

## **MODEL OF CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE ERA OF VUCA**

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### **Abstract**

With the presence of the fourth industrial revolution, humanity is faced with an increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) era. In such period, besides knowledge and skills, individuals are also required to embody strong character to

confront the unpredictable challenges. This study aims to analyse character education for Indonesian and Malaysian Muslim college students in the VUCA era. This research uses qualitative approach with descriptive method and purposive sampling technique. The research has been conducted at Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Subject of this research were lecturers at UII and UKM. Data collection techniques include interviews, observation, and documentation. The data analysis method uses an interactive model. This study reveals that they are similarities as well as differences in the model of character education in UII and UKM. Lecturers in both UII and UKM observe the severe importance of character education for muslim college student in VUCA era. However, while lecturers in UKM emphasis on teaching technical preparation, UII lecturers inclined towards more personal approach and intense communications.

**Keywords:** *Character; College; Education; Students; VUCA.*

## **Abstrak**

*Dengan hadirnya revolusi industry 4.0, manusia dihadapkan pada zaman yang semakin Volatile, Uncertain, Complex dan Ambigie (VUCA). Dalam era yang demikian, selain pengetahuan dan keterampilan, manusia juga membutuhkan karakter kuat untuk menghadapi tantangan yang tak terprediksi. Oleh karena itu, penanaman budi pekerti luhur di kalangan pelajar muslim menjadi sangat penting di era VUCA ini. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis model pendidikan akhlak mulia bagi mahasiswa muslim Indonesia dan Malaysia. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dan menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Lokasi penelitian di Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) dan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Subyek penelitian ini adalah dosen UII dan UKM. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Metode analisis data menggunakan model interaktif. Penelitian ini menemukan adanya kesamaan dan perbedaan model pendidikan karakter di UII dan UKM. Para dosen di UII dan UKM sama-sama memandang tingginya urgensi pendidikan karakter di bagi mahasiswa muslim di era VUCA. Meski demikian, ketika dosen-dosen UKM lebih menekankan pada*

*persiapan teknis pengajaran, dosen-dosen UIN lebih cenderung pada pendekatan personal dan komunikasi yang intens.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Mahasiswa; Karakter; Kampus; Pendidikan; VUCA.*

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, the educational standards in Indonesia exhibit a tendency towards stagnation or decline, as evidenced by a rising portion of graduates from educational institutions who lack the necessary requirement to enter the workforce in their respective domain of knowledge and expertise. The more important indicator is the decline of moral commitment of graduates who are on ongoing astray from the guidance of social and religious values (Kamaruddin, 2012).

The future of nation will falter when the quality of the youth generation corrupted. On the contrary, the future of a nation will be bright when the quantity growth of the youth is in line with the improvement in the quality of that generation. The younger generation or millennials, especially the Muslim generation are expected to develop, not only knowledge but also morality, sense of nationalism, and others. Concern towards the youth in this epoch of uncertainty is well-founded. On the one hand, it is obvious that the younger generation, consists of Millenials and generation Z, harbour inherent fear towards recent and future development. In the survey by Hickman et al., (2021), 77% of youth respondents assert that the future is frightening. On the other hand, the younger generation, by their technology mastery, also actively engaged in prevailing advocacy towards sustainability and survival.

During the age of VUCA, traditional morality and ethics are declining as the consequences of rapid change of society (Thitsilo, 2023, p. 36). Moral decadence occurs when the modernization affects human behaviour. Beside the positive benefits, massive innovation in the field of technology has negative impact on the youth's morality (Patimah & Herlambang, 2021). The problem of moral crisis among youth has been widespread and could threaten the future of the nation.

VUCA is an acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. The term appeared in Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus' leadership theory in 1987, which was later used in military leadership training at the US Army War College to describe the rapidly changing political-security situation in the 1990s, from the Soviet collapse to the Gulf War (Susanto, 2021). VUCA world is suggested to have been distinguished by its interconnectivity (Hanti et al., 2021, p. 6). Volatility means is that the world is changing fast, turbulent, unstable, and unpredictable. No one can predict that 2020 will be the worst year for almost all business sectors in the world. According to (Baran & Woznyj, 2021), agility at both personal and institutional level is required to manage effectively during VUCA. Uncertainty means is that the future is full of uncertainty. History and experiences are no longer relevant to predicting probabilities and what will happen. Complexity means is that the modern world is more complex than ever. Problems and consequences are more layered, intertwined, and influence each other. The external situation facing business leaders is increasingly complicated. Ambiguity means is that the business environment is increasingly confusing, unclear,

and difficult to understand. Every situation can give rise to many interpretations and perceptions (Susanto, 2021).

In the field of education, the age of VUCA offers universities with the new kinds of students with independency to self-develop, self-format and innovate (Brylina, I. V., Okonskaya, N. K., Ermakov, M. A., & Brylin, 2021). Therefore, according to Hanti et al., (2021) schools and universities need to prepare the innovation pedagogy which enables students to versatile innovation process among volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous challenges.

Besides the pedagogical approach, within this era of VUCA, character education remain important. Noble character education for students is expected to be able to improve individual resilience, which subsequently contribute in community's development. However, can character really solve our contemporary problems? According to Alvarez, in the era of rapid change and uncertainty, the meta-competency linked to character will enable students to cope with complicated problems (Alvarez, 2018). It is also argued by Hadar, Ergas, Alpert, & Ariav, (2020) that social-emotional competency is the necessary condition for teachers and students to adapt with the age of VUCA. Noble character education in higher education is carried out to form and develop students with character according to the noble values of the nation's ideology. This noble character education must be carried out by all components, namely the academic community, parents, and the community (Susanti, 2013).

Three factors cause the current contemporary moral decline: family environment, environmental influences, and mass media/digital technology. Family environment remain the

most influential for it is the first environment for a child where his character will be determined. Furthermore, the influence of the environment and mass media will also shape child identity. It is at this stage of early childhood that determines mostly whether a person has good morals or not. Today, the influence of the environment and mass media or technological developments has caused a lot of moral decadence because of the unfiltered acceptance and the wrong use of technology.

The phenomenon of moral decadence can be recovered by instilling character education from an early age in the family environment. In this phase, the role of parents in the intellectual, social, and emotional development of children is very vital and will become the innate nature of the child. Cultivating character in the family environment is not enough in constructing morals because when they grow up the child will find a new environment that will also shape his personality. Planting character in the family environment will become the foundation of the next character, but not a few have experienced a decline because of the influence of the new environment.

So far, moral education has been dominated by a doctrinal, ideological approach, and only stopped at the cognitive aspect, it needs to be changed to a science (rational), faith, and charity (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) approach. Moral education in higher institutions must be able to motivate students to develop their science, and strengthen faith and can be used as a moral foundation in everyday life (Sutrisno, 2008). Therefore, it is time for moral education among students to carry out multi-dimensional innovations.

To anticipate these problems, education must be able to carry out the mission of forming a culture of noble character (character building) so that students and graduates can participate in future development without neglecting moral values or noble character (*al-akhlaq al-karimah*). Therefore, the existence of education with a noble character is very important in higher education, not only to equip students in terms of practicing religious values, but the most important thing is to lead them to become human beings with noble character (noble character).

As countries with Muslim majority citizen, Indonesia, and Malaysia are certainly very representative in the formation of the noble character of students in higher education. Therefore, this research focuses on universities in Indonesia and Malaysia. This research will describe how the model of character education for Indonesian and Malaysian Students in the face of the VUCA Era answers the problems that have occurred.

Several researches have been done to address character education in Indonesia and Malaysia. Mahanani, Akbar, Kamaruddin, & Hussin (2022) discuss it in elementary school level and found that Indonesian strategy is more comprehensive by embedding it into all subjects. The elaboration of character education in elementary level is also conducted by Komariah, Abdullah, Kurniady, & Sunaengsih (2021) and found that while Malaysian technical preparedness is relatively better, the socialization for character education in Indonesia is more locally-rooted. The cultural approach by Indonesian government to promote character education is also highlighted by Rosa (2019) in which she underlined the effort to introduce local folklores into formal education curriculum.

Puspitasari & Akbar, (2021) described Indonesian five main values in character education and 16 pure values that support multicultural education in Malaysia. Marzam, Elpina, Rusdinal, Ananda, & Gistituati, (2022) notice the distinct characteristics of character education in Malaysia by dividing it into two kinds of education programs: religious education program for Muslim and character education for non-Muslim.

From the literature studies above, the research for understanding character education in Indonesia and Malaysia at university level remain open and novel among numerous attempts efforts that compare the approach adopted by countries.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a descriptive-qualitative approach. It was chosen to be able to explore information about the noble character education model of students in Indonesia and Malaysia to face the VUCA era. The research location was at the Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Test the validity of the data or credibility (internal validity) by using the triangulation method.

The subject of this research were lecturers at Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) especially lecturers who master public compulsory courses (MKWU). Students become informants to strengthen the data. The determination of informants was carried out by using a purposive sampling technique. The following are the names of the interviewees written in pseudonyms:

**Table 1.** List of Interviewees

No	Interviewees	Institution
1	Aisyah	Lectures at Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII)
2	Ahmad	Lectures at Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII)
3	Alif	Lectures at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
4	Alifah	Lectures at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)

The data analysis method used in this study is an interactive model. The interactive method is based on three main things which are (Idrus, 2009), 1) Data Reduction, 2) Presentation of Data, and 3) Making conclusions or verification.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Internalization of Character in Indonesian and Malaysian Universities**

Moral decadence is one of the negative impacts that arise and must be faced by the Indonesian and Malaysian people during VUCA era. This condition is inseparable with the flow of information that runs very fast and is difficult to contain. Therefore, the right strategy for responding to these conditions is the role of education. Education plays a very important role in developing and preparing human resources who are not only superior scientifically but also in terms of morals so that the younger generation is expected to be independent and wise in filtering information for themselves. So inclusive moral education is needed in every school (Umam, Trimansyah, Kartika, & Iriantara, 2021).

Character education extends beyond merely imparting knowledge of right and wrong. It also cultivates virtuous habits, leading students to develop cognitive awareness of ethical distinctions, emotional appreciation for positive values, and habitual adherence to morally upright actions. In essence, effective character education encompasses not only moral knowledge but also a profound sense of moral sentiment and ethical behavior. (Kamaruddin, 2012).

During the VUCA era, the cultivation of character education in UII is inclined towards more humanist approach. "Thus far, we have predominantly employed personal approach, considering students as close companions, " said Ahmad, lecturer in the department of Islamic Education. Other lecturer, Aisyah, said that noble character education is closely related to the interaction of fellow human beings, how a person's attitude in socializing with each other, she said this as follows:

*The approach from lecturers to students is different depending on the characteristics of each student, lecturers are more socially supportive of students, for example when we don't want to be treated badly by others, then we must also be kind to others Speaking of noble character, it is a form or model of moral interaction that is applied in the social sphere, that morality is applied socially, we are not called having noble character if we don't socialize, this exists.*

Character education is related to interactions between humans, this can also be a benchmark whether someone has noble character with others or not. The internalization of the noble character model has long been applied by Islamic of Education study program lecturers, as is the practice of Aisyah. She often teaches this model of noble character by setting a

good example so that his students can imitate it. Aisyah said that:

*When I teach, I am always open to criticism and try to raise awareness in students. For example, if there are students who admit their mistakes, they should be given appreciation for their courage and awareness. I'm also human, so if I am wrong, I need to be reminded. Not by blaming or punishing.*

According to UII lecturers, in the process of internalizing noble moral values, the most important thing is an interpersonal approach, a heart-to-heart approach, sharpening an empathetic approach with anyone. It can be said that someone who socializes well means having noble character and vice versa, therefore the process of internalizing the moral values given by Aisyah is in the form of a social approach, for example when teaching must respect the rights of students, open to criticism. The process of cultivating noble moral values in the classroom is more pronounced but not much different from virtual, only in a different way.

Malaysian also has a decline in morality which is quite similar to what happened in Indonesia, that is why it is important to internalize moral education in Malaysia. Universitas Kebangsaan Malaysia also has courses that support the moral cultivation of its students and has internalized noble character in children since they were young.

The inculcation of noble character among Muslim college students in Malaysia has been an enduring endeavor, as evidenced by the outcomes of interviews carried out by researchers with a lecturer from UKM. Alif, one of the lecturers at UKM said:

*The implementation of moral values is always ongoing. There is no end. The process of cultivating or nurturing morals, or good values, is*

*always continuing whether in the classroom, outside the classroom, whether in the era of the new norm like now or even before this new norm..matters that are related to morality are indeed always emphasized. Even in The National Education Philosophy (NEP), we see that National Education Philosophy (NEP) has indeed emphasized the elements related to the soul, to the values from the beginning.*

Amidst the VUCA era, the process of instilling moral character among Muslim college students in Malaysia encounters significant challenges. The online mode of teaching and learning impede students engagement. Therefore, the structure of character education for student in the VUCA era manifest through the implementation of well-organized programs containing relevant and beneficial content tailored to the prevailing circumstances.

Moreover, the process of internalization of noble moral values applied to students in learning in the classroom as well as outside the classroom so far and especially in the VUCA era is a continuous process. They are two kind of process, direct and indirect. The direct process is conducted through the implementation of Malaysian vision of education embodied in The National Education Philosophy (NEP), the construction of the subject syllabus, and teaching and learning sessions. While the indirect process is through the organization of seminars or webinars and intervention mechanisms.

The main agenda in education is the change and transformation of the individual from one level to another. These changes and transformations will not be implemented without involving human development which needs to be planned according to the NEP mold. Balanced and holistic human development will not exclude any aspect and will even

be combined to produce people who have religious beliefs, pure noble values, and skills (Ismail, 2015).

The first process is through The National Education Philosophy (NEP) which emphasizes the elements related to the soul and values. Moral elements are the focus of the education system in Malaysia. Then, the second process is continued at the university level through the construction of syllabus or courses, in which the courses offered must meet the objectives of the course to inculcate affective values in students. For example, the value of good relations among students, cooperation value, hard work value, the value of commitment, and the value of being able to solve issues that occur in society. These values can be applied to the tasks that need to be completed by the students throughout the lecture. The third process is the teaching and learning process which will be monitored by the faculty management.

In addition, there is also the indirect process of applying moral values such as through the organization of seminars and webinars that can benefit students. Finally, there is a mechanism that is used throughout this process which is a mechanism called intervention. Intervention is a monitoring process in which the faculty management will collect information related to problems that arise in terms of student moral values and the problems will be resolved. Thus, we can see the process of internalization of noble moral values in students takes place continuously and will not stop.

In the process of internalizing character education for students, the most important thing is the mental approach to students. The internalization carried out must also be balanced between internalization inside and outside the classroom. So

that the process of internalizing student noble character education is not only carried out by lecturers, but all existing components must play a role in the internalization of character education.

### **Model of Character Education**

Moral development is one of the non-negotiable orientations of Islamic education. Reforms should be carried out thoroughly and touch various aspects to respond to global challenges and prepare for the competition and opportunities of the global era with the accompanying consequences (Umam et al., 2021). Especially in the VUCA period, when character education is exceedingly unclear and changeable, so Islamic education must allocate special attention to it. The presence of VUCA should promote excitement for dealing with change. One of the passions in dealing with VUCA is by implementing VUCA prime, namely: Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility (Hendrarso, 2020). So that in facing the VUCA era, people must have a vision, understand and be able to adapt to change, and quickly respond to changes that occur.

The model of character education used by lecturers at the UII is various; lecturers have their own techniques and methods of developing character in their pupils on campus. There are various distinctions in the execution of learning, whether it is done personally or online. These are obstacles for lecturers in applying a model of character education that is appropriate for students during learning, particularly in online classes.

UII instructors use a more humanistic approach to instilling character education during the online learning session. The findings of interviews with the two UII teachers reflect this. To begin, professors highlight the technique of

connecting with students, either directly via online learning or indirectly via Whatsapp messaging, when teaching character education. For example, if a student lied about attending class, the lecturer did not instantly chastise him in class; instead, the professor asked the student who felt deceived to meet him in the room. Character education is taking place in the lecturer's room. During class, lecturers do not force students to admit their mistakes. However, as previously indicated, it is the student who admits his error by going to the lecturer's chamber. In addition, lecturers also do not reprimand students in front of other students, this is because lecturers prioritize humanist values.

Second, lecturers always start learning with a prayer together. This can be categorized in the habituation method. Islam encourages its people to start all activities by saying a prayer and ending it with a prayer. With the habit of learning beginning and ending with prayer, it is hoped that students will get used to it and become a character within themselves. Third, the lecturer gives motivational sentences to students during the learning process. This sentence was conveyed in between the delivery of material or discussion and of course the motivation related to the theme at that time. Actually, not only in class, but through WhatsApp messages the lecturer also conveyed this motivation. With these methods, the lecturer admits that he has inserted character education either in the learning process or not. Indirectly, the things that lecturers do are role models for students.

Alif (Lecturer of UKM, Center for Usuluddin & Philosophy Studies) said that the process of inculcating noble morals in students is not easy, it must be continuously

conveyed so that it can become a habit and become a moral that is attached to a person. Through the interviews with lecturers, the authors found that there are various methods of internalization of noble moral values that they apply to the students in learning in the classroom as well as outside the classroom in the VUCA Era. The internalization method is also divided into two parts, they are the direct method and the indirect method. The first direct method is through Program Learning Outcomes (HPP) where one of the HPP that needs to be achieved is to produce ethical and responsible students. Any selected subjects should be mapped according to this HPP. The second method is through specific subjects related to morality as the subjects offered in the study program at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, namely the subject of Morality in the Quran and Sunnah.

Next, the third method used is the collaborative learning method through assigned tasks that need to be completed in groups, not individually. This method can cultivate moral values such as the value of cooperation and teamwork. The fourth method is the method of assignment. Each assignment and assessment have its message. Through this fourth method, many moral values can be cultivated such as being able to submit on time, which is the value of punctuality, discipline, no procrastination, agility, showing the value of hard work and honesty. This fourth method is not only applicable during lectures but even outside of lectures because a lot of time outside the lectures is used to discuss with group mates to complete the assignments. The informant pointed out that knowledge is not only acquired in lectures when learning with lecturers but can even be acquired when together with

colleagues while completing assignments. The moral values that can be nurtured through this method are the values of teamwork, cooperation, and producing the best outcomes of the assignment.

While for the indirect method is through co-curricular activities such as student association activities. Although indirectly this method greatly affects the students. Second, the initiative taken by the lecturer himself in explaining matters related to noble morals either in lectures or outside the lecture, this method is indirectly able to instill good thoughts on noble morals. In addition, to balance the volatility or uncertainty in the VUCA era, we need to have a vision. In giving assignments to students, some students do not understand the assignments given, therefore, lecturers need to plan their learning and give advance notice of the things they will do. That is the vision.

From the interview above it is evident that lecturers prepare their material before learning is carried out, lecturers also have various methods used in teaching this is intended to foster student interest in learning but should be adjusted to the objectives of the courses to be delivered.

**Table 2.** Methods of Internalization of Noble Moral Values

No	Used by	Approach	Methods
1	UII's Lecturers	Humanistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communication technics</li> <li>• starting lesson by praying together</li> <li>• motivation speech during lesson and outside</li> <li>• be role model</li> </ul>
2	UKM's Lecturers	Direct method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first direct method is through Program Learning Outcomes (HPP) where one of the HPP that needs to be achieved is to produce ethical and responsible students. Any selected subjects should be mapped according to this HPP.</li> <li>• The second method is through specific subjects related to morality; Morality in the Quran and Sunnah.</li> <li>• The third method used is the collaborative learning method through assigned tasks that need to be completed in groups, not individually. This method can cultivate moral values such as the value of cooperation and teamwork.</li> <li>• The fourth method is the method of assignment. Each assignment and assessment has its message. Many moral values can be cultivated such as being able to submit on time, which is the value of punctuality, discipline, no procrastination, agility, showing the value of hard work and honesty. This fourth</li> </ul>

			method is applicable during lectures and even outside of lectures.
3	UKM's Lecturers	Indirect method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through co-curricular activities such as student association activities.</li> <li>• The initiative was taken by the lecturer himself in explaining matters related to noble morals either in lectures or outside the lectures.</li> </ul>

Methods character education have a different implementation between the direct learning model and online classes. The lecturer has to set a good example and be a role model (*uswatun hasannah*) for the students. The internalization of noble moral values can use direct and indirect methods. The internalization in selected subjects, specific subjects, collaborative learning, and assignment. But the internalization can be done through co-curricular activities. So the methods of Internalization of noble moral values can be balanced in the VUCA era.

## CONCLUSION

As nations with Muslim majority citizen, the cultivation of noble character towards students remains important objective of Indonesian and Malaysian education. In Indonesian and Malaysian higher education, this educational objective faces serious challenges from contemporary development. Massive technological innovation brings about the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous condition of society that to some extent corrupts youth attachment towards noble character.

Within the scope of UII and UKM education, each lecturer has own characteristics in instilling or internalizing moral values. Lecturers also prepare various methods to integrate values internalization during teaching and learning. However, it is obvious from the research that UKM approach are more comprehensively technical with focus on learning preparation and programs initiations. On the other hand, UII lecturers applied more humanist approach with concern on communication and counselling.

The extent to which these findings relate to different level of educational infrastructures, especially in technological domain, in both universities remains unanswered. Hence, it is important for the next research to embed the analysis on technological facilities and its impact on character education.

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