



Building morality: the role of character education, learning environment, and motivation

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Building morality through education has become an increasingly crucial area of research, particularly in light of the challenges posed by today's complex social environment. Recent global studies reveal that approximately 40% of countries report a significant decline in student morality, underscoring the urgent need for character education. Factors such as character education, the learning environment, and student motivation play vital roles in shaping moral values. This study aims to examine these factors' direct and indirect effects on the moral development of high school students. By understanding these intricate relationships, educators and policymakers can develop more effective educational programs that promote moral growth, helping teachers and schools implement strategies to strengthen students' moral foundations.

Study participants and methods. This research was conducted on senior high school students. A random sampling technique was employed to select 95 students from the school's population, ensuring homogeneity and equal opportunity for participation. Data was collected using a Likert scale questionnaire and validated for reliability and validity through pre-tests. Three items in the character education variable were found invalid and excluded from the final questionnaire.

Results. The findings indicate that Character Education and Learning Environment significantly influence Motivation, with path coefficients of 0.456 and 0.397, respectively. Moreover, Motivation positively affects Morality, with a coefficient of 0.287, suggesting that higher motivation levels contribute to stronger moral development. Character Education emerges as the most influential factor, directly impacting Morality with a substantial coefficient of 0.545. The Learning Environment also positively influences Morality, though to a lesser extent, with a coefficient of 0.192. Motivation is a mediating variable that enhances the effects of character education and the learning environment on morality, although the indirect effect is relatively modest. These results underscore the critical role of Character Education in promoting moral development, both directly and through its influence on Motivation.

Conclusion. Character education and a supportive learning environment significantly impact student motivation, which mediates the development of morality. Educational programs that enhance moral development should focus on strengthening character education and creating positive learning environments.

Keywords: character education, learning environment, motivation, morality, mediation

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of building morality through education has gained global attention in recent years as societies grapple with the consequences of moral decay and ethical dilemmas. As globalization increases and cultural values converge, the challenge of developing a moral generation becomes increasingly complex. Character education, which instills essential virtues such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy, has become an important component of education systems worldwide. However, character education's effectiveness is affected by various factors, including the learning environment and student motivation.

Education is not only about transferring academic knowledge but also about forming students' character and morals [39]. In the dynamics of social change and increasingly complex global challenges, we need to prepare young people who are not only intellectually intelligent but also morally and ethically strong [24]. Character education planning is an important foundation in shaping students' moral future [3], With effective strategies and a structured approach [7]. Character education can help students develop positive values, such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and integrity, which will become valuable provisions in life. Character education planning can be practically implemented in the school environment [36], and various methods can be used to achieve it.

Character education is one of the important aspects of education that should not be ignored [30]. Character education has a very vital role in shaping moral [6] and student ethics [42]. Character education is often neglected and does not get enough attention from related parties in its development so that it can help them become individuals with quality and integrity. This is due to various factors, such as a lack of understanding of its importance, a lack of resources, and a lack of effective strategies for designing students' moral futures.

One of the main challenges in character education is how to design effective strategies to implement character education in the educational environment [31]. A comprehensive and well-planned approach is needed for character education to impact students significantly. Character education in designing the moral future of students is very important, and it is becoming increasingly relevant, given the moral challenges faced by the younger generation. [38] Character education is a strong foundation to help students deal with various moral problems. This study examines these factors' direct and indirect effects on students' moral development.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Relationship between Character Education, Learning Environment, Motivation and Morality

Character education involves teaching students values and behaviors that are considered morally appropriate. A conducive learning environment supports the application of these values. Motivation acts as a driving force, encouraging students to internalize and practice moral behavior. The interaction of these factors creates the foundation for moral development. Character education is fundamental to students' moral and ethical development in an educational setting. Motivation is an important factor that significantly impacts the effectiveness of character education programs. Research has indicated that fostering motivation is critical to the success of character education initiatives [20;21]. In addition, motivation has been linked to increased student engagement and the ability to overcome academic challenges [4]. Incorporating character education principles, such as promoting positive values and using proactive strategies, has been recognized as beneficial for enhancing positive character development [11].

2. Mediating Effect of Motivation

Motivation bridges the gap between character education and moral outcomes. Motivation enhances the effectiveness of character education and positive learning environments by encouraging students to apply moral values in everyday life. Motivation plays an important role in mediating various relationships in different contexts. Research has shown that motivation can mediate [1; 29].

Character education is an important component in nurturing moral development in individuals. The impact of character education and learning environments on morality can be influenced by motivation. Research underscores the importance of character traits, moral identity, and the benefits of character development programs [8; 33]. Character education seeks to foster moral integrity, values, empathy, and social awareness, along with academic skills [28; 40]. This is in line with the objectives of national education and improves academic competence and ethical behavior of individuals [16]. Effective character education encompasses moral knowledge, moral emotions, and moral action, with motivation playing an important role [21;27]. Character education helps individuals form constructive habits, morality, and behavior by cultivating positive values, habits, and ethics.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research model

The research model (Figure 1) posits motivation as a mediating variable between character education, the learning environment, and morality. This quantitative study employs path analysis to understand the direct and indirect effects of the variables.

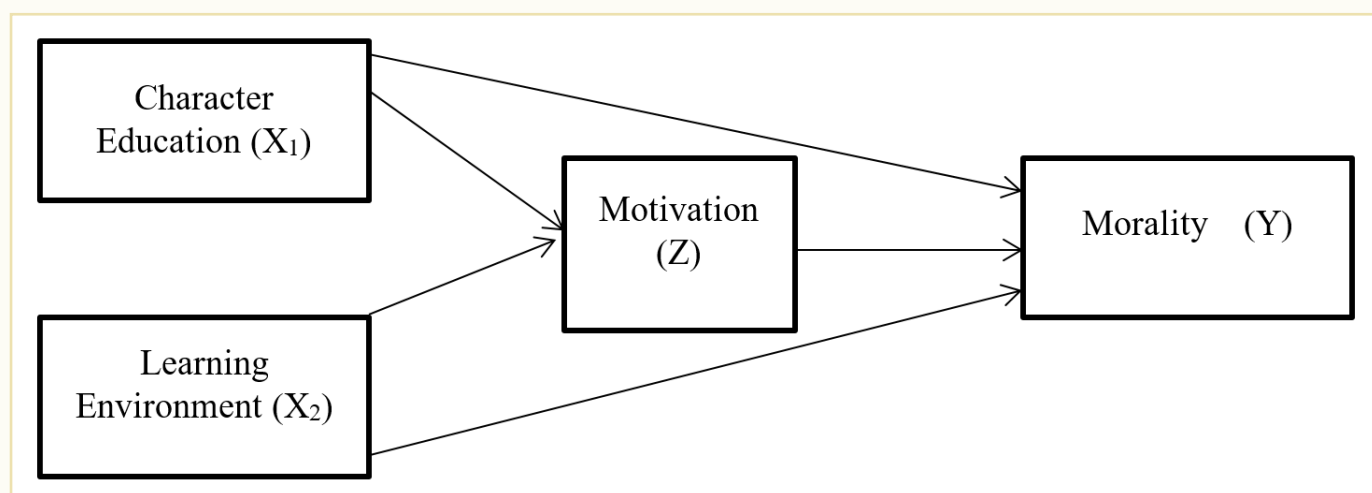


Figure 1 Research model

2. Participants and data collection

The study population was YPIT Al-Huda Wonogiri Senior High School, Indonesia students. The sampling technique uses random sampling because the population is homogeneous, and all respondents have the same opportunity to become respondents. The number of samples taken was 95 students. Data were collected through a questionnaire with a Likert scale. The instrument was previously tested for validity using validity and reliability tests; the validity test results are presented in Table 1, and the reliability test in Table 2. The validity test results are known in the character education variable. There are three invalid numbers, and they cannot be used for questionnaires.

Table 1

Validity Test Results

NO	r _{count}	r _{table}	Description
Character Education			
1	0,539	0,361	VALID
2	0,342	0,361	INVALID

3	0,687	0,361	VALID
4	0,618	0,361	VALID
5	0,696	0,361	VALID
6	0,548	0,361	VALID
7	0,715	0,361	VALID
8	0,621	0,361	VALID
9	0,298	0,361	VALID
10	0,763	0,361	VALID
11	0,656	0,361	VALID
12	0,693	0,361	VALID
13	0,740	0,361	VALID
14	0,838	0,361	VALID
15	0,700	0,361	VALID
16	0,768	0,361	VALID
17	0,208	0,361	INVALID
18	0,268	0,361	INVALID
Learning Environment			
1	0,384	0,361	VALID
2	0,708	0,361	VALID
3	0,515	0,361	VALID
4	0,739	0,361	VALID
5	0,797	0,361	VALID
6	0,702	0,361	VALID
7	0,806	0,361	VALID
8	0,761	0,361	VALID
9	0,587	0,361	VALID
10	0,685	0,361	VALID
11	0,738	0,361	VALID
12	0,573	0,361	VALID
13	0,571	0,361	VALID
14	0,549	0,361	VALID
Motivation			
1	0,621	0,361	VALID
2	0,781	0,361	VALID
3	0,562	0,361	VALID
4	0,642	0,361	VALID
5	0,763	0,361	VALID
6	0,862	0,361	VALID
Morality			
1	0,644	0,361	VALID
2	0,701	0,361	VALID
3	0,658	0,361	VALID
4	0,810	0,361	VALID
5	0,748	0,361	VALID
6	0,761	0,361	VALID
7	0,702	0,361	VALID

The reliability test determines whether the instrument is reliable. The results show that the instruments used by all variables are reliable, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Character Education	0,898	Reliable
Learning Environment	0,890	Reliable
Learning Motivation	0,798	Reliable
Morality	0,835	Reliable

3. Data analysis

The data collection techniques that researchers use in this study are questionnaires, observation, and documentation. The data analysis technique uses a normality test, and path analysis tests the existing hypothesis. In path analysis, independent and dependent effects can be direct and indirect effects; in other words, path analysis considers the existence of direct and indirect effects. The indirect effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable is through another variable called the intervening variable. The authors used a path diagram to describe the causal relationships between the variables to be studied in this study. A path diagram is a tool to describe graphically the structure of the causal relationship between independent variables, intervening (intermediary), and dependent variables. The design of this research hypothesis is as follows.

- a. Ho: There is no effect of character education on motivation
H1: There is an effect of character education on motivation
- b. Ho: There is no effect of the learning environment on motivation
H2: There is an influence of the learning environment on motivation
- c. Ho: There is no effect of motivation on morality
H3: There is an influence of motivation on morality
- d. Ho: There is no direct effect of character education on morality
H4: There is a direct effect of character education on morality
- e. Ho: There is no direct effect of the learning environment on morality
H5: There is a direct influence of the learning environment on morality
- f. Ho: There is no effect of character education on morality through motivation
H6: There is an influence of character education on morality through motivation
- g. Ho: There is no effect of the learning environment on morality through motivation
H7: There is an influence of the learning environment on morality through motivation

STUDY RESULTS

1. Verificative Analysis

The results of the Normality Test based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test are as follows:

Table 2

Normality Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		Unstandardized Residual
N		95
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	1.40459598
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.078
	Positive	.058
	Negative	-.078
Test Statistic		.078
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.188 ^c

In the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the following decision-making basis is proposed:

If Sig. > 0.05, then it means the data is normally distributed

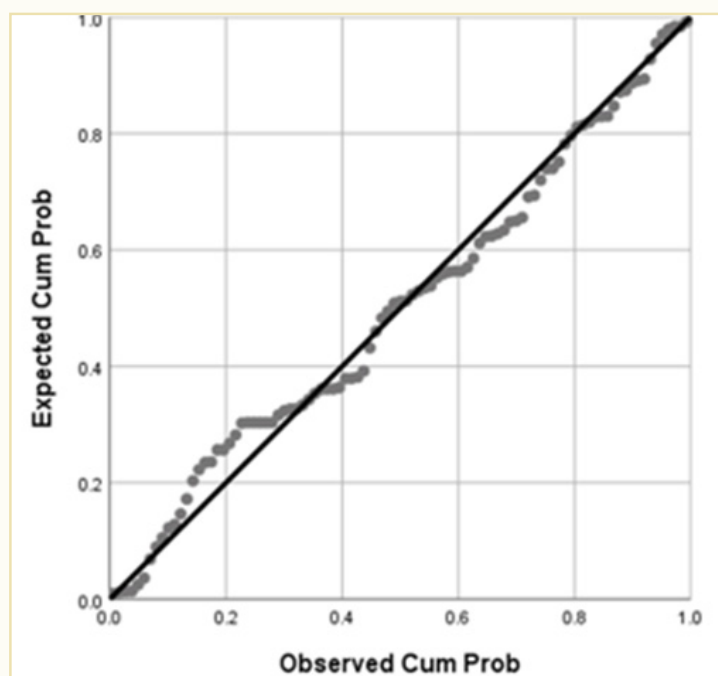
If Sig. < 0.05, then it means the data is not normally distributed

Decision:

Sig = 0.188 > 0.05

Based on the Sig. Value, the data is declared normally distributed.

Furthermore, a normality test was conducted using the Normal Probability Plot graph. The graph results are as follows:

**Figure 2** Normality Chart**2. Path Analysis**

The path analysis model in sub-structure I can be described and formulated with a structural equation as in the following figure:

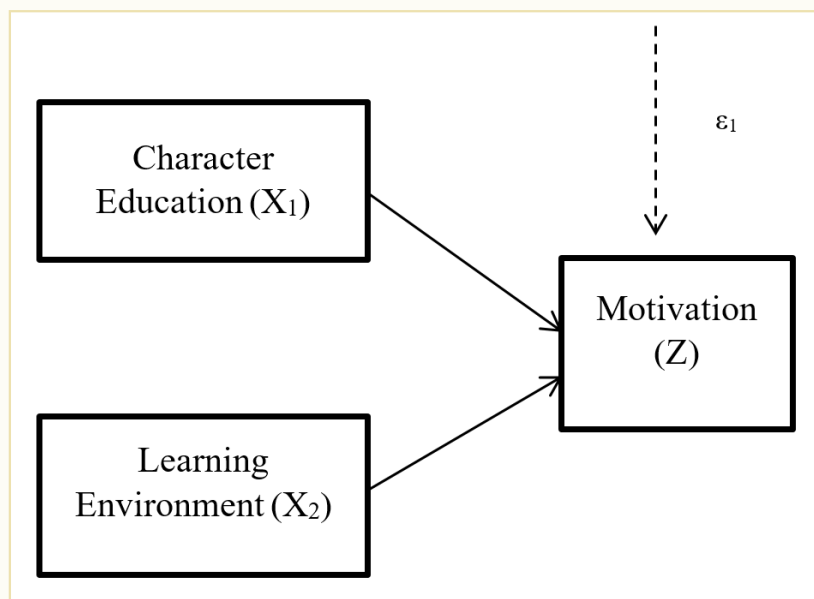


Figure 3 Sub-structure Relationship of the Effect of Variables Character Education and Learning Environment on Motivation

The data processing results for the substructure I obtained are the coefficients table and summary table of the influence of variable X (character education and learning environment) on the motivation variable, as follows. According to the R square value, the amount of influence is 0.620 or 62%. The contribution of character education variables and the learning environment to motivation is 62%, and the remaining 38% is contributed by other variables that are not examined.

Table 2

Path Analysis Results of Substructure I Regression Equation

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.787a	.620	.611	1.556

a. Predictors: (Constant), Learning Environment, Character Education

The magnitude of the influence of variables X1 and X2 on Z can be seen through the Model Summary table. It is known that the R square value is 0.620 or equal to 62%, and other variables outside this study influence the remaining 38%. Meanwhile, the magnitude of the path coefficient for other variables outside the study is equal to.

$$e_1 = \sqrt{1 - 0.620}$$

$$e_1 = 0.616$$

The learning environment variable in this test has a positive and significant effect on the motivation variable. The magnitude of the character education path coefficient on motivation is by the value in the coefficients table, namely, the standardized coefficients beta sub structure 1, which is 0.456. The path coefficient value of the learning environment variable on motivation is 0.397.

Table 2 can be conveyed as follows. To determine the significance of path analysis, compare the probability value (5% / 0.05) with the Sig probability value of the calculation results used as the basis for decision-making.

Table 2

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	-.646	2.246		-.288	.774
	Character Education	.226	.045	.456	5.066	.000
	Learning Environment	.188	.043	.397	4.403	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Motivation

It can be seen that the Significance column in the coefficients table substructure 1 obtained the value of the Character Education variable of 0.000, where the value is smaller than the probability value (0.05), so from the test results above, it can be concluded that H_0 is rejected. H_a is accepted, which means that the path analysis coefficient is significant. Character education in this test has a significant and direct effect on motivation. The learning environment variable has a sig value of 0.000, where the value is smaller than the probability value (0.05), so it can be concluded that H_0 is rejected. H_a is accepted, which means that the path analysis coefficient is significant.

Table 3

Path Coefficient Results Substructure 1

Influence between Variables	Path Coefficient (Beta)	Sig. Value	Testing Results	Coefficient of Determination	Coefficient Other variables
X1 to Z	0,456	0,000	Significant Contribution	0,620 = 62%	0,616
X2 to Z	0,397	0,000	Significant Contribution		

The figure depicts the structure model path diagram I from the above results.

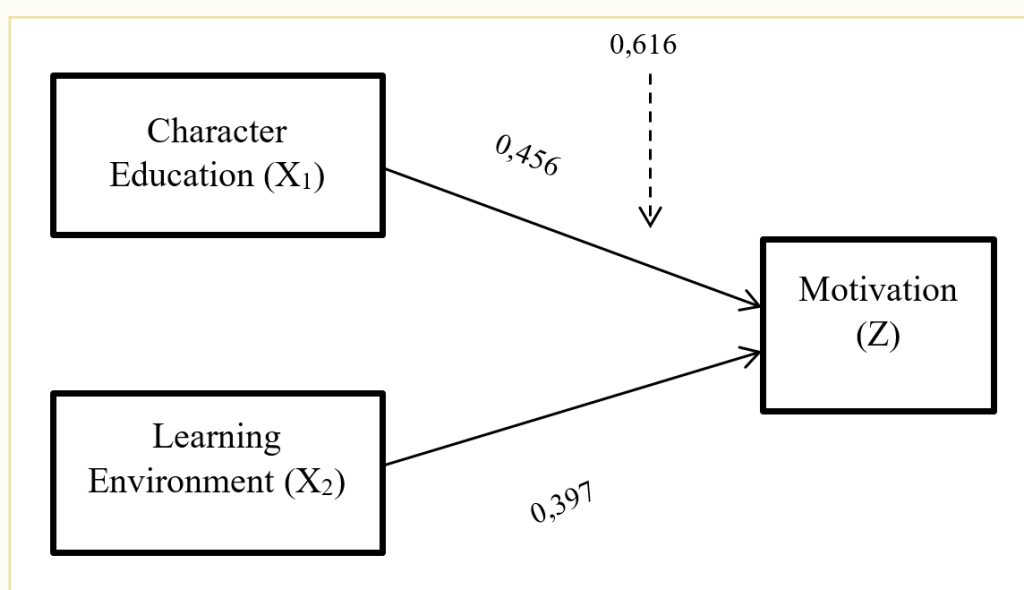


Figure 4 Empirical Relationship of Sub Structure I The Effect of Variables Character Education and Learning Environment on Motivation

Thus, the structural equation for sub-structure one can be obtained as follows.

$$Z = \rho_{zx1} + \rho_{zx2} + \varepsilon_1$$

$$Z = 0,456 + 0,397 + 0,616$$

Based on the structural equation of sub-structure 1, it can be interpreted that:

- Motivation is influenced by character education and the learning environment simultaneously, and significantly, 62% is influenced by other variables outside this study
- The better the character education implemented, the higher the motivation. Vice versa, the worse the character education received, the lower the motivation.
- The better the learning environment, the higher the motivation. And vice versa.

The path analysis model in substructure two can be described and formulated with structural equations, as shown in the following figure.

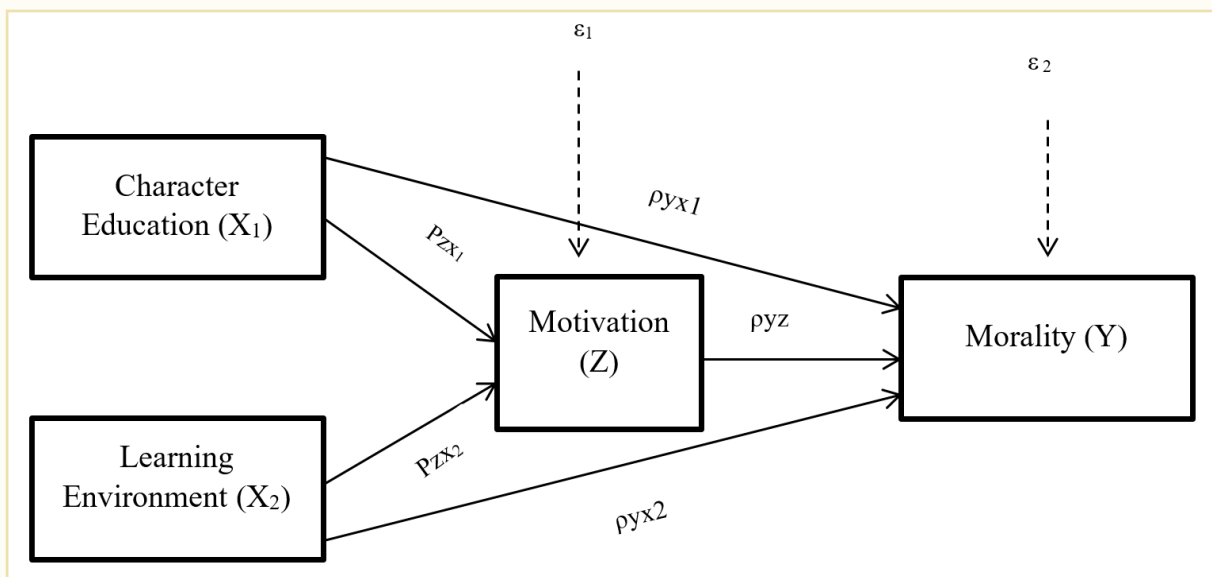


Figure 5 Relationship Sub Structure 2 Effect of Variables Character Education, Learning Environment and Motivation on Morality

The results of data processing for sub-structure 2 obtained from Table 4 influence of variable X (character education and learning environment) and variable Z (motivation) on variable Y (morality) as follows:

Table 4

Results of Path Analysis of Regression Equations Substructure 2

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.838a	.703	.693	1.428

- a. Predictors: (Constant), motivation, learning environment, character education

The magnitude of the influence of variable X on variable Z is in accordance with the R square value of 0.703, or 70.3%. The contribution of character education variables, learning environment, and motivation to morality is 70.3%, with the remaining 29.7% contribution from other variables that are not examined.

Table 5**Results of Regression**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.238	2.061		1.571	.120
	Character Education	.227	.046	.445	4.912	.000
	Learning Environment	.094	.043	.192	2.175	.032
	Motivation	.296	.096	.287	3.096	.003

It can be seen that the Sig (significance) column in the coefficients table substructure 2 obtained the value of the character education variable of 0.000, which is smaller than the probability value (0.05). Thus, from the test results above, it can be concluded that H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted, which means that the path analysis coefficient is significant.

Character education in this test has a significant and direct effect on morality. Furthermore, the learning environment variable has a sig value of 0.032, which is smaller than the probability value (0.05), so it can be concluded that H_0 is rejected. H_a is accepted, which means that the path analysis coefficient is significant. The learning environment variable in this test has a positive and significant effect on the morality variable. The motivation variable has a sig value of 0.003, where the value is smaller than the probability value (0.05), so it can be concluded that H_0 is rejected. H_a is accepted, which means that the path analysis coefficient is significant. The motivation variable in this test has a positive and significant effect on the morality variable.

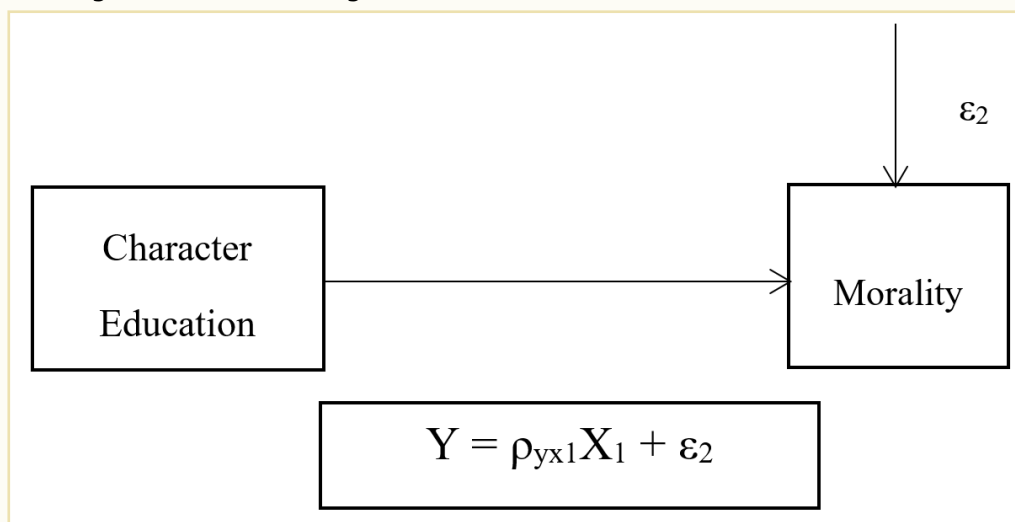
The magnitude of the character education variable path coefficient on morality is by the value in the coefficients table, namely the standardized coefficients beta sub structure 2, which is 0.445. The path coefficient value for the learning environment variable on morality is 0.192. Meanwhile, the magnitude of the path coefficient for other variables outside the study is equal to:

$$e_1 = \sqrt{1 - R^2}$$

$$e_2 = \sqrt{1 - 0,703^2}$$

$$e_2 = 0,505$$

Individual Testing of X_1 Variables Against Y .

**Figure 6** Path Diagram of Character Education to Morality

Here are the results of the X1 to Y path diagram test.

Table 5

Result X1 to Y Path Diagram

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.238	2.061		1.571	.120
	Character Education	.227	.046	.445	4.912	.000
	Learning Environment	.094	.043	.192	2.175	.032
	Motivation	.296	.096	.287	3.096	.003

Sig = 0.000 or > 0.05, then Ho is rejected, and Ha is accepted.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Character Education variable contributes significantly to the Morality variable.

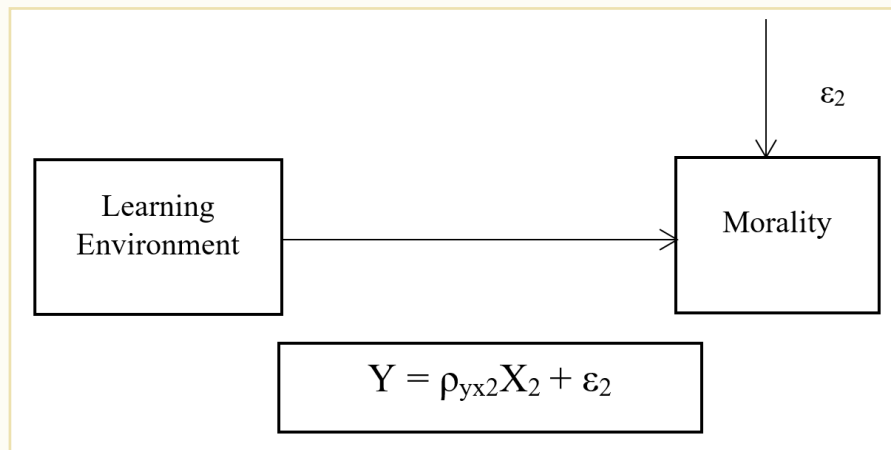


Figure 7 Learning Environment Path Diagram to Morality

Sig = 0.032 or > 0.05, then Ho is rejected, and Ha is accepted.

Thus it can be concluded that the learning environment variable contributes significantly to the morality variable.

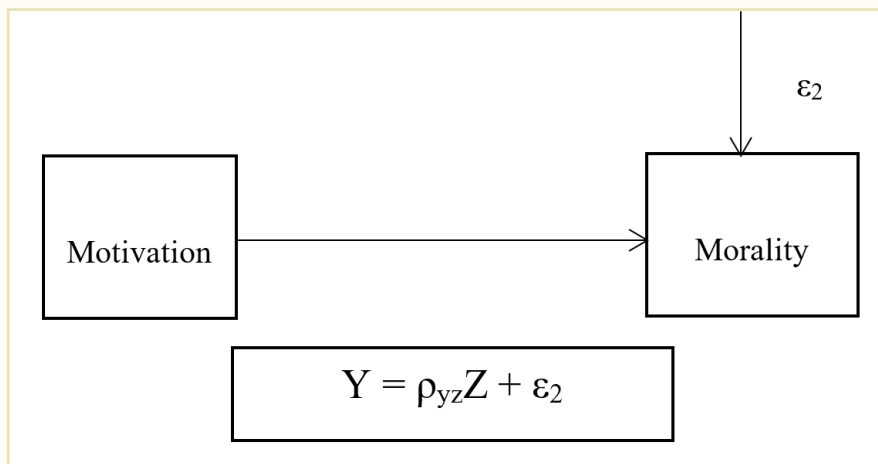


Figure 8 Third Sub Structure: Path Diagram of Motivation to Morality

Sig = 0.003 or > 0.05, then Ho is rejected, and Ha is accepted.

Thus, it can be concluded that the motivation variable is significant to the morality variable. Furthermore, a summary of the path coefficient values in sub-structure 2 can be seen in the following table.

Table 6

Path Coefficient Results Substructure 2

Influence between Variables	Path Coefficient (Beta)	Sig.	Testing Results	Coefficient of Determination	Coefficient Other variables
Character Education Towards Morality	0,445	0,000	Significant Contribution	0,703 = 70,3%	0,545
Learning Environment Towards Morality	0,192	0,032	Significant Contribution		
Motivation towards Morality	0,287	0,003	Significant Contribution		

From the above results, the structure model 2 path diagram is described as follows:

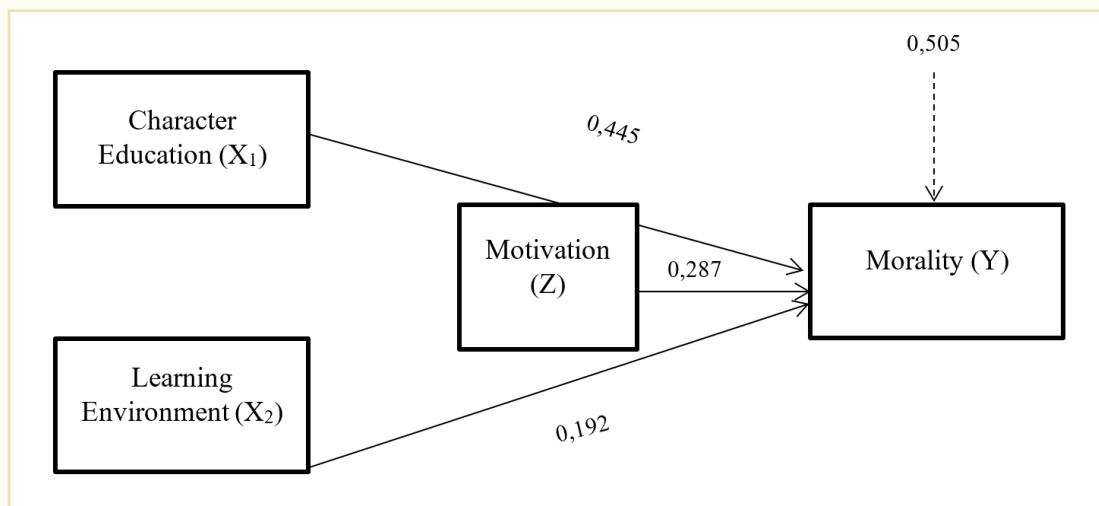


Figure 9 Empirical Relationship Sub Structure 2 Effect of Character Education, Learning Environment and Motivation on Morality

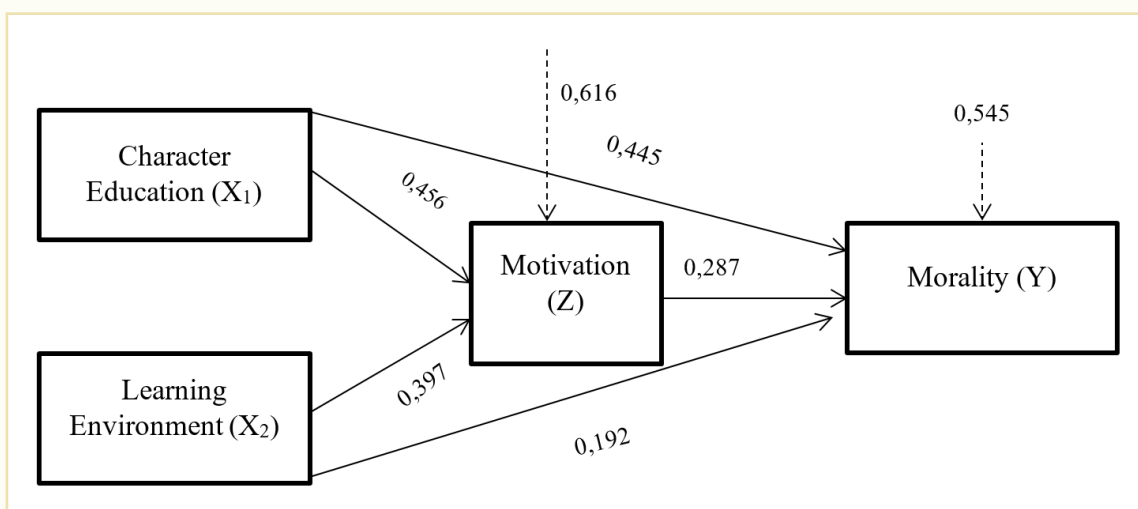


Figure 10 Discussion of the Overall Path Diagram of the Research Structure

Thus, the structural equation for sub-structure 2 can be obtained as follows:

$$Y = \rho_{YX1} + \rho_{YX2} + \rho_{ZY} + \varepsilon_2$$

$$Y = 0,445 + 0,192 + 0,287 + 0,545$$

Based on the summary of the results of the influence of all path coefficients analyzed, the results can be described as follows.

Based on the calculation results from Figure 10, it can be seen:

a. Character Education on Motivation.

The path coefficient of 0.456 indicates that Character Education has a direct positive effect on Motivation. This means that the better the character education received, the higher the motivation possessed by the individual.

b. Learning Environment on Motivation.

The path coefficient of 0.397 indicates that the Learning Environment also positively influences Motivation. A conducive learning environment will increase individuals' learning motivation.

c. Motivation to Morality.

The path coefficient of 0.287 indicates that Motivation has a direct positive effect on Morality. High motivation tends to increase individual morality.

d. Character Education on Morality through Motivation.

Character Education also affects Morality through Motivation, with a total indirect effect of $0.287 \times 0.456 = 0.131$.

e. Learning Environment on Morality through Motivation.

The Learning Environment also affects Morality through Motivation, with a total indirect effect of $0.287 \times 0.397 = 0.114$.

f. Direct effect of Character Education on Morality.

The direct path coefficient of 0.545 indicates that Character Education has a direct positive effect on Morality without going through Motivation.

g. The direct effect of Learning Environment on Morality.

The direct path coefficient of 0.192 indicates that the Learning Environment has a positive but weaker direct effect on Morality than the effect of Character Education.

h. Motivation as a mediator

From this model, Motivation is a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between Character Education and Learning Environment with Morality, although the effect is not too large.

DISCUSSION

This study found that character education and a positive learning environment significantly increased students' motivation. This finding is in line with previous research, which highlights the importance of these factors in driving students' engagement and commitment to moral behavior [33].

Motivation was found to mediate the relationship between character education, learning environment, and morality. This suggests that although character education and a supportive learning environment are very important [27], the impact on morality increases significantly when

students are motivated to apply what they learn [34]. Collaboration between various stakeholders such as parents, school members, and policy makers to instill moral values and promote character development [35]. Schools play an important role in emphasizing the importance of character education, as children spend a lot of time at school [2]. The main objective of character education is to improve the quality of education by fostering the development of character and noble traits in students in a comprehensive and balanced manner [15]. It is important to start teaching character values from an early age to ensure their integration into students' personalities [41]. At its core, character education is a systematic process that aims to cultivate individuals with ethical values, a strong personality, and a sense of national identity [26].

Character education, as defined by Lickona, involves deliberate efforts to develop virtues such as respect, responsibility, and honesty in students [22]. This educational approach is based on the belief that moral values are not innate, but can be developed through structured educational experiences.

The learning environment also plays an important role in moral development. An environment that supports moral development through educational interventions [32], curriculum-based moral education [43], and the influence of the social environment in shaping individual morals [25]. Integration of morality into students' personality [37]. The effectiveness of moral integrity education is highlighted when combined with experiential learning and education [23]. Establishing a morally supportive learning environment is seen as a professional obligation and moral responsibility [13]. Integration of cultural and moral components in education is recognized to improve moral reasoning and character development [19].

Motivation plays an important role in shaping students' moral development by influencing behavior and values. Teachers' motivational strategies can positively change student morale [17]. Implementing programs focusing on moral values through motivation and role models can improve students' understanding of ethics [10]. Presenting moral role models to students can inspire them to engage in moral behavior by imitating positive examples [14]. Collaboration between teachers and parents can contribute to the formation of students' virtuous morality, highlighting the importance of home-visiting activities in improving students' motivation and morale [12]. Motivation is linked to moral development, influencing students' ethical decision-making and behavior [18].

Berkowitz and Bier meta-analyzed character education programs and found that they significantly improved students' moral reasoning, social-emotional skills, and prosocial behavior [5]. Their research highlights the importance of integrating character education into the curriculum to promote moral development.

The mediating role of motivation between educational inputs and moral outcomes has been explored in various studies. A study by Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan showed that motivation mediates the relationship between educational practices and learning outcomes, including moral behavior [9]. Their findings support the results of the current study, which show that motivation significantly increases the effectiveness of character education and a positive learning environment in promoting morality.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that character education and learning environment significantly affect individual motivation and morality. Character education has a strong direct impact on motivation and improving morality. In addition, a conducive learning environment also contributes positively to motivation, although its effect is weaker than that of character education. Motivation acts as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between character education and the learning environment with morality, although this mediating effect is relatively small. These findings imply the importance of implementing strong character education and creating a supportive learning environment to improve student morality. Educational institutions should emphasize the importance of character education as an integral part of the curriculum and ensure that the learning environment is designed to encourage student motivation.

Educators and policymakers should continue to strengthen character education programs and improve the quality of the learning environment. Although motivation was found to be an important factor, interventions aimed at increasing motivation should be seen as a complement, not a substitute, for character education and improving the learning environment. Furthermore, this study suggests additional studies with more diverse samples to validate these findings and explore other factors that might influence students' morality. Thus, character education and a conducive learning environment can continue to be developed to achieve better educational goals.

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