

## STRENGTHENING CITIZENSHIP CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS THROUGH THE MQ HORSE RIDING EDUCATIONAL TOURISM PROGRAM

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the effectiveness of the MQ Equestrian Educativotourism Program at the Daarus Sunnah Islamic Boarding School, West Bandung, in strengthening civic character and environmental awareness through the integration of civic education, equestrian-archery sports, and sustainable ecotourism-based educational tourism. Using a qualitative case study approach during July 2025 with 15 respondents (12 students aged 15-20 years and 3 managers), data were collected through participant observation (18 hours), in-depth interviews (12 sessions), and documentation (40 documents), analyzed inductively with triangulation for validity. The findings show that the program successfully fostered civic dispositions such as responsibility, discipline, social participation, and ecological awareness through holistic contextual experiences, significantly changing participant behaviors such as waste management and mutual cooperation. This approach fills the literature with an innovative model based on Islamic values, more effective than conventional formal education to address the moral and environmental crisis of the 21st century. It is recommended that the program be replicated in other religious educational institutions as a sustainable, transformative character education practice.

**Keywords** : Citizenship, Environment, Ecotourism,

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### A. INTRODUCTION

Character education plays an important role in forming citizens who are responsible, disciplined, actively participate in social life, and care about the natural environment (Dewi Resika Wati, 2024). In this modern era, moral crises, individualism, and environmental degradation present challenges that threaten the sustainability of human social and ecological life. Character education includes various skills that not only demand student intelligence ( Berkowitz , 2009 ). However, what is more important is the formation of character and integrity, because this shows that a person's identity as part of a nation has a major influence on the well-being of individuals and society as a whole (Sauda Bukoting, 2023).

In this era, there is an urgent need for education that not only instills theoretical values but also provides real-world experiences that can strengthen environmental awareness and concern (Rahmah et al., 2025). Education in both formal and non-formal institutions can foster the values of responsibility, discipline, and citizen participation in environmental conservation. Students not only understand the concepts of citizenship and aspirations, but also apply them in their daily lives, both through social action and conscious environmental management.

Civics (Physical and Health Education) is a subject that plays a vital role in fostering environmental awareness among students. The primary goal of Physical and Health Education is to develop good citizens who are knowledgeable, skilled, and have character, and who are able to participate actively and sustainably in social, national, and state life (Yayan, 2019). In the context of environmental education, Physical Education and Health serves as an effective means to instill

environmental values and attitudes in students. Through this learning process, students can understand concepts such as the rights and obligations of citizens, environmental management, and sustainable development (Sunaryati et al., 2024). In addition, Physical Education and Health also fosters character that respects nature, is wise in utilizing resources, and is responsible for environmental preservation. This is important in shaping a young generation that has ecological awareness and acts as agents of change in preserving the earth.

Understanding and strengthening ecological citizenship is crucial to addressing the challenges of the 21st century. Contextual, action-oriented, and environmentally based character education is believed to encourage participants to become citizens who are concerned, active, and responsible for socio-ecological life. According to Bourban (2023), the 21st century is characterized as a period of global environmental crisis characterized by complexity, interconnectedness, and interdependence between humans and nature, thus requiring innovative approaches in understanding, managing, and building relationships between humans and the environment. Efforts to prevent and address various environmental problems are also emphasized in the Tbilisi Declaration, which underscores the importance of developing citizens who have the ability and willingness to participate in preventing environmental problems (Technica, 2012). The Declaration emphasizes the need to instill an attitude of environmental protection, the ability to identify threats, address threats, disseminate alternative solutions, and make relevant decisions on current and potential future environmental issues. Therefore, citizens in the 21st century need to master knowledge, have the right attitudes, and internalize values oriented towards environmental awareness.

Previous research on civic character education has generally focused on formal educational contexts and emphasized cognitive aspects. Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of project methods, reflective dialogue, and social activities as a means of character building. However, few studies have examined the integration of civic character education, sports (especially equestrianism), and faith-based ecotourism activities, as found in the MQ Equestrian Educator program (Nurhasanah, 2021). Research on a character education training program for elementary school students supporting coastal ecotourism has demonstrated results in increasing environmental awareness, community involvement, and social responsibility among participants. This program uses a systematic development model from analysis to evaluation and is effective in character building (Nugraha et al., 2023).

The uniqueness of this research lies in the integration of three dimensions: citizenship education, sports science (equestrianism and archery), and educational tourism, within a single sustainable ecotourism-based approach. The MQ Equestrian Educativotourism Program is a unique model that combines learning values, physical activity, and ecological experiences, thus providing a novel contribution to the literature on character education and context-based learning models. Therefore, this research contributes to filling this gap through an in-depth analysis of the program's implementation, impact, and participants' perceptions of the program.

## **B. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the process and impact of the MQ Equestrian Educati on program based on sustainable ecotourism at the Daarus Sunnah Islamic Boarding School, West Bandung, West Java. The study was conducted in July 2025 for 4 weeks, covering a complete cycle of the program that includes equestrian training, archery, and ecotourism activities, with this period chosen to

capture the full implementation through participant observation and interviews during the activities. The population included all participants and program managers, while the sample was determined purposively as many as 15 respondents consisting of 12 active participants (students aged 15–20 years: 8 males and 4 females) and 3 program managers (equestrian trainers and coordinators), selected to ensure a variety of experiences for rich and relevant data triangulation.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques during the program at the equestrian field and ecotourism area, namely 6 sessions of participatory observation (18 hours total) to observe participant interactions, character learning processes, and environmental behavior; 12 sessions of in-depth interviews (45–60 minutes per respondent) using semi-structured guidelines to explore the perceptions and impacts of the program; and documentation with analysis of 40 documents in the form of photos, activity videos, and program diaries. The research instruments included a structured observation sheet, an interview guide with 15 open-ended questions, and a systematic documentation sheet, in which all respondents provided written informed consent and the research had obtained official permission from the management of the Daarus Sunnah Islamic Boarding School.

Data analysis used an inductive content approach through three stages: data reduction (initial coding), data display (theme mapping), and verification of findings (interpretation), with the main themes covering strengthening citizenship dispositions such as responsibility and discipline as well as environmental awareness. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation (participants-managers), method triangulation (observation-interview-documentation), process triangulation (member check), and peer observation by two qualitative methodologists. The overall research procedure included instrument design, intensive data collection during July 2025, step-by-step analysis, interpretation of findings, and formulation of recommendations based on validated results.

### **C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Education is a process that is not only carried out spontaneously, but also consciously and through careful planning to create a conducive learning environment for each student (Ichsan & Hadiyanto, 2021). Through a carefully designed learning atmosphere and learning activities, students are expected to actively explore, develop, and channel their potential. In this process, education not only focuses on the cognitive aspect, but also involves efforts to strengthen the spiritual dimension, faith, self-control, character formation, improving thinking skills, instilling noble morals, and developing skills needed both for oneself and for the benefit of society, the nation, and the state (Hawari et al., 2024).

Ki Hajar Dewantara as quoted by Abu Ahmadi and Nur Ukhbiyanti (1991: 69), emphasized that education is a process that guides and directs all the natural potentials that a child has so that in the future he can grow into a complete human being and a member of society who is able to achieve the greatest happiness and safety. According to Ki Hajar, education does not only aim to instill knowledge and skills, but also to shape a complete human being: having common sense, a clean heart, a high sense of humanity, and a strong character.

Furthermore, Ki Hajar Dewantara stated that education must integrate three important aspects: character or strength of character, intellectual intelligence, and physical health. Education is emphasized as a guarantee process, namely freeing children from various shackles that limit their potential and freedom to develop (Reni et al., 2024). In its implementation, education must be student-centered, paying attention to the nature and characteristics of the times, so that

students are able to develop optimally according to their environment, conditions, and times. Thus, education functions as a comprehensive effort to build a generation that is cultured, moral, physically healthy, and ready to contribute actively to society and the nation.

The Daarus Sunnah Bandung Educative Tourism Program (MQ Equestrian Educator) is a program that integrates educational learning with sunnah sports activities such as horse riding and archery, and combines them with ecotourism experiences based on Islamic values. Located at Daarus Sunnah Bandung, this program is designed to provide a fun and meaningful learning experience, not only teaching horse riding and archery techniques but also instilling positive character and spiritual values in participants.

This program is open to all groups, including beginners and families, and offers structured training and guidance from experienced trainers, emphasizing equestrian skills, technique, and character building. In addition to the sporting activities, participants are also invited to experience a comfortable and peaceful Islamic atmosphere through ecotourism activities that prioritize environmental preservation and positive social interactions.

Activities within MQ Equestrian Educotourism, such as equestrian classes, archery, internal competitions, trekking, and camping, serve as educational tools that combine physical, mental, social, and spiritual aspects. The program also provides space for reflection and character building, involving the active participation of participants in maintaining the cleanliness and sustainability of the surrounding environment. With this holistic concept, MQ Equestrian Educotourism Daarus Sunnah Bandung carries a mission to produce a generation that is not only physically strong and skilled, but also has noble morals and cares for the environment and surrounding community.

The MQ Equestrian Educativotourism program is designed to integrate educational learning, equestrian and archery activities, and religious-based ecotourism experiences. The program's implementation includes real-life experiences, physical activities, and contextual learning that directly instills values of responsibility, discipline, and social and environmental awareness in participants.

Meanwhile, the term character comes from the Greek word *charassein*, which means to carve or make sharp and deep (Nasihatusun, 2019). This word was then absorbed into English as character, and in the context of Greek culture, carving means imprinting something deeply on an object, so that the carving will stick firmly and not easily erased. Character is essentially a unique characteristic of a person, which distinguishes one individual from another. The main characteristic of character, such as the nature of carving on solid objects, is the ability to stick and last a long time in a person. This emphasizes that character is not just an outward appearance, but rather an identity formed through a long process of socio-cultural interaction. (Muh et al., 2025) states that character cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context, because character grows and develops in the midst of a certain social environment.

Character education is a conscious and planned effort to shape students' personalities to have good character, which is based on core virtues, such as honesty, responsibility, respect, hard work, and kindness (Raharjo, 2010). Character development efforts are carried out systematically through the school, family, and community environments with the aim that the acquired character can provide positive benefits for both individuals and the wider community. Character education helps students internalize virtuous values that can serve as guidelines for life and behavior, so that they are able to build a better society through individuals with strong character and noble morals (Yusri et al., 2024).

MQ Equestrian Educativotourism is an educational innovation that combines educational learning, horse riding and archery activities, and ecotourism experiences with a foundation of religious values. This design not only encourages participants to learn technical horse riding and archery skills but also fosters a deeper understanding of the values of courtesy, discipline, and social awareness through interactions in the natural environment and within the community.

### **Sustainable ecotourism citizenship-based education**

In the context of MQ Equestrian Educotourism, citizenship education is not taught through classroom lectures, but is brought to life through hands-on experiences that foster responsibility, discipline, social participation, and environmental awareness in the equestrian arena and ecotourism areas. Values such as obeying rules, maintaining public facilities, working together, and respecting fellow participants are implemented as concrete practices of civic ecology, so participants learn that being a good citizen also means protecting the earth and the communities in which they live.

Within the framework of the 21st century, citizenship education in this program is aimed at forming citizens who are active, caring, and able to make decisions on socio-environmental issues ( Warwick, 2011 ), for example, through involvement in clean-up training activities, waste management, and simple conservation activities within Islamic boarding schools. This approach aligns with the concept of "ecological citizenship" and the Tbilisi Declaration, which aims to prepare citizens with knowledge, character, and the willingness to participate in sustainable problem-solving and prevention.

### **Sports science (horse riding and archery) from a character and ecological perspective**

The sports science in this program goes beyond mastering horse riding and archery techniques, but is positioned as a vehicle for character building and ecological awareness through structured physical activity. Riding and archery training requires participants to learn time management, focus, courage, emotional control, and collaboration with coaches and peers all of which are important civic character traits.

As a "sunnah sport" performed outdoors, cycling and measuring connect participants directly with nature, for example through horse care, regular use of training grounds, and maintaining cleanliness after activities. Here, sports science intertwines with the principles of sustainable ecotourism; physical activities are designed to be environmentally friendly, consider the well-being of animals, and teach wise use of natural resources.

### **Educational tourism (educotourism) based on sustainable ecotourism**

Educational tourism in MQ Equestrian Educotourism is designed as a "learning while traveling" program that combines recreational activities (trekking, camping, horse riding, archery) with the goal of learning social, spiritual, and environmental character. Participants not only enjoy the scenery or recreation, but are also encouraged to reflect on religious values, instill Islamic social etiquette, and cultivate a sense of awareness for the cleanliness and sustainability of tourist areas.

The principles of sustainable ecotourism are evident in the emphasis on environmental preservation, facility maintenance, waste management, and environmentally friendly activities, along with integrated value reflections in each session. Educational tours like this create a contextual learning experience: participants experience the direct connection between religious

values, civic character, and ecological responsibility, thus making their attitudes toward the environment and community more permanent.

These three dimensions citizenship, equestrian and archery and educational tourism are integrated into a single sustainable ecotourism design, ensuring that each activity incorporates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor elements. Within a series of activities, participants learn values (citizenship and religion), instill them through physical activity (equestrian and archery), and reflect on them within the context of nature and community (ecotourism), ensuring that character education is holistic, contextual, and action-oriented.

Findings from participant observation and in-depth interviews during the program indicate that participants experienced a variety of tangible benefits, not only in terms of knowledge but also in the form of changes in daily behavior. Time discipline was a prominent characteristic, as participants learned to organize their training schedules and adhere to them consistently. Furthermore, through outdoor activities, participants were encouraged to be more concerned about environmental cleanliness, such as maintaining the cleanliness of the training area and participating in post-event cleanup activities.

Active participation in the community has also grown rapidly, as evidenced by participants' involvement in group activities, collaboration, and increased social awareness. The religious values internalized in each activity make this behavioral change even more meaningful, shaping holistic characters that are not only intelligent in terms of knowledge and skills, but also environmentally conscious and virtuous (Maulida & Ratnasari, 2024). Programs like this demonstrate that integrating character education, sports, ecotourism, and religious values can produce transformative learning experiences that positively impact participants and the surrounding community.



Image: MQ Equestrian Educotourism Daarus Sunnah's horse riding and archery program

Program participants experienced attitudinal changes that supported social engagement, such as reciprocal cooperation and ecological awareness, which were manifested in concrete actions such as facility maintenance, waste management, and environmental conservation efforts. This aligns with the goals of 21st-century character education, which demands innovative approaches and concrete actions to address the challenges of the global environmental crisis. 21st-century character education focuses not only on mastering academic material but also emphasizes the development of inclusive and environmentally conscious social attitudes, values, and skills.

The collaborative learning and value reflection in this program encourage participants to become active agents of change who protect the environment. Through this process, students not only understand environmental issues but also feel a sense of social responsibility in preserving nature as part of responsible citizenship. The contextual, reflective, and project-based learning

model is key to its success, as it fosters character values through participants' daily lives and the real-world challenges they face.

A 21st-century character education approach that integrates environmental action and social engagement through citizenship education and collaborative learning can shape students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess empathy, ecological awareness, and the ability to actively contribute to solutions to environmental and social crises. This is an innovative and relevant response to today's learning demands, aiming to build a generation ready to face the complexities of future global challenges.

The MQ Equestrian Education Tour received very positive reviews from most participants and organizers, who saw it as an effective way to build character while making the process enjoyable. This activity provides an integrated educational experience that not only focuses on character development but also motivates participants' involvement in environmental conservation through ecotourism and social interactions oriented towards religious values.

Practically, this study recommends the development and replication of similar programs in other religious educational institutions as an effective medium for environmental character education. This integrated approach of character education, equestrian and archery sports, and faith-based ecotourism provides an innovative and relevant model for sustainable education in today's educational context.

From an academic perspective, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature by combining aspects of character education, sports, and religious ecotourism as a holistic approach to education. This model opens up opportunities for further research on the development of sustainable education that not only educates but also inspires positive behavioral changes towards the environment and the wider community. Thus, the MQ Equestrian Educativotourism serves as an example of innovative and comprehensive educational practices that can serve as a reference for the development of similar programs in the context of religious character and environmental education.

The MQ Horseback Riding Education Tour from MQ Daarus Sunnah, Bandung, initially filled a research gap by holistically integrating three educational dimensions—values learning, physical activity, and ecological experiences into a single environmentally-based character education model. This research demonstrates that character education is not only based on classroom theory but also needs to be realized through real-life experiences and contextual activities to shape a responsible and environmentally conscious generation.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The MQ Equestrian Educativotourism Program at the Daarus Sunnah Islamic Boarding School in West Bandung effectively strengthens the citizenship character and environmental awareness of participants through the integration of civic education, equestrian-archery sports, and educational tours based on sustainable ecotourism. This holistic approach not only teaches technical and physical skills, but also instills the values of responsibility, discipline, social participation, and environmental conservation in a tangible way, resulting in lasting positive attitude changes in students aged 15-20 years. The research findings show that contextual experiences during July 2025 through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation confirmed the program's success in forming active and responsible ecological citizens, in line with the demands of 21st-century character education. This program fills the literature with an innovative model based on Islamic religion, which combines value, physical, and

ecological dimensions to address the moral crisis and environmental degradation. Practically, it is recommended that similar programs be replicated in other religious educational institutions as a fun and transformative medium for environmental character education. His academic contribution lies in empirical evidence that real-life experience-based education is more effective than formal theory, opening up opportunities for further research on religious ecotourism in sustainable character building.

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