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# The Contestation of Values in Character Education: Political Interest and School Burden

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**Submission date:** 01-Sep-2020 10:49AM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 1377392317

**File name:** 32538-53264-1-SM.pdf (936.44K)

**Word count:** 3349

**Character count:** 19374

# oposición

Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,  
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 36, 2020, Especial N°

# 27

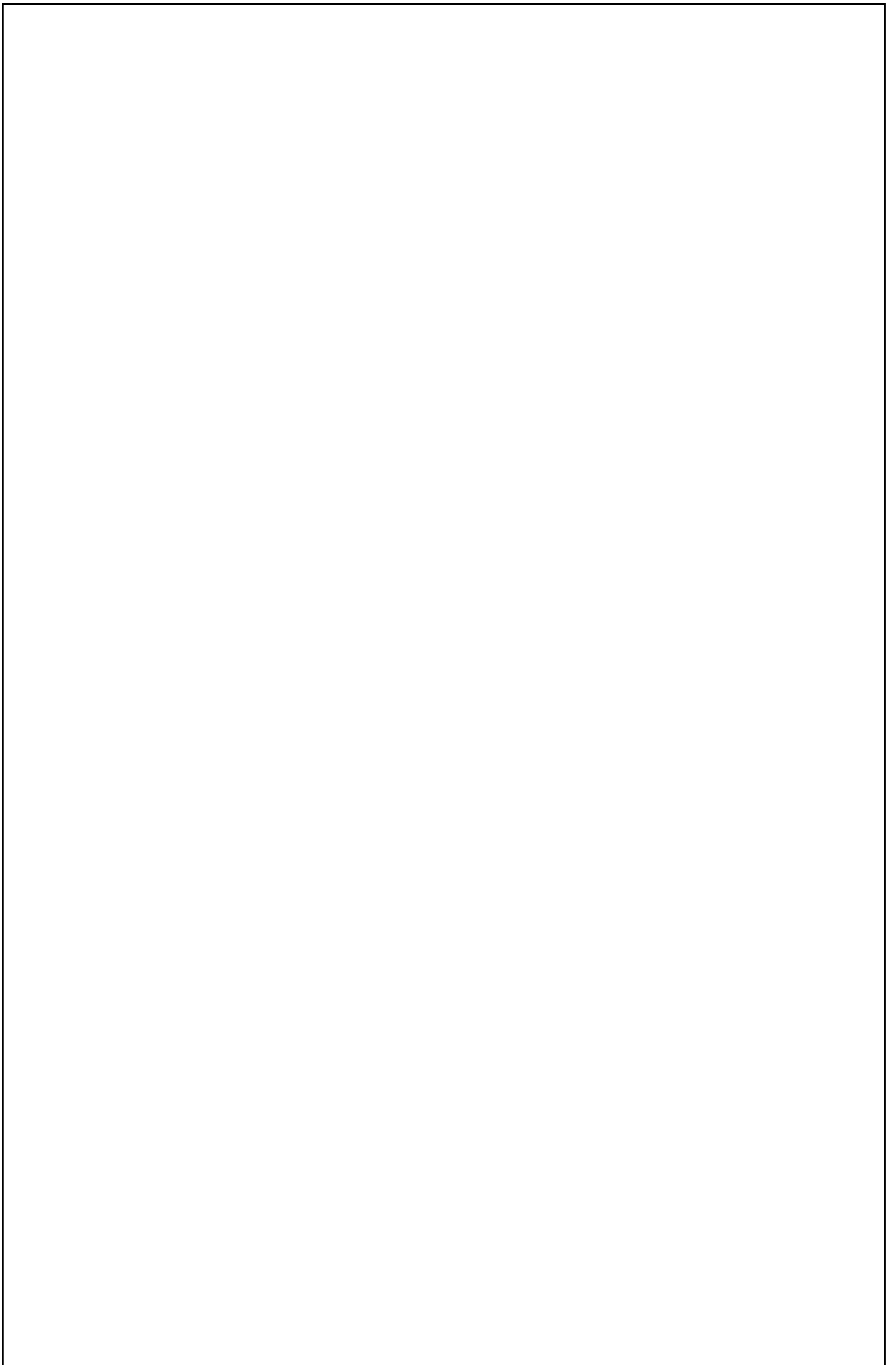
Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

ISSN 1012-1587/ ISSNc: 2477-9385

Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia  
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias  
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas  
Maracaibo - Venezuela



# **The Contestation of Values in Character Education: Political Interest and School Burden**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the issue of character education in Indonesia, which has not met expectations. In detail, this paper analyzes how schools' status as subordinate to the state burdens them with specific ideologies that influence how they undertake their educational mission. The contestation of values within schools' curricula deleteriously affects students' character development. Data were obtained through field observations at three schools, as well as interviews with principals, teachers, and students to obtain information regarding the implementation and perception of character education. This study finds that schools have become arenas for the contestation

Recibido: 20-12-2019 • Aceptado: 20-02-2020

of values, and this contestation of values results in conflict as students develop their character. It recommends that character education accommodate students' perspectives by recognizing their socio-cultural diversity; it should also avoid the undue influence of outside interests. Even though schools are administratively extensions of the state, they should not become propaganda tools that simply promote state interests.

**Keywords:** Value Contestation, Character Education, Political Interest.

## La impugnación de los valores en la educación del carácter: interés político y carga escolar

### Resumen

Este documento discute el tema de la educación del carácter en Indonesia, que no ha cumplido con las expectativas. En detalle, este artículo analiza cómo el estatus de las escuelas como subordinadas al estado las carga con ideologías específicas que influyen en cómo llevan a cabo su misión educativa. La disputa de valores dentro de los planes de estudio de las escuelas afecta negativamente el desarrollo del carácter de los estudiantes. Los datos se obtuvieron a través de observaciones de campo en tres escuelas, así como entrevistas con directores, maestros y estudiantes para obtener información sobre la implementación y la percepción de la educación del carácter. Este estudio encuentra que las escuelas se han convertido en escenarios para la disputa de valores, y esta disputa de valores genera conflictos a medida que los estudiantes desarrollan su carácter. Recomienda que la educación del carácter acomode las perspectivas de los estudiantes al reconocer su diversidad sociocultural; También debe evitar la influencia indebida de intereses externos. Aunque las escuelas son extensiones administrativas del estado, no deberían convertirse en herramientas de propaganda que simplemente promuevan los intereses estatales.

**Palabras clave:** Contestación de valores, Educación del carácter, Interés político.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Character education, a main component of the Indonesian government's efforts to instigate a mental revolution and create an ideal Indonesian citizenry, has been influenced by the contestation of different ideologies and interests. Diverse actors have sought to ensure that their particular ideologies—religious, political, and cultural—help shape the minds and souls of students. In Sulawesi, such state intervention has been opposed through the passage of sharia bylaws (Robinson, 2011: 219). For example, in Sather Village, along the northern coast of Greater Kai Island, has seen the political and chaacultural forces collide as a shared sense of community has emerged (Adhuri, 2013: 163). Meanwhile, in Guangzhou, China, urban public spaces have been produced through the contestations of various actors that have brought local governments into conflict with beggars (Flock, 2014: 37). Marlow, thus, argues that contestation is a complex process through which relationships are renegotiated or even damaged (Marlow et al., 2010: 958). Such contestations can prove detrimental to the harmony and synchrony that are necessary for character education. As shown by Holvoet and de Hert (2018), integration is inexorably linked with collaboration, while contestation is closely linked to pluralism.



To date, the literature on character education has generally fallen into three categories. First are the studies that analyze the factors that promote successful character-education endeavors, including the necessary infrastructure, curricula, and religious actors (Anwar, 2017; Emosda, 2011; Hakim, 2015; Hadi, 2011). Second are the studies that examine the link between character education and state, religious, and cultural values (Khotidjah and Izzah, 2015; Ainiyah, 2013; Zuriah, 2014; Sabunga et al., 2016; Mahardika, 2017: 18). Third are those studies that evaluate schools' performance and students' competencies as related to character education (Ilma, 2015; Kurniawan, 2015; Sumarno, 2011; Abdullah et al., 2019). Rare are studies that consider how values are contested within the context of character education. In plural Indonesia, for example, character education has necessarily had to encompass diverse cultures, different religions, and state political values. An analysis of the complex interactions of these values is therefore necessary.

This paper is intended to fill the gap in the literature and show how value contestation significantly influences character education. It thus asks three questions. First, how are values contested in fiqh of character education? Second, how do actors—with their individual ideologies—influence value contestation in character education? Third, how does value contestation influence the character conveyed to students? The answers to these three questions will explain how students develop the competencies they need in a plural Indonesia that has significant potential for conflict.

It is rooted in three assumptions. First, character education does not occur within a uniform value system, as it has diverse cultural, religious fiqh, and political sources. Different actors structure the character education process using their own values and promoting their own interests. Second, the competencies developed through character education are not static or rooted in a singular source, but dynamic, incorporating a diverse range of elements within their curricula. Third, actors use their own agency to structure character education as a means of advocating their ideologies. Diverse actors, with their different interests, are distant from students, who have their own cultural, political and religious backgrounds. In other words, education has become a space for ideological contestation.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Research was conducted at three schools in Yogyakarta with different orientations, namely religious, state, and cultural. Religious schools are those schools that emphasize religious education in their curricula and materials. Such schools are not only under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religion, but also the Ministry of Education through its national education system. Such schools thus combine religious and state systems in their educational processes. State schools, meanwhile, are those schools that are affiliated with the State, and thus direct extensions of the state. Such schools are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. Finally, cultural schools



are those that have internalized specific cultural values—in this case, Javanese cultural values. The selection of these different schools was intended to facilitate comparison and ensure comprehensive results.

Data were collected through interviews with principals, teachers, and students. Interviews were conducted between July and October 2018, with interviews being conducted in accordance with informants' availability. Two school principals were interviewed. Afterwards, counselors and citizenship teachers were interviewed, as these teachers are the most involved in conveying character education materials to students. Further interviews were used to ascertain the perspectives of students, as the recipients of character education. Principals and teachers were interviewed at school, while students were invited to talk about their perceptions at the canteen; this ensured that they felt comfortable answering questions. Student informants were chosen based on their perceived willingness to communicate.

Data were then categorized, with the most appropriate being selected for analysis. Interview transcripts were analyzed textually, enabling key words to be identified. These key words were determined based on informants' emphasized values, which were contrasted with two or more other values. Value contestation became evident through this analysis. Analysis was also used for interpretational purposes, enabling the researchers to understand the dogmas of individual actors, each of whom had different views of values and their implementation in schools' character education processes. Afterwards, patterns and trends were identified in the findings, enabling data to be more structured and easily read.

### 3. RESULTS

In character education, different value systems are contested. Each system seeks to influence students' character and advance their interests. State, religious, economic, social, and cultural values are contested within different contexts. The contestation of values in character education can be seen from interviews (Table 1).

Table 1: Value Contestation in Character Education

<b>Value Contestation</b>	<b>Interview Data</b>
State and religion	- On certain religious holidays, all students are involved, not only those who practice that religion
	- Every Tuesday and Thursday, in the first fifteen minutes before lessons, we have our literacy activity. ... Furthermore, on Wednesday and Friday we do joint Quranic recitation, which the school identifies as part of its literacy program.
	- (The extracurricular group) hizbul wathon, in State schools they call them Scouts, but at Muhammadiyah we have hizbul wathon.
State and culture	- On every national holiday, we have a ceremony. But for Kartini Day, the school has a

	<p>special program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, there is Javanese as part of the local curriculum, but the students from outside Java are given help, both in their lessons and in their marks.</li> <li>- The children, once they are at school, they are Indonesian children. So, for example, if they are from East Java, they won't be branded East Javan.</li> </ul>
Religion and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prayers are done at the dormitory, being led by a musrifah (an alumnus who has volunteered) or the person on duty at the dormitory.</li> </ul>
State and economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When it comes to giving them permission, we are very strict. We are very concerned if students are out in the streets promoting specific events, as they often have to deal with government agencies.</li> <li>- Every morning... the teachers and disciplinary team wait for the students to come in. If the children aren't wearing socks, or their veils are wrong, we ask them to enter the disciplinary room and fix their uniform. We have new socks available; they have to buy them. If they don't, they aren't allowed in class. The veils are the same.</li> </ul>

State, religion and culture	- Students often take the initiative to visit orphanages, geriatric care facilities, and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) to donate things. Money for these programs is provided by the Grade 12 students who will write their national exams. So these social programs are also used to ask for others' prayers and support.
	- Students get "points" for every violation, like cheating, being late, not participating in prayers, not wearing the uniform, not speaking English and Arabic, etc.

Actors and ideologies—be they state, religious, or cultural— influence the substance and process of character education. The roles of these actors are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Actors' Ideologies and Character Education

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Character Education</b>	<b>Ideology</b>
Citizenship Teacher	- In my opinion, nationalism is love for one's homeland. I teach this to my students by asking them to participate appropriately in school ceremonies.	- political
	- Before class, teachers ask their students to pray before class.	- Religious

	Students take turns leading these prayers, but they do these prayers silently, so that these prayers can be accepted by all religions.	
School Counselor	- There are compulsory extracurricular activities, as well as elective extracurricular activities. The compulsory ones are hizbul wathon and tapak suci (k.o. martial arts).	- Religious
	- On Friday, they are free (no school).	
Teacher	- We tell our colleagues that students may not act this way (i.e. be loud) because they are rude, but because it's a habit. They are used to yelling, to calling out to friends, and whatnot.	- Cultural
	- The new students, we randomize their rooms, making sure that students from the same area don't share a room.	
Principal	- For example, if after ten minutes we find out that a student has been cheating, we'll write this in	Political



	<p>their report, take the test sheet, take the answer sheet, and ask the student to leave the room. The student is not allowed to take the test anymore.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are sanctions, points taken away (if a student cheats). Ten points.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ... so, if they meet, they (students) will simply say 'salam'. For example, when they meet teachers, students will simply say 'Salam, Pak/ Ibu' (Greetings, Sir/Ma'am).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students are also asked to travel to historical sites such as museums to increase their sense of nationalism.</li> </ul>	
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers here promote mutual interactions, asking all students to greet each other and their teachers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To ensure new students embrace the values of Taman Siswa, during orientation, our staff provide materials about our organization,</li> </ul>	

	including our philosophy and songs.	
	- To motivate students, we have hung Javanese-language slogans around the school.	
	- Before the start of the new school year, we socialize Muhammadiyah's values. We give students a comprehensive examination at the end of their studies (i.e. before they graduate).	- Religious
Students	- If a classmate is sick, my friends and I will go visit.	- Cultural

The contestation of different values influences the character developed by students through the education process. At the three schools where observations and interviews were conducted, students were involved in different learning activities, which affected their internalization of values. At the religious school, it was apparent that a nationalist and religious character is created through such activities as praying and singing the national anthem "Indonesia Raya" before lessons. Other values, including tolerance, creativity, and discipline, are also incorporated into the learning process. The effects of the contestation of cultural, religious, and political values are summarized briefly in Table 3.

Table 3: Influence of Value Contestation on Character Education

Value Contestation	Character Formed
<p>Before the learning process begins, we always pray and sing the national anthem "Indonesia Raya". This is part of discipline.</p>	<p>Nationalist/religious and disciplined</p>
<p>Yes, we continue to study until 3 p.m. We do asr prayers, return to the dormitory for asr prayers, change our clothes, and then they (the students) return to the madrasah for their extracurricular activities. But for the Grade 10 students, there are still learning activities until 4 p.m.</p>	<p>Hard work, structure, discipline, and talent</p>
<p>For cheating, there are discipline points. For being late, there are discipline points. For not joining communal prayers at the dormitory, there are discipline points. For not wearing the right veil, there are discipline points. For not speaking English and Arabic, there are discipline points. There are all sorts. Many kinds.</p>	<p>Discipline, normativity, unfree, uncreative.</p>
<p>... to teach here, men are required to already be married. For women, if they aren't married yet, that's not a problem, as all of the students are girls.</p>	<p>Conservative</p>
<p>But for fundraising, when getting money for</p>	<p>Social concern,</p>

disaster victims, the school isn't independent yet. Instead it often becomes involved in Yogyakarta students' independent activities	collaboration
For Eid al-Adha, we sacrifice goats for the cleaning staff and for others, in different villages.	Religious, social concern, but monotonous
If a student is late, that student must run around the field four times. Teachers are only reprimanded.	Orientation towards position and office, injustice, opposition
Students befriend others from different regions, because demographically the school is diverse	Tolerance and friendliness
From the beginning, students are asked to make a statement about the classes they will join and have their parents sign it. Once, a Muslim student decided not to participate in the Islamic education program because the teacher was stingy with his marks.	Pragmatism

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that values are contested in various aspects of the learning process. This contestation is evident in all school activities, rules, systems, and policies, as well as in students' attitudes and behaviors. Character education does not occur

constructively, but through the contestation—and even contradiction—of values. Students are positioned as passive objects, being accepted to simply accept actors' values and advance their interests. Students' need for values that enable them to navigate society's dynamics is not met, and as such the character education process does not sufficiently shape their attitudes or behaviors.

This paper's use of agency has enabled it to understand the fundamental problem of why educational institutions have been unable to create the desired national character. Educational institutions have been used as instruments of power, while their processes have been dominated by contestative processes and interests. Character education is thus structurally biased to distance students from their cultural values, as well as contextual mindsets, values, and behaviors. The vision of Indonesia's education system is not reflected in classroom learning processes, and this has detrimentally affected students' internalization of values.

This paper has limited itself to the individual perspectives of students, teachers, and principals, applying a subjective and evaluative approach. As such, a comprehensive study that employs objective indicators is still necessary to ascertain the influence of schools' structural positioning on character education. Using objective indicators, a survey should be conducted to ascertain how curricula and the contestation of values within them influence students and their character.



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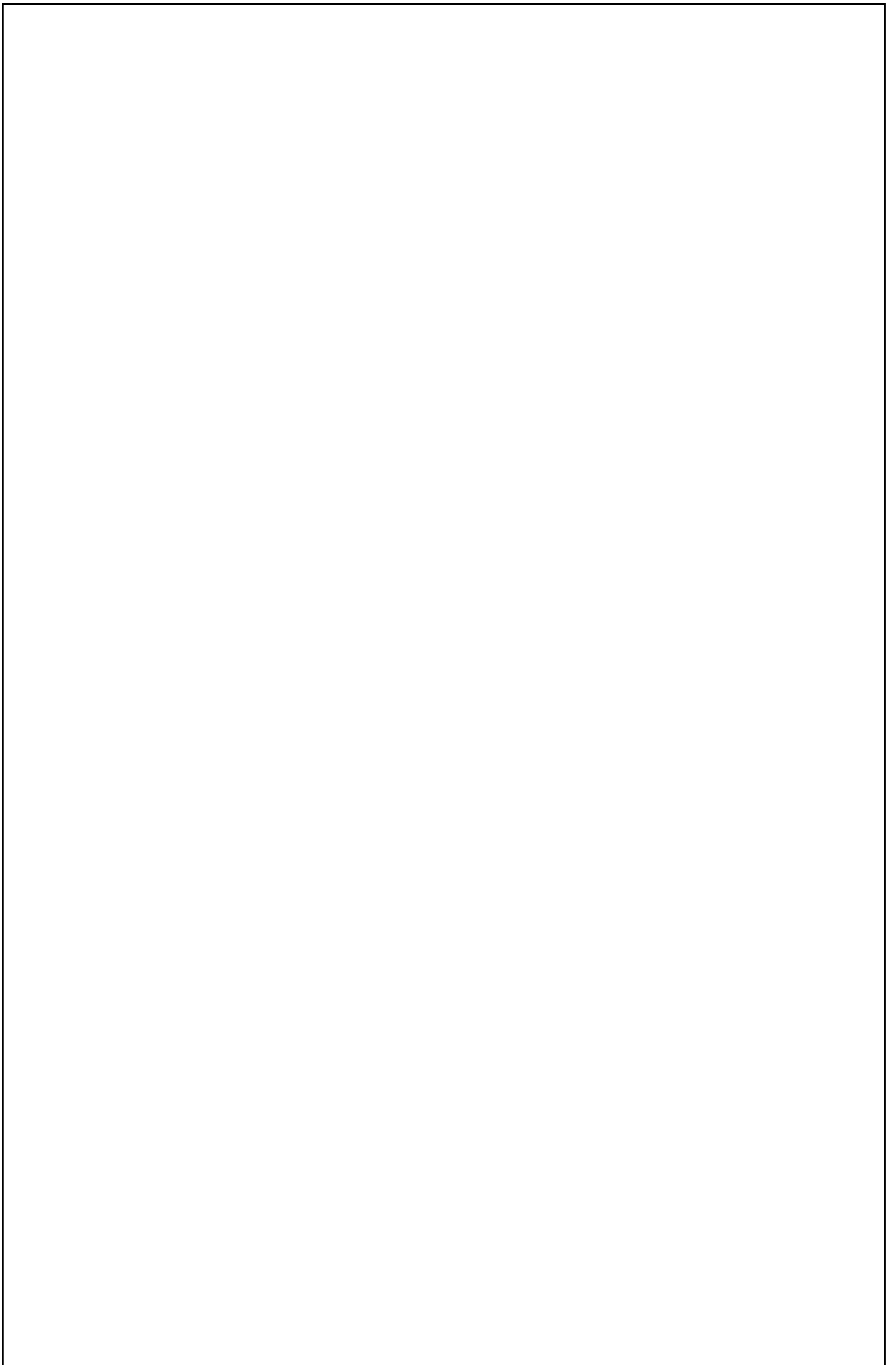
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Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Año 36, N° 27, (2020)

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.

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