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Character Education into Ethical Use of Google Translate at Vocational Schools

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the role of character education in fostering students' digital responsibility and ethical behavior regarding the use of machine translation tools for academic purposes. The main focus of this research is the internalization of character education values such as honesty, responsibility, and academic integrity in students' digital practices, particularly in their use of google translate. The study conducted a qualitative method with a case study approach, enabling an in depth understanding of the phenomenon within real social and education contexts. Data were collected through in depth interviews and classroom observations. The result show that character education significantly influences how students utilize Google Translate. Students who receive consistent character education demonstrate higher ethical awareness in using google translate, including the ability to distinguish between constructive academic assistance and academic plagiarism. Conversely, insufficient character development leads to increased dependence on google translate without critical reflection. The implications of the study underscore the importance of integrating character education into digital based curricula to foster ethical literacy and academic responsibility in the technological era. Schools are therefore encouraged to develop learning strategies that integrate character education with digital competencies, enabling students to use google translate wisely, responsibly, and ethically.

INTRODUCTION

The urgency of this research stems from a fundamental shift in the pedagogical landscape, where the ease of access to digital information often outpaces students' moral readiness to process it independently. Rationally, a high level of reliance on google translate without a strong foundation of character risks degrading cognitive abilities and intellectual autonomy. This creates a critical challenge to academic integrity, where the thingking process is entirely diverted to machines a phenomenon identified as cognitive offloading. This study significantly strenghthens Thomas Lickona's character education theory by Thomas Lickona's character education theory by demonstrating its empirical application within the modern vocational education ecosystem that intersects with AI-based technology. By validating the moral knowing, feeling, and action

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framework in digital practicies, this research offers a substantial contribution to contemporary education science. It provides a strategic pedagogical model to balance digital literacy with fundamental moral values (Baround et al., 2024; Kasheem et al., 2025; Seminikhyna & Lutsenko, 2024; Zein, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings serve as a cornerstone for future academic discourse by redefining digital responsibilty not merely as rule compliance, but as cognitive resilience. In the long term, this contribution is essential to ensure that educational transformation in the era of society 5.0 does not merely produce technically proficient graduates, but individuals who possess the ethical integrity and intellectual independence necessary to navigate increasingly complex technological dynamics. This has led to the emergence of the habit of students who only rely on machines to complete assignments without really understanding the structure of the sentence, or it can be said to look for academic shortcuts. This condition is increasingly prevalent in vocational school environments in rural areas, where the limitations of the learning environment sometimes encourage students to rely more on digital tools. In theory, if this technology is not accompanied by a strong foundation of character, students will lose independence and honesty in learning (Dewi & Alam, 2020). Therefore, an approach is needed that focuses not only on the sophistication of the tools, but also on mental and moral formation in the use of English Translation Tools (Arwen & Puspita, 2020).

Recent studies show that the digital age demands a balanced integration of technology, media literacy, and digital ethics within the framework of character education (Zvereva, 2023). Character education in a digital context aims to form responsible citizens who are able to show positive behavior in online interactions. Previous research has also emphasized that teaching AI ethics (Rina et al., 2024). It is very important to equip students with reasoning in determining the appropriateness of using the technology. However, the current literature tends to still focus on the technical aspects of the use of digital tools or character education in general, without specifically associating linking character values with cognitive offloading mitigation (Prasetiyo et al., 2023). There are limitations in previous studies that have not explored how values such as perseverance and independence. Intrinsically it can reduce the behavior of looking for shortcuts in the use of translation tools (Li et al., 2023).

This study operates within a qualitative paradigm, utilizing a case study approach to investigate the intenalization of character values at Bhakti Mulia Vocational High School. Data collection was multifaceted, involving in depth interviews with fifteen purposively selected students, participatory observation within the classroom environment over a two month period, and a rigorous analysis of student work results. These methods allowed for a nuanced exploration of the moral feeling and moral action, components of character education, providing a lens through which to view the subtle shift from technology as a supportive scaffold to technology as a total cognitive replacement. The urgency of this inquiry is underscored by the high utilization rate of Google Translate, which reaches 82.51% among students for completing English assignments.

A comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical observation reveals a profound research gap that defines the current state of digital pedagogy. While prior studies have extensively documented the technical improvements in NMT accuracy and its positive impact on the lexicogrammatical quality of student writing, there remains a stark disconnect between these technical successes and the internal moral development of the student. Theoretically, character education is designed to provide a universal

compass for behavior. However, the reality in vocational environments shows that technology often creates a moral vacuum where the pressure for task completion and the allure of efficiency override the commitment to intellectual honesty. Existing research frequently focuses on either the technical efficacy of translation tools or general character education frameworks, failing to specifically link character values such as perseverance and independence with the mitigation of cognitive offloading. Furthermore, most academic shortcuts.

The novelty of this research lies in its offering of an ongoing pedagogical framework that does not merely prohibit or permit Google Translate but actively balances AI technology with the inculcation of specific character values to maintain academic integrity. Unlike previous studies that often treat digital literacy as a purely technical skill, this research positions digital responsibility as a manifestation of cognitive resilience. The uniqueness of this study is further enhanced by its specific location, Pare, Kediri, known as the English Village, where the high expectations for student autonomy collide with the reality of digital dependence. By integrating Thomas Lickona's framework of moral knowing, feeling, and action into the daily digital practices of a vocational school, this research offers a subtantial contribution to contemporary education science. The implications of this study are multi dimensional, affecting theory, practice, and society. Theoretically, it strenghthens Lickona's character education theory by demonstrating its empirical application within a modern vocational ecosystem intersecting with AI technology. Practically, the findings serve as a strategic model for educators to redefine digital responsibility as cognitive resilience, providing tools for process based assessment that can alleviate the burden of plagiarism policing. On a societal level, this research contributes to the vision of society 5.0, where digital transformation must remain human centered, ensuring that graduates possess the ethical integrity and intellectual independence necessary to navigate complex technological dynamics.

METHODS

This research is epistemologically grounnded in a qualitative paradigm that prioritizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena in their natural context without manipulating the variables under study (Asril et al., 2023; Engkizar et al., 2025; 2018; Iskandar et al., 2023; Syafril et al., 2021). A qualitative descriptive design was chosen because the research seeks to present an honest and comprehensive overview of how character values are internalized by Bhakti Mulia Vocational High School students when interacting with digital translation technology. In the tradition of qualitative descriptive research, the primary focus lies in answering the "who, what, and where" of an event, which allows the researcher to stay close to the raw data and present it in a rich narrative form. This is highly relevant to the urgency of this study, where the pedagogical shift due to easy access to digital information demands an understanding of students moral readiness to process such information independently. This study employs a case study approach to examine digital dependence and academic integrity at SMK Bhakti Mulia, Pare, Kediri, within a clearly bounded context. Sutuated in Pare, English Village, the research highlights a sociocultural paradox between high expectations for English learning autonomy and digital dependence rate of 82.51%, particularly in a rural learning environment that encourages reliance on translation engines.

Data in this study are classified into primary data obtained directly from field interactions and secondary data derived from documents and student work results. The primary data sources (informants) were determined through

a purposive sampling technique, where the researcher intentionally selected subjects deemed most representative and possessing in depth information regarding the phenomenon under study. In this context, the researcher selected 15 students from Bhakti Mulia Vocational High School as key informants. The selection criteria were based on the intensity of their Google Translate usage in English assignments and their involvement in classroom learning processes during a two month observation period. Utilizing 15 informants is considered sufficient in qualitative research to achieve data saturation, the point at which behavioral patterns and perceptions begin to repeat consistently. In addition to human informants, data sources also include actual student activities observed during the English learning process. The researcher served as a substitute teacher or intern for two months, which provided high accessibility to authentic behavioral data. This position allowed the researcher to observe firsthand how students shifted from using technology as a supportive scaffold to a total cognitive replacement. Additional data sources include artifacts of student work, such as written assignments and exam results, which were analyzed to identify traces of uncritical machine translation use or mechanical plagiarism. The integration of multiple data sources interviews, observations, and document analysis constitutes a form of source triangulation essential for ensuring the credibility of the research findings.

Research instruments and data collection mechanism, in qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researcher themselves, supported by auxiliary tools to collect data systematically. The researcher at Bhakti Mulia Vocational High School functioned as both an observer and a participant possessing theoretical sensitivity to capture the "cognitive offloading" phenomenon occuring in the classroom. The first instrument developed was an in depth interview guide. This guide was designed not only to gather technical facts but to explore student motivations, their understanding of academic honesty boundaries, and how the character values taught by the school influenced their digital behavior. These interviews served as a narrative means to explore the moral knowing and moral feeling aspects. The second instrument was a participatory observation sheet. Over two months, the researcher recorded students' real time interactions with translation technology. Observation focuses included the frequency of device use, student discussion patterns when encountering English difficulties, and their responses to their feedback. These observation aimed to validate whether technology was used as a learning aid or as a shortcut to reduce independent thingking efforts. Data collection was conducter using three complementary methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding. First, interviews were carried out in an informal setting to encourage students to openly describe their patterns of Google Translate use. Second, continous classroom observation was undertaken to capture authentic learning behavior, as students were accustomed to the researcher's presence as an intern teacher, thereby reducing observation bias. Third, student assignments were analyzed by comparing independently produced sentence with machine generated translations to assess originality and critical languange use. Collectively, these methods were designed to examine how the internalization of character values, particulary honesty and independence, can mitigate the negative effects of technological dependence.

This study applied the interactive data analysis model proposed by (Miles & Saldaña, 2015), which conceptualizes analysis as a cyclical process consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verificiation. Data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data

condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and coding interview transcripts and classroom observation notes from 15 students and a two month teaching period, focusing on character value internalization and Google Translate use, with codes such as academic honesty, cognitive dependence, and critical usage. The condensed data were then organized into thematic displays to illustrate how moral knowing, feeling, and action were reflected in students' digital practices, revealing patterns such as pseudo self efficacy and variations in ethical awareness. Finally, conclusion were drawn and verified through continous reference to raw data, peer discussion, and alignment with Thomas Lickona's character education framework, ensuring analytical rigor and confirming that character value internalization can moderate students' dependence on Google Translate in the digital learning context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the current era of digital transformation, foreign language proficiency has become extremely important. The study found that Google Translate is the most dominant digital tool used by students, with a utilization rate of 82.51% for completing English assignments. The high percentage indicates that the application has become a primary academic resource, necessitating a strong ethical framework to prevent misuse. Character education has been proven to have a significant influence on the way vocational high school Bhakti Mulia students use translation tools. Students who receive character coaching consistently show a higher ethical awareness in using technology. They are able to distinguish between the productive use of digital aids to support understanding and prohibited academic plagiarism behavior. On the contrary, the findings of the study revealed that the lack of character development had an impact on the increased dependence of students on translation tools to be accepted at face value without any critical reflection. Without a strong foundation of character, students tend to lose independence and honesty in their learning process. Furthermore, the internalization of character values such as honesty, responsibility, and academic integrity is a determining factor in students' digital practices which include curriculum, classroom learning methods, and school culture.

Table 1. list of questions asked during interviews with students

No	List of Research Question
1.	What character values are most frequently taught and emphasized at vocational schools (e.g., honesty, responsibility, and discipline)? (Rahman & Unsiah, 2025)
2.	Have you ever received formal instruction or discussion at school (through lessons or other activities) regarding ethics or appropriate behavior in using the internet and digital technology? (Yan et al., 2025)
3.	How do you understand and apply academic responsibility in daily learning activities?
4.	How often do you use online translation tools (e.g., Google Translate) for school assignments?
5.	Why do you use online translation tools for academic tasks?
6.	What are the advantages and disadvantages of using online translation tools in learning?
7	Do you review translations generated by online tools before submission? (Shi et al., 2026)
8.	Do you consider submitting unedited machine translations as your own work to be academically honest?

Qualitative interviews conducted with 15 students, including 8 females and 7 males, in the 11th grade at vocational high school Bhakti Mulia revealed a complex psychological landscape related to the use of Google Translate. Although this tool has become an integral part of their academic lives, many students expressed deep intellectual and moral discomfort. Students honestly admitted that although they often "copy and paste" translations to meet assignment deadlines, they often do not understand the linguistic structure of the answers they provide. Participants highlighted several critical drawbacks to their reliance on the tool: i). Cognitive Stagnation, students noted that the "instant" nature of the software discourages critical thingking, leading to a mechanical completion of tasks rather than active learning. ii). Linguistic Confusion, many expressed frustration at their inability to distinguish between basic grammatical components, such as subjects, objects, and verbs, after relying on machine outputs. iii). The Conflict of Authority, a recurring theme was the discrepancy between teacher explanations and AI generated results, which often left students feeling confused rather than enlightened. iv). The Closed Book failure, perhaps most significantly, students reported a sens of failure during independent examinations. Without the "digital crutch" of Google Translate, they found themselves unable to replicate the quality of work they had previously submitted, proving that their apparent proficiency was merely pseudo self efficacy.

Tabel 2. indicators and responses from interview results to see the effect of using Google Translate on student character

Indicator	Response	Number of Student Response
Honesty	Students demonstrate honesty through moral transparency by acknowledging their level of reliance on Google Translate and admitting when they do not comprehend machine generate structures. This value is reflected in their willingness to disclose the use of digital tools rather than presenting raw outputs as original intellectual work.	15/15
Responsibility	Responsibility is manifested as selective engagement, where students position technology as a supportive scaffold rather than a total replacement for thought. These students take ownership of their learning by verifying machine outputs and using the tool primarily to check vocabulary or technical terms.	12/15
Integrity	Integrity students demonstrate a lack of integrity when relying on pseudo-self-efficacy, where they admit to not understanding the linguistic patterns provided by Google Translate. This dependence results in a closed book failure, as they	12/15

	struggle to replicate the quality of their work during independent school examinations without a digital crutch. Consequently, this highlights the urgent need for students to engage in deeper independent study to ensure genuine competence when digital assistance is unavailable.	

Despite these challenges, students acknowledged the practicular allure of the technology. They perceived the machine generated answers as 90% accurate and more scientific or formal than their own independent efforts. The practicality of the tool provides a shortcut to high marks, yet this efficiency comes at a moral cost. Several informants expressed a lingering sense of dishonesty toward their teachers, feeling that their submitted work was a misrepresentation of their true capabilities. Without the internalization of honesty and independence, students view technology not as a partner in learning, but as a total cognitive replacement that ultimately erodes their academic resilience.

Analysis of the Use of Google Translate and its Impact on Student Competence

The results of the study show that Google Translate has become an integral part and learning practice of students at vocational high school Bhakti Mulia, especially in English learning and completion of academic assignments. High accessibility through mobile devices makes this application the first choice for students in translating vocabulary, sentences, and text. In the context of vocational education, this use can be understood as a response to practical academic demands and limited foreign language mastery. However, field findings show that the intensity of using Google Translate is not always accompanied by an improvement in the quality of conceptual language comprehension. Positively, Google Translate can help students overcome initial barriers in understanding vocabulary and basic structure in the use of English text (Tasya et al., 2025). The Google Translate app serves as a starting tool that allows students to access the meaning of the text more quickly, thus encouraging their engagement in written tasks. In some cases, students become more confident in drafting an initial draft of the piece of writing and understanding the technical terms relevant to their vocational field. This research indicates that Google Translate has pedagogical potential as an initial support for the learning process, especially for students with limited language skills backgrounds (Faridah et al., 2025).

However, researchers found that these benefits tend to be superficial and do not always lead to the strengthening of in-depth language competence. Many students use Google Translate mechanically by copying the translation results without conducting linguistic evaluation or reflection on the meaning of the meaning of the writing (Kasmaini et al., 2023). This pattern shows that the student learning process is more oriented towards the final result than understanding the structure of the language. As a result, the apparent improvement in ability is often not directly proportional to the student's ability. The limitations of Google Translate in translating contexts, idioms, and cultural meanings are still a significant issue in the findings of this study (Fransyaigu et al., 2021). The literal translations that the app generates often give rise to various meanings, especially in the parts of idioms and technical

terms that require situational understanding. Without the critical ability to judge translation accuracy, students tend to accept technological machine results as linguistic truth. This condition not only has the potential to cause misconceptions, but also inhibits the development of more contextual language sensitivity. Research shows that there is a tendency for students' cognitive dependence on Google Translate. This dependence can be seen from students' reduced efforts in analyzing sentence structure, guessing the meaning of the context, or increasing vocabulary that has been studied previously. From a cognitive perspective, this practice shows the occurrence of cognitive offloading, which is the transfer of thought processes from individuals to technology. If it continues continuously, this phenomenon has the potential to weaken students' reasoning power, critical thinking ability, and learning independence. From a psychological perspective, the heavy reliance on Google Translate triggers cognitive offloading, where students transfer their critical thinking and linguistic processing entirely to the machine. This phenomenon results in pseudo-self-efficacy, where students perceive themselves as competent despite being unable to perform independently during exams. Consequently, this mental dependency weakens their long term reasoning power and analytical skills, as the internal character filter honesty and perseverance is bypassed for the sake of task efficiency (Pham, 2025).

In this context, character education has a crucial role. This study found that the internalization of character values such as honesty, independence, and digital responsibility was able to moderate the way students utilize Google Translate. Students who have a strong sense of character tend to use the app selectively, for example just to check vocabulary or compare translation results, rather than as the main tool for completing assignments. Character education serves as an internal control that leads students to remain actively involved in the learning process. Furthermore, character education helps students understand that the use of technology is not just a matter of whether or not it is allowed, but related to academic integrity and responsibility for the learning process. This awareness encourages students to reject the use of Google Translate as an academic shortcut and to appreciate the process of thinking more independently (Vijayan & Corbita, 2024). Thus, digital responsibility is understood as a reflective ability to determine the limits of the use of technology ethically and proportionately (Khadair et al., 2024). Overall, this discussion confirms that the impact of Google Translate on student competence is highly dependent on the pedagogical framework that surrounds it (Iakovidis et al., 2023). Without the assistance of character values, technology tends to strengthen dependency and weaken cognitive competence. Conversely, when integrated with consistent character education (Ilham & Rahman, 2024), Google Translate can serve as a supporting tool that enriches the learning process without sacrificing the independence and academic integrity of Bhakti Mulia Vocational High School students.

Internalization of Values-Character Values in Encouraging Ethical Behavior in the Use of Digital Translation Tools

The urgency of character education in shaping students' digital responsibilities at Bhakti Mulia Vocational High School is fully supported by data on the use of technology in the field. The results of the study show that Google Translate has become the dominant instrument with a utilization rate of 82.51% among students (Ali, 2021). This high number validates that without a strong moral foundation, this instantaneous technology will precede students' ethical readiness, ultimately triggering academic shortcut-seeking behaviors (Klimova, 2025). Substantively, the risk of "cognitive dependence"

seems very reasonable when associated with the findings when taking the exam. Observations show a paradoxical phenomenon: although students are very proficient in using Google Translate for daily tasks, they have significant difficulty when working on English test questions independently. This proves that the use of technology mechanically without character filters results in cognitive offloading, where the thinking process is completely transferred to the machine, so that students' reasoning skills become dull when the tool is pulled (such as during an exam) (Cathrin & Wikandaru, 2023). The process of internalizing these values was observed during in depth interviews with students. In these sessions, researchers explored how students' moral feeling influence their decision to use translation tools responsibility.

The author systematically shows how the results of this study are related to the expectations of character education and previous research. In the context of Bhakti Mulia Vocational High School which is located in Pare (English Village), there are high expectations for student learning autonomy. The findings of this study confirm Thomas Lickona's theory that character is not just knowledge (Pham et al., 2022), but must include moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Researchers found that students who had not internalized the value of honesty tended to engage in unethical behavior, such as copying translations directly without being re-corrected. The unethical behaviors identified in the study included raw copying of machine results and the emergence of "pseudo-self-efficacy". Students feel that they have mastered the material only because they are able to produce text through an application, even though factually they do not understand the sentence structure. On the contrary, ethical behavior is shown by a small number of students who have internalized the value of responsibility in using Google Translate only as an initial reference to check vocabulary, then manually verify and paraphrase to ensure the originality of their work (Pham et al., 2022).

The extent to which character values shape students' independence can be seen from their interaction patterns with technology. Students with strong self-esteem values position Google Translate as a learning partner (support tool), not a substitute teacher (replacement). The internalization of these values allows students to retain intellectual agency, where they critically assess the accuracy of Google Translate (Arwen & Puspita, 2020), especially in the idioms or technical terms section of vocational technical terms that often fail to be translated correctly by the application. This research report provides strong support for the theory of digital literacy as a moderation variable in character education. This article reinforces the theory that strengthening character through habituation can be a solution in facing the challenges of the digital age. At SMK Bhakti Mulia, habituation strategies such as "Declaration of Transparency of translation tools" and process-based assessments have been proven to be narratively able to encourage students to be more honest in reporting the use of Google Translate in their assignments (Alkhofi, 2024).

The results of this research are also in line with the concept of society 5.0 where technology integration must remain human-centered (Human Centered). By placing character education as the main soul of educational implementation, Bhakti Mulia Vocational High School seeks to ensure that digital transformation in schools does not sacrifice the intellectual quality of graduates. These findings refute the view that the prohibition of using Google Translate is a solution, but affirm that ethical mentoring by teachers as mentors is an absolute prerequisite. In the domain of moral knowing, this study found that students need to be given an understanding of the limitations of the knowledge machine that Google Translate often ignores the complex cultural

and grammatical context that triggers students' critical attitudes. When students learn that translation tools can be wrong, they begin to feel a moral sense of responsibility to revise their work in order to maintain personal integrity (Cathrin & Wikandaru, 2023).

Data analysis shows that students' failure in the English exam is an indicator of low independence due to the unethical use of translation tools. Therefore, this study recommends a reflective assessment strategy, where students are asked to explain their thought process behind the translation results. This aims to change the mindset of students from result-oriented to process-oriented, which is the core of ethical behavior in the academic world. (Al-Awawdeh et al., 2025). Character education as a whole, including curriculum, teacher examples, and school culture, is able to transform Google Translate from a threat to integrity into a competency acceleration tool. This research confirms that the integrity of vocational school graduates in the global job market will largely depend on how strong the digital responsibility character they currently have (Umami et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that internalizing the use of Google Translate shows a correlation with educational character values such as honesty, responsibility, and integrity in students' cognitive development and independent thinking skills. This approach is one of the efforts to encourage students to explain the logic behind machine translations, effectively reducing pseudo-self-efficacy and preparing them for the strict demands of independent performance in the Society 5.0 era. Beyond this, the findings emphasize that the role of character education is central in shaping students' ethical awareness in digital practices. The integration of values such as honesty and responsibility into the use of machine translation tools ensures that students are not only technologically competent but also morally grounded. Students who consistently receive character education demonstrate the ability to distinguish between constructive academic assistance and academic misconduct, thereby reinforcing the importance of ethical literacy in the digital era.

The study also reveals that insufficient character development leads to overdependence on Google Translate without critical reflection, which risks undermining genuine learning and fostering plagiarism. Therefore, embedding character education into digital-based curricula is not optional but essential. Schools and educators are encouraged to design learning strategies that combine digital competencies with moral guidance, enabling students to use translation tools wisely, responsibly, and ethically. In a broader sense, this research contributes to the discourse on how educational institutions can adapt to technological transformations while safeguarding academic integrity. By harmonizing digital literacy with character education, students are better prepared to navigate the challenges of Society 5.0, where independent performance, ethical responsibility, and adaptability are indispensable. Future research may expand this framework by exploring its application across different disciplines and cultural contexts, thereby strengthening the universality of character-based digital pedagogy.

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