to teach ethical decision-making, many others are still using traditional methods that fail to address the specific ethical challenges students encounter online. This fragmentation hampers the effectiveness of character education in preparing students to handle moral issues in a digital context. For instance, although some schools use online simulations or ethical decision-making apps, these tools are often used sporadically and without follow-up activities that could reinforce the lessons learned.

Another critical insight from this study is the lack of preparedness among educators to lead ethical discussions in digital contexts. Many teachers, especially those without specific training in digital leadership, feel unprepared to guide students through the complexities of digital ethics. As digital technologies evolve rapidly, educators must continuously update their knowledge and skills to address the emerging ethical concerns that accompany these advancements. The findings indicate that professional development programs focusing on digital ethics are essential to equip educators with the tools necessary to effectively teach and model ethical behavior in both physical and digital spaces.

The disconnect between classroom learning and real-world digital behavior was another significant finding. While students often understand the importance of ethical values in abstract terms, they struggle to apply these values in their online interactions.

The findings suggest that this gap can be attributed to the lack of real-world applications of ethical lessons in digital spaces. For instance, while students might recognize the importance of privacy and honesty, they find it more challenging to apply these principles on social media platforms, where anonymity and peer pressure can often override ethical considerations. This highlights the need for integrated character education programs that incorporate digital ethics into their core curricula, allowing students to practice ethical decision-making in the environments where they are most likely to encounter ethical dilemmas.

Highlights of this study is the critical need for a unified, comprehensive approach to teaching ethical leadership and character education in the digital age. As Society 5.0 continues to evolve, so too must our strategies for preparing students to navigate the ethical challenges posed by digital technologies. Educational institutions must prioritize digital ethics education, provide ongoing professional development for educators, and ensure that character education is not limited to the classroom but is woven into students' real-world digital experiences. By doing so, we can ensure that future generations are equipped with the ethical foundation needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and technologically advanced world.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore the integration of ethical leadership and character education in addressing the digital dilemmas of Society 5.0, with a focus on how educational institutions can equip students to navigate ethical challenges in both physical and digital environments. The study's introduction set the stage by emphasizing the necessity of ethical leadership in the rapidly evolving technological landscape. The research method used—a qualitative case study approach—allowed us to gather in-depth insights into how institutions are responding to the challenges posed by digital technologies and the need for ethical decision-making frameworks. The results and discussion revealed critical gaps in the integration of ethical leadership in digital education, underscoring the fragmentation of digital ethics education and the lack of consistent teacher training.

The findings confirm the need for a cohesive, comprehensive framework that integrates ethical leadership into both traditional and digital educational practices. Despite the availability of digital tools designed to teach ethical decision-making, their application remains inconsistent and lacks systematic integration into the broader curriculum. This misalignment between classroom teachings and real-world digital behavior demonstrates the necessity for educators to be better equipped with the knowledge and resources to guide students in making ethical decisions in digital

contexts. The research clearly shows that while ethical principles are often taught in isolation, real-world applications in the digital space are lacking, thus limiting students' ability to translate classroom learning into online behaviors.

The study's results also highlight the crucial role of digital ethics education in fostering responsible digital citizens in Society 5.0. The students' difficulty in applying ethical principles to their digital lives emphasizes the importance of practical, hands-on ethical experiences that extend beyond the classroom setting. These findings provide a critical understanding of how character education should evolve to encompass digital ethics and leadership, ensuring that future generations are not only academically proficient but also ethically grounded.

In terms of future prospects, this research points to several areas of potential development. First, educational institutions must invest in comprehensive training programs for teachers and administrators to build their capacity in teaching digital ethics and leadership. Additionally, developing integrated curricula that combine traditional character education with digital ethics is crucial to better prepare students for the complexities of digital interactions. The research also paves the way for further investigation into the effectiveness of digital tools used in teaching ethics, providing insights into how these tools can be better implemented and sustained across various educational settings.

For future research applications, the findings suggest several pathways for expanding the study. Future research could focus on longitudinal studies to track the impact of digital ethics education on students' behaviors over time. Additionally, research could explore how various digital platforms (such as social media, gaming, and online communities) influence ethical decision-making and how educational interventions can be tailored to address these specific platforms. This would allow for a deeper understanding of the real-time ethical challenges students face and how educational systems can adapt to better support responsible digital citizenship.

Based on the findings, the study offers the following recommendations:

- 1) Develop standardized digital ethics education frameworks that are integrated into both curricula and extracurricular activities, ensuring that all students have consistent access to ethics education across various platforms.
- 2) Invest in teacher training programs focused on ethical leadership and digital literacy to equip educators with the tools they need to guide students through digital dilemmas.

- 3) Promote collaboration between educational institutions, policymakers, and technology companies to create ethical guidelines that align with the rapidly evolving digital landscape.
- 4) Implement real-world, experiential learning opportunities that allow students to practice ethical decision-making in digital spaces, such as online simulations or engagement with social media platforms from an ethical standpoint.

By addressing these recommendations, educational institutions can foster a generation of responsible, ethical leaders capable of navigating the complexities of Society 5.0 with integrity.

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