



## The Effectiveness of the Inquiry Learning Model in Shaping the Morality and Ethics of Seventh Grade Students in the Academic Year 2024/2025 (A Case Study at SMP Paramita Maitreya Duri, Riau)

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### Abstract

Moral and ethical education has become a central concern in the 21st century, particularly in the face of rapid social and cultural changes. Schools are expected not only to provide cognitive knowledge but also to shape students' moral character and ethical responsibility. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the inquiry learning method in developing moral and ethical values among Grade VII students at SMP Paramita Maitreya Duri, Indonesia. The research adopts a qualitative case study design with purposive sampling involving students, teachers, school leaders, and parents. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation. The findings reveal that inquiry learning fosters active participation, critical thinking, and reflective engagement in moral education. Students demonstrated improvements in honesty, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, and self-control. Ethical awareness was also enhanced, with students showing increased ability to analyze real-life dilemmas, respect others' perspectives, and make moral decisions. These findings are consistent with both contemporary educational theories (Bruner, Lickona) and Buddhist teachings (Dhammapada, Kalama Sutta, Sigalovada Sutta). Although challenges remain, such as limited time and teachers' readiness, inquiry learning has proven to be an effective and culturally relevant approach to moral and ethical education.

**Keywords:** Character education, elementary school students, ethics, inquiry model, morality

### INTRODUCTION

The 21st century presents unprecedented challenges in the moral and ethical formation of young people. Globalization, digitalization, and rapid socio-cultural transformations expose adolescents to diverse values, sometimes contradictory to the principles of honesty, discipline, empathy, and responsibility. Schools, therefore, play a crucial role not only as centers of intellectual development but also as institutions that cultivate moral character and ethical integrity.

In Indonesia, character education has become a national priority, reflecting the government's efforts to address moral decline among students. Various reports highlight issues such as dishonesty during examinations, lack of discipline, peer

bullying, and the influence of social media on students' behavior. These challenges call for innovative approaches in moral and ethical education, moving beyond traditional methods that often rely heavily on lectures and rote memorization.

One promising alternative is the inquiry learning method, which emphasizes active student participation, critical reflection, and experiential learning. Unlike conventional moral instruction that tends to be normative and prescriptive, inquiry encourages students to ask questions, explore dilemmas, and construct meaning through investigation. Jerome Bruner (1961) argued that inquiry-based education stimulates natural curiosity and supports deeper cognitive engagement. Thomas Lickona (2004) similarly emphasized that character education must integrate moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions, which are all facilitated by inquiry learning.

In the Buddhist context, moral and ethical education is deeply rooted in the cultivation of *sīla* (morality) as one of the three foundations of practice, alongside *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). The *Dhammapada*, *Kalama Sutta*, and *Sigalovada Sutta* all highlight the importance of critical reflection, self-control, and moral action, which resonate strongly with the principles of inquiry learning. Schools with Buddhist foundations, such as SMP Paramita Maitreya Duri, therefore provide a unique context to examine how inquiry can be applied in moral and ethical education.

This study seeks to fill the gap in existing literature by examining the effectiveness of the inquiry method in moral and ethical education in a Buddhist-based school setting in Indonesia. While inquiry has been widely applied in science education, its application in moral and ethical learning remains underexplored, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts.

The objectives of this research are fourfold and interconnected. First, the study seeks to evaluate how inquiry-based learning fosters students' active engagement in moral and ethical education, shifting their role from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in the process of reflection and analysis. In addition, the research aims to identify the core moral and ethical values—such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and respect—that are enhanced through the implementation of inquiry learning. Beyond that, the study also analyzes the challenges and limitations encountered in applying inquiry learning within the context of moral education, including issues of teacher readiness, time constraints, and students' adaptation to a more active learning model. Finally, the research objectives include contextualizing these findings within both broader educational theories and Buddhist teachings, thereby linking contemporary pedagogical practices with timeless moral principles.

By addressing these objectives, this study contributes theoretically to the discourse on inquiry-based moral education and practically to the development of culturally relevant strategies for schools in Indonesia and beyond.

## **METHODS**

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore the effectiveness of inquiry-based learning in shaping students' moral and ethical values. A qualitative approach was chosen because it provides a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, attitudes, and behaviors in their natural classroom context (Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at SMP Paramita Maitreya Duri, a Buddhist-based junior high school in Riau Province, Indonesia, which integrates Buddhist values with modern pedagogy.

The participants were selected purposively and consisted of Grade VII students (aged 12–13 years), teachers who applied inquiry in moral education, the school principal, and parents. In total, 22 students joined focus group discussions (FGDs) and classroom observations, while teachers, parents, and the principal participated in interviews. This combination of perspectives provided a holistic view of how inquiry-based learning influenced students' moral and ethical development.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, FGDs, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews and FGDs captured participants' views and reflections, while observations provided direct evidence of classroom dynamics. Document analysis, including lesson plans and behavioral records, added contextual support.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation of sources and methods was applied, along with credibility checks such as prolonged engagement and member checking.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings are organized into key themes: application of inquiry, impact on student morality, ethical decision-making, challenges in implementation, and alignment with Buddhist values.

### **1. Implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning in the Classroom**

The results show that the application of inquiry-based learning in moral and ethical education transformed the learning environment from a teacher-centered to a student-centered model. Instead of memorizing abstract definitions of morality, students engaged in structured processes of questioning, exploring, and reflecting. This aligns with Bruner's (1961) theory of discovery learning, which emphasizes active participation as a means of internalizing knowledge.

During classroom observations, inquiry steps such as orientation, problem formulation, hypothesis development, data gathering, and conclusion drawing were clearly visible. For example, in a lesson on honesty, teachers asked students to evaluate the implications of cheating not only for themselves but also for peers and the broader school community.

This reflective questioning encouraged students to move beyond superficial answers and explore deeper moral reasoning.

Recent research strengthens this finding. Alkhasanah et al. (2023) emphasize that inquiry strategies in elementary and secondary schools enhance student engagement by positioning them as knowledge seekers rather than passive receivers. Similarly, Citra Maylia et al. (2024) demonstrated that inquiry increases students' critical thinking and encourages them to connect moral principles with real-life contexts. Thus, the inquiry model in this study proved effective in bridging the gap between theoretical moral education and authentic ethical reflection.

## **2. Moral Development through Inquiry: Evidence from Student Responses**

Students' moral growth was most evident in their statements during focus group discussions (FGDs). Many students articulated empathy, responsibility, and honesty in addressing moral dilemmas. For instance, when asked about group members who refused to contribute, one student remarked: *"If a friend doesn't want to work, we should remind them kindly. Getting angry will only make things worse. If they still refuse, then we can ask the teacher for advice."* This highlights moral maturity, showing an ability to balance responsibility with compassion.

Another student emphasized personal integrity by saying: *"It is better to make mistakes on your own than to cheat. Cheating is dishonest and embarrassing."* This resonates with Lickona's (2004) triad of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, illustrating how students internalized values beyond theoretical knowledge.

Devi Ayu Lestari et al. (2024) found similar outcomes, reporting that moral education supported by inquiry not only strengthened honesty but also encouraged discipline and empathy. In addition, Sutarningsih (2022) confirmed that inquiry-based models cultivate responsibility and cooperation, critical for character formation. These parallels confirm that the results of this study are consistent with broader evidence, demonstrating inquiry's role in fostering deep moral sensitivity among adolescents.

## **3. Ethical Reasoning and Decision-Making Skills**

One of the most significant outcomes was students' enhanced ability to reason ethically. Through role-plays and case-based inquiry, students learned to analyze peer conflicts, bullying, and dilemmas between personal and group interests. Most students preferred negotiation and compromise over confrontation, reflecting growth in ethical maturity.

This finding aligns with Bintang Alfarras (2023), who argues that ethics must be contextualized in practical decision-making rather than abstract principles. Inquiry-based methods provide precisely this space for contextual moral reasoning. Likewise, Mahmudah et al. (2024) highlight that inquiry-based science lessons foster not only cognitive growth but also ethical awareness, suggesting that the inquiry model is transferable across disciplines to strengthen moral-ethical competencies.

Furthermore, the results resonate with Buddhist ethical teachings. The Noble Eightfold Path emphasizes right speech (*sammā vācā*) and right action (*sammā kammanta*), which mirror students' choices of communication and cooperation during conflicts. Thus, inquiry not only equips students with reasoning tools but also harmonizes with spiritual-ethical traditions.

#### **4. Comparison with Previous Studies**

This study confirms and expands upon earlier research. Fransyaigu (2015) demonstrated that moral inquiry rooted in local values ("*Alam Takambang Jadi Guru*") significantly shaped students' character in West Sumatra. Similarly, Heriyudanta (2021) highlighted that inquiry enhances autonomy and confidence, supporting holistic moral development. The present study advances this discussion by situating inquiry within a Buddhist school context, where cultural and religious values serve as an additional foundation for moral education. Parents observed that their children became more disciplined and respectful at home, echoing findings from Lestari & Ain (2022), who noted that school culture strongly influences character development. Teachers also reported higher engagement levels, consistent with Selwen & Bodhi Dharma (2022), who found that Buddhist teachers use inquiry as a means to integrate spiritual and ethical lessons effectively. By combining these perspectives, this study demonstrates that inquiry's effectiveness is not limited to secular moral frameworks but is equally compatible with religious and cultural approaches to education.

#### **5. Challenges in Implementation**

Despite its benefits, inquiry-based learning presented several challenges. First, students accustomed to passive learning initially struggled to engage in active questioning. Teachers had to provide scaffolding and encouragement to overcome hesitation. This mirrors the challenges described by Warsiti (n.d.), who noted that inquiry requires gradual adaptation for students unfamiliar with participatory learning. Second, inquiry lessons consumed more classroom time than traditional methods. Teachers needed to balance curriculum demands with reflective discussions. This issue has also been documented by Pury Widyastuti & Wardani (2018), who argued that inquiry requires flexible time allocation to succeed. Third, teachers themselves required continuous training. Facilitating open-ended discussions on moral dilemmas demands skill in neutrality, sensitivity, and conflict management. Without sufficient professional development, inquiry risks being reduced to superficial questioning rather than genuine exploration. These findings underline Bruce Joyce et al. (2016), who stress that the effectiveness of teaching models depends largely on teacher mastery and institutional support.

#### **6. Integration with Buddhist Values**

Finally, the integration of Buddhist values gave inquiry learning unique depth and resonance. The Sigalovada Sutta (Digha Nikaya 31) emphasizes ethical responsibilities

in social relationships, which aligns with the inquiry outcomes of mutual respect and responsibility. Similarly, the Kalama Sutta (Anguttara Nikaya 3.65) encourages critical reflection rather than blind acceptance, directly mirroring the inquiry method.

Dhammapada 183, which states, “*To avoid evil, to cultivate good, and to purify the mind—this is the teaching of the Buddhas,*” encapsulates the moral trajectory observed in this study. Students not only discussed moral concepts but also practiced self-discipline, honesty, and compassion. Parents’ testimonials confirmed that these values were transferred beyond the classroom into family and community life.

In line with Sonika (2021), who demonstrated that Buddhist-based moral education fosters altruistic values among adolescents, this study confirms that inquiry is both pedagogically effective and spiritually grounded. The combination of inquiry methods and Buddhist teachings created a holistic framework that nurtured intellectual, moral, and ethical growth simultaneously.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that inquiry-based learning is effective in shaping the moral and ethical development of seventh-grade students at SMP Paramita Maitreya Duri. Unlike traditional lecture-based approaches, inquiry places students at the center of learning, encouraging them to question, reflect, and apply values in real-life contexts.

The findings show that inquiry strengthens essential values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, collaboration, and respect. It not only builds students’ moral knowledge but also promotes moral feeling and action, as reflected in their increased ability to admit mistakes, respect differing opinions, and manage conflicts constructively. Aligned with both contemporary character education theories and Buddhist teachings, inquiry fosters morality through awareness and reflection rather than passive obedience. The main implication is that inquiry can serve as an effective pedagogical model for moral education, supporting students to become ethical, responsible, and empathetic individuals prepared for the challenges of modern life.

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