

A Critical Study of the Sodaqoh Tradition from the Perspective of Character Education: A Phenomenological Study of the Sunan Gunung Jati Burial Complex, Cirebon

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ABSTRACT

The sodaqoh tradition that has taken root in this society not only contains cultural and spiritual values, but also has the potential for negative impacts on the development of children's character, especially in terms of independence, morality, and ethical attitudes. This study aims to analyze the influence of the sodaqoh tradition on the formation of the independence character of elementary school-age children involved in the practice of begging at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery Complex, Cirebon. The research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods and a single case study. Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with validity tested through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results of the study show that the phenomenon of begging visitors/tourists is a tradition in the community at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cirebon cemetery complex. From three case studies of elementary school-age children who are directly involved as sodaqoh requesters, it shows a lack of independent character among them. This is against the background of the habit of asking for sodaqoh from pilgrims being a tradition so that it is considered a practice that does not contradict the values and norms of their community. Thus, the tradition of asking for sodaqoh at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cirebon cemetery complex has an impact on the lack of independent mentality among elementary school-age children.

KEYWORDS

character independence, elementary school age children, sodaqoh tradition



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is experiencing an emergency where many elementary school-aged children are involved in begging. This is a problem that is not only related to the economy, but also shows the weakness of the system in instilling a spirit of independence from an early age. In a number of locations in the city, children aged 6 to 12 who were supposed to go to school were seen begging on the street. They were seen at crossroads, bus terminals, markets, and other public areas, hoping that someone would come to help. This problem is rooted in the continuous cycle of poverty. Families who live in poverty and do not have access to adequate education and employment tend to make their children a source of income for their daily needs. This habit then becomes an inherited tradition, creating an attitude of dependency that is difficult to change. A child's independence includes the ability to carry out daily activities and tasks independently or with a little help, recognize right and wrong, and be able to distinguish between good and bad. Children can also apply an understanding of prohibited things and understand the consequences that may occur if they violate the rules. In addition, children have the ability to take care of themselves, such as in terms of eating, dressing, using the toilet, and bathing (Handayani, Surya, & Syahti, 2024). The number of children who are active on the

street to earn income every day is increasing. The situation shows that children who should receive protection and guidance to grow up to be healthy, intelligent, skilled, and resilient adults are dependent on asking for help and compassion from others. (Ushuluddin & Iain, 2022)

Independence must be taught and trained from an early age, starting from the age of 3 years. At this age, children begin to interact more with others, not only with parents (mom and dad) but also with people they just know. This is the right moment to teach socialization and train independence in children (Handayani et al., 2024). The emergence of many destructive cases in the context of nationality shows a lack of national character, therefore the formation of character from an early age is very necessary to foster a good national character culture and the main key in building the nation (Sukma, 2021)

In the increasingly rapid digital era, the character development of children and adolescents faces the negative influence of various problems that can damage character (Annisha, 2024). The uncontrolled use of social media has triggered various worrying behavioral changes, such as a decline in the ability to socialize directly and a weakening of the values of politeness in communication (Ananda & Marno, 2022). Excessive exposure to digital content without supervision not only leads to addictive behavior tendencies, but also affects children's ability to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Intan Rachmawati & Ratnaningrum, 2024). This condition shows the importance of developing a character education approach for children and adolescents, especially elementary school-age children that can be used to teach moral values to children in accordance with today's needs (Melianti, Handayani, Novianti, Syahputri, & Hasibuan, 2023).

Early childhood character development can be instilled through various local traditions as a medium of character education. Character education is not just about knowledge transfer, but also about guiding individuals to grow into quality and ethical individuals (Sagala, Naibaho, & Rantung, 2024). A person's character will be formed through activities that are carried out repeatedly and regularly, so that over time it becomes a habit. In the end, the habit is not just a habit, but also develops into a part of the character (Rizky Asrul Ananda, Mufidatul Inas, & Agung Setyawan, 2022). Tradition is an important part of people's lives that can have an impact on children's character development (Natalia Desy Anggraeni, 2025). One of the traditions that still survives to this day is the sodaqoh tradition from pilgrims to beggars at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery Complex, Cirebon. This tradition has been going on for generations and involves children who participate in alms-giving activities in the hope of getting rewards. This tradition not only has historical and cultural significance, but also holds various elements of character education that can play a role in the formation of personality, especially in children at the elementary school (SD) level (Situmorang, 2023). Culture has an important function as a link between individuals and their environment (Huzaeema, Nurvadi, Prameswari, Basyari, & Hayati, 2024).

The tradition of sodaqoh among the residents around the Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery Complex has been going on for generations and has become part of the children's routine. Although this tradition is not mandatory, many children choose to participate because of certain rewards or rewards they receive. Through these activities, children gain valuable experiences that contribute to the development of their character, especially in terms of independence (Hamim, 2024). Independence is a very important character for children. The ability to make decisions, complete tasks independently, and overcome obstacles are skills that need to be

honed from a young age. Lack of independence in children can result in high dependence on others. This can also cause children to become less creative, lazy, less confident, and have difficulty solving the problems they face. (Bui, Puspitasari, Hastuti, & Sofyan, 2023). In today's era, independence is one of the most important character values to pay attention to (Wuryandari, Fathurrohman, & Ambarwati, 2016). A lack of independence in children can cause them to tend to depend on others. It can also reduce creativity, lead to laziness, reduce self-confidence, and hinder their ability to solve problems independently (Ngaliyan, 2020). Character education rooted in local culture, such as the sodaqoh tradition, can be an efficient approach to instill the values of independence in children from an early age.

Various previous studies have examined the influence of local culture on children's character education. Research by (Pamungkas & Kuryanto, 2024) found that the sodaqoh tradition in some regions of Indonesia can foster empathy and social concern, but also risk leading to dependence on external gifts. Then, the research (Natalia Desy Anggraeni, 2025) highlighting the importance of integrating local cultures in formal education to strengthen the values of children's independence and responsibility from an early age. Meanwhile, a study conducted by (Annisha, 2024) suggests that children who are actively involved in social traditions tend to have higher moral awareness, but a lack of supervision in the implementation of traditions can lead to value deviations. Children's development is greatly influenced by parental guidance and treatment in introducing various aspects of social life and norms in society. These three studies show that local culture has great potential in shaping children's characters, but a more critical approach is needed so as not to create dependence on external incentives.

The theory developed by Albert Bandura is called "Social Learning Theory" as well as the theory of Cognitive Social Learning. One of the main concepts in Bandura's theory is the idea that the majority of human learning takes place in a social context (Tullah & Amiruddin, 2020). Vygotsky's theory is a theory that studies actions and understands things using the mind, while the processes discussed here emphasize actions performed by sociocultural methods. The theory put forward by Vygotsky provides an opportunity for children to develop their knowledge through relationships with others and their environment (Learning et al., 2024). Vygotsky highlights that a person's mind is greatly influenced by relationships with others. The psychosocial theory put forward by Erik Erikson, for example, highlights the important value of developing initiatives and industries in children who are still in elementary school. Erikson argues that children who are able to grow initiatives and industries will have high confidence and the ability to do activities independently. Conversely, children who do not have the opportunity to develop independence may experience feelings of doubt and inferiority (Handayani et al., 2024).

Terminologically, Thomas Lickona associates moral issues with character through a definition that states that character is "an internal disposition that can be relied upon to respond to situations in a morally good way (Akimas et al., 2022). Lickona further explained that character consists of three interrelated components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. Good character includes an understanding of goodness (moral knowing) which in turn forms a commitment to do good (moral feeling), and is finally manifested in real good actions (moral behavior (Akimas et al., 2022). According to J.J. Hoenigman, culture consists of three forms, namely (1) culture as a combination of ideas, concepts, values, norms, and rules A Critical Study of the Sodaqoh Tradition from the Perspective of Character Education: A Phenomenological Study of the Sunan Gunung Jati Burial Complex, Cirebon

known as mentifact; (2) culture as a collection of structured activities and behaviors carried out by humans in a community, called sociofact; (3) culture as a physical product that is a human creation, known as an artifact (Maulidiah & Saddhono, 2019).

Most previous research has focused on the role of local culture in building positive character in children, but not much has specifically addressed the impact of sodaqoh traditions on the independence of elementary school-age children. Therefore, the researcher is interested in exploring how the Sodaqoh tradition affects children's independence from the perspective of character education (Natalia Desy Anggraeni, 2025). Positive characters that can emerge from the Sodaqoh tradition include a sense of responsibility, courage, perseverance, and cooperation in the group. However, there are possible negative impacts, such as dependence on rewards and motivation from external factors rather than the development of self-reliance that comes from within. Therefore, this study also seeks to identify cultural elements in the Sodaqoh tradition that can affect children's development, both positively and negatively.

This study aims to analyze the sodaqoh tradition carried out by tourists (pilgrims) on the formation of independence character among elementary school-age children in the Sunan Gunung Jati Cirebon cemetery complex whose daily lives are either directly or indirectly affected by this phenomenon. This research is expected to provide a new perspective in developing learning methods based on local wisdom that support the formation of children's character optimally, as well as contribute to formulating educational strategies that are more contextual and in accordance with local culture. Local wisdom is the identity of a nation that also serves to filter various things that enter from outside cultures and are seen as inherited to the next generation in order to be protected from the influence of foreign culture (Huzaeema et al., 2024). In addition, this research can contribute to formulating educational strategies that are more contextual and in accordance with culture, so as to be able to support children's character development more effectively.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods that aimed to understand the lived experiences of subjects in the context of the sodaqoh tradition at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery Complex, Cirebon, West Java. The research was conducted from September to November 2024. The type of research chosen was a single case study, focusing specifically on the sodaqoh tradition and its impact on the independence character of elementary school-age children involved in begging activities.

The population of this study consisted of all stakeholders involved in the sodaqoh tradition at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery Complex, including cultural experts, tomb managers, pilgrims, and elementary school-age children who actively participated in asking for sodaqoh. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique to identify informants with a deep understanding of the tradition, combined with snowball sampling to obtain additional informants based on recommendations. The final sample consisted of cultural experts (2 informants), tomb managers (2 informants), pilgrims (5 informants), and three elementary school-age children (aged 12-13 years) who regularly engaged in begging activities: Lina (13 years old), Riyan (12 years old), and Bagas (12 years old).

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: (1) participatory observation to directly observe the sodaqoh tradition and children's begging activities in the

cemetery complex; (2) in-depth semi-structured interviews with all informants to explore their experiences, motivations, and perceptions; and (3) documentation studies including photographs, field notes, and relevant written materials. Data sources included primary data obtained directly from observations and interviews, as well as secondary data from literature, historical documents, and previous research related to the sodaqoh tradition and character education.

The research instruments consisted of interview guidelines containing open-ended questions tailored to each informant category, observation sheets to systematically record field phenomena, and documentation tools including cameras and audio recorders. Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach through thematic analysis, which included four stages: (1) data collection through field observations and interviews; (2) data reduction by selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data; (3) data presentation through narrative descriptions and thematic categorizations; and (4) conclusion drawing by identifying patterns and interpreting findings in relation to the research objectives.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applied triangulation techniques by comparing and cross-checking results from multiple sources (source triangulation) and multiple methods (method triangulation). Source triangulation involved comparing information from cultural experts, tomb managers, pilgrims, and children to verify consistency. Method triangulation involved comparing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure data credibility and trustworthiness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery complex is located on Mount Sembung, which is about eight kilometers from the center of Cirebon City, in West Java. This place is the burial location of Sunan Gunung Jati or Syarif Hidayatullah, as well as the sultans and their descendants. Sunan Gunung Jati himself was one of the members of Wali Songo who was influential in the spread of Islam in West Java in the 15th and 16th centuries and the founder of the Cirebon Sultanate. This tomb is built on a small hill that has nine levels, symbolizes a spiritual journey, and consists of nine doors that must be passed through to reach the main tomb. However, only the descendants of the palace and the guards were allowed to go to the main tomb, while ordinary visitors were only allowed until the fifth door. Architecturally, the cemetery area is surrounded by dark red brick walls decorated with various Islamic calligraphy ornaments as well as supporting buildings such as a rest hall and an area for pilgrims. This complex serves not only as a resting place for Sunan Gunung Jati and his family, but also as a tomb for other important figures from the Cirebon Sultanate. The influence of Javanese, Islamic, and Chinese culture is very clearly seen in the building styles, ornaments, and traditions that are still maintained today in this place. In the tomb area, there is a building dedicated to prayer. The building has a multi-storey limestone roof with wooden pillars that reflect traditional Javanese and Islamic architecture of the archipelago. This place is the starting point for pilgrims to pray and perform tahlil before continuing to the cemetery area. The tradition of washing hands and feet before praying is still maintained as part of self-purification.



Figure 1. Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery Front Area

More than just a resting place, the Sunan Gunung Jati Complex is a center of historical, cultural, and spiritual heritage that contributed greatly to the spread of Islam on the north coast of Java. It symbolizes the change from a local kingdom to an Islamic sultanate, as well as serving as a lively social space where local people, sultanate descendants, and tomb keepers work together to preserve traditions. Local economic activities also grew, in line with pilgrimage activities, including flower traders, incense, souvenirs, and Cirebon specialties.

Pilgrimage activities are usually carried out in the morning, starting with cleaning themselves and wearing modest clothes. Pilgrims enter the tomb area while saying prayers, reciting Surah Yasin, tahlil, and bringing flowers as a sign of respect. Some of them also bring prayer water or special items to obtain blessings. A pilgrimage to the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati is not just a physical journey to a location, but also a spiritual and intellectual journey that includes deep thinking about religious, historical, and cultural values (Hidayattulloh, Amrulloh, Amrulloh, Eve, & Saumantri, 2024). The reasons for pilgrims also vary, from asking for blessings, carrying out vows, to reminding themselves of death. This pilgrimage is considered to be an intercessory of prayer through the guardian of Allah, as stated by the (Ali, 2007) The motivation of the pilgrims came to the Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery to get lessons and warnings, that one day he would also become a grave resident, besides that the kiyai or ustad gave encouragement to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of the wali to obtain blessings. On the other hand, religious ritual activities in this complex are integrated with social and cultural activities. The celebration of Islamic holidays such as the Prophet's Birthday, Isra Mi'raj, Eid al-Fitr, and the Sunan Gunung Jati haul is an annual agenda that is routinely welcomed with enthusiasm by the community. The area is also attractive as a religious tourist destination that provides various facilities for pilgrims, including souvenir traders, incense, flowers, and traditional cuisine.

One of the striking cultural aspects of Java Island is the deep respect for important figures, such as kings, sultans, and especially the spreaders of Islam known as Wali Sanga. This is reflected in the practice of burial of these figures in special places that are considered to have high spiritual significance. Over time, these burial places were considered sacred by the community and became locations for pilgrimages and religious activities. Pilgrimages to resting places made by the Javanese people to burial sites that are considered sacred were actually influenced by the Javanese-Hindu era (Latifah, 2023). This tradition is more than just a tribute to the deceased, it is also part of the Javanese cultural construction that combines Islamic values with local beliefs. The Javanese people believe that the guardians have a close relationship with God, so their tombs are seen as locations that have spiritual power. This belief

shows syncretism, which is the incorporation of Islamic teachings with pre-existing local cultures, such as animism and belief in ancestral spirits.

The tombs of Wali Sanga, such as Sunan Kalijaga in Kadilangu, Sunan Ampel in Surabaya, and Sunan Gunung Jati in Cirebon, are clear examples of this practice. The selection of the burial location is not done arbitrarily, but considers cultural and symbolic aspects. For example, some tombs are located on higher ground such as hills or locations that are considered sacred by the surrounding community. The function of this tomb has also developed, from being just a final resting place to presenting a center of religious and cultural activities. The tradition of pilgrimage to the graves of the guardians or great figures has become a significant part of the spiritual life of the Javanese people. This pilgrimage activity is not only considered as a way to respect, but also as a medium to seek blessings, ask for salvation, and get closer to God through the intercession of these holy figures. Pilgrimage activities by various circles are also used for certain purposes, such as seeking peace, earning a living, seeking luck, and others, according to the attraction and special stories of the buried figures (Latifah, 2023). The phenomenon of tomb worship also reflects the values of Javanese society that respects figures, wisdom, and spirituality. On the other hand, this tradition also keeps local values alive in the context of Islam. This proves that the spread of Islam in Java is not carried out directly, but through a cultural approach that respects the social and spiritual structure of the community.

In the implementation of the traditional ceremony that was held, this site was also formed as a destination for religious areas, there is *a culture* or culture that is closely related to this site, namely another social phenomenon related to pilgrimage activities in this area is the existence of beggars. In general, beggars at the tomb location are divided into two groups, namely official beggars who have permission from the cemetery manager and the local government, and unofficial beggars who come from other areas. The existence of these beggars has become part of the dynamics of religious tourism and social traditions accepted by the community. Although the local government and tomb managers have taken various control measures, this phenomenon still exists, influenced by socio-economic factors and the belief of some pilgrims that alms in the area of the tomb of the guardian can bring blessings. In addition, the existence of children who are still in elementary school who also ask for *sodaqoh* from pilgrims has become part of local traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Their presence increased on the night of Friday Kliwon, the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday, and the haul of Sunan Gunung Jati. These children usually carry simple containers or plastic bags and move along the road to the main tomb. This tradition continues to be maintained as part of the religious pilgrimage culture in Cirebon, where the giving of *sodaqoh* is considered a charity that provides goodness for both the giver and the recipient. Thus, the Sunan Gunung Jati Tomb Complex in Cirebon not only functions as a burial place and spiritual center, but also as a cultural, social, and economic center for the local community. This area reflects cultural acculturation and the sustainability of religious values that are still alive in the community today.

According to sharia terms, *sodaqoh* is a voluntary donation made by a person to others, especially to those in need, whenever there is an opportunity that exists without limitations in terms of type, quantity or time. Alms include not only donations in the form of objects, but can also be services that provide benefits to others (M. Munir & Nur Muhammad, 2022). In addition to *sodaqoh*, there is also *infak*, *Infak* is a form of spending wealth, with the aim of

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giving an asset for goodness, donations, or things that are consumptive in nature, but still useful for many people (Anjelina, Salsabila, & Fitriyanti, 2020). On the other hand, in socio-religious practice, the term beggar or beggar also appears. Beggar is a term for people who need money, food, shelter, or other needs from the people they meet by asking for (N sari, D Anhar, 2020).

The tradition of giving alms to beggars in the tomb area is also supported by Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of generosity. Many pilgrims come not only to pray and seek blessings, but also to share sustenance as a form of sincerity and the search for rewards. This practice is often considered part of the pilgrimage ethic, before or after praying, pilgrims take the time to give alms to those in need. In the context of the local culture of Cirebon, the custom of begging and giving alms around the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati is not socially problematic. Tolerance for this practice arises from the understanding that these actions have symbolic, spiritual, and social meanings. It reflects the reciprocal relationship between the giver and the receiver, between those who come seeking blessings and those who are part of the local community that keeps the tradition alive. Thus, the practice of begging and giving alms in the Sunan Gunung Jati tomb area can be seen as part of a culture full of religious, spiritual, and humanitarian values. This tradition is accepted by society not only for economic reasons, but also because it has become part of a way of life that supports social and spiritual relationships between people.

From a spiritual perspective, shodaqoh is a noble principle taught in Islam as a form of concern for others. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the graves of guardians like Sunan Gunung Jati, the spirit to share is so strong. However, when this act of giving is done repeatedly and follows an almost uniform pattern, it evolves from an individual act into a kind of shared tradition. Shodaqoh is no longer just about personal sincere intentions, but has transformed into a social practice that is expected by both the giver and the receiver. The beggars realize that the pilgrim feels "interested" in sharing, and on the other hand, the pilgrim feels a "moral responsibility" to give. Thus, a unique social symbiosis is formed, namely the act of giving and asking becomes a sustainable habit. In the long run, this tradition can shape the general personality of the community. If begging is increasingly considered legitimate because of religious values without an emphasis on independence, then there will be a generation that sees begging as a norm and even justified, as long as it is related to the spiritual context. This is where the problem lies when shodaqoh as a noble value is not balanced with productive education, then the practice of giving can encourage the emergence of a culture of dependence. This phenomenon has two sides. On the positive side, this tradition strengthens the social solidarity and generosity values of Muslims (Putra, Afandi, & Fadilla, 2024). However, from the negative side, the habit of giving alms to beggars waiting on the pilgrimage route, including children, can strengthen the pattern of dependence and hinder the educational process and the formation of independent character (Ismi, 2024).

In addition, there is also a mandate of Sunan Gunung Jati which states that "*Ingsun titip tajug lan fakir mipoor*" has a very deep meaning in the religious life of the community, especially in terms of worship. This message not only warns Muslims to pay attention to mosques as places of worship, but also instills a spiritual responsibility to prosper them. In this case, the mosque is not only seen as a physical building, but as a center of religious, educational, and social activities that must always be alive and play an active role in shaping the character of the people. This mandate also teaches the value of sincerity in worship that

worship is not only a personal affair with God, but must be reflected in concrete actions that show affection and concern for others. The tradition of giving to the beggar in the area of the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati, for example, not only arises from a sense of empathy or compassion, but is also a form of application of the teachings of the guardian which emphasizes the importance of balance between human relationships with God (*habluminallah*) and with fellow humans (*habluminannas*).

The phenomenon of beggars in the Sunan Gunung Jati tomb complex in Cirebon is an ordinary sight and is an inseparable part of pilgrimage activities. Along the access road to the tomb area, beggars of various ages were seen sitting in a row, extending their hands to the pilgrims. The existence of beggars at the Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery complex is divided into several locations, including those who line along the cemetery alley to the location of the sacred mosque of Gunung Jati, as well as elementary school-age children who are waiting for a helping hand along the road to the tomb of Sheikh Datuk Kahfi, and at each entrance to the cemetery complex (Ali, 2007). Some of them even seem to understand the busy times and look like they are "working" with an orderly rhythm. For pilgrims, giving to them is not just an act of empathy, but is often done with the intention of shodaqoh or charity that is considered to bring blessings, especially when done in a place that is considered sacred.

This begging activity did not arise as an individual act, but rather developed in a cultural environment that had recognized the practice as part of local traditions, especially in the context of giving alms by pilgrims. The tradition of begging that has taken root in this area makes children's activities acceptable, even considered normal, so that they build an understanding that relying on alms is a legitimate form of 'effort' and sufficient to meet daily needs. Thus, the tradition of begging integrated with the practice of pilgrimage indirectly shapes the character of children who depend on the generosity of others, rather than building the true value of independence.

The begging activities carried out by children at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery Complex are a social tradition that has been rooted in the culture of the local community. This practice is carried out continuously and is part of routine activities during pilgrimage, especially on Friday night Kliwon, commemorating the Prophet's Birthday, and the haul of Sunan Gunung Jati. This custom is accepted by the community and is considered a natural local cultural element in the burial place of the guardians. The children took advantage of the crowds of pilgrims to ask for donations, in ways that have become a common custom in their communities. This tradition is still maintained thanks to the belief of some pilgrims who believe that giving alms at the tomb of the guardian brings blessings, so that these children's activities continue and become part of the socio-religious interaction in the cemetery area. These traditions and customs form an internalization that expands the network of these traditions is carried out, internalization is a process in which values, norms, and behaviors from the external environment are taken and become an important part of a person's personality. In terms of begging behavior, this process takes place through primary socialization that occurs in the family, where the child sees, imitates, and ultimately adopts parental behavior as a normative reference.



Figure 2. Beggars Around the Cemetery Complex

The practice of alms in this location does not only occur in an official form, such as through the charity box of a mosque or a tomb management institution, but also in a semi-official form, such as direct donations to tomb guards or pilgrimage guides who also function as recipients of donations. In addition, there is also an unofficial practice of giving money or food to beggars who gather when groups of pilgrims arrive who are often encountered. The beggars around this cemetery consist of various groups ranging from adults to children. This phenomenon is considered to be common by the community and pilgrims. The tradition of giving to those in need, especially in a spiritual context such as a pilgrimage to the tomb of the guardian, is seen as a charity that has merit value. Unfortunately, this habit has also triggered an increase in the number of beggars, both those who really need help and those who take advantage of this opportunity. Not infrequently, pilgrims, even visitors, are swarmed by beggars with a variety of approaches, from polite to somewhat urgent.

In accordance with the theory of Social Learning introduced by Albert Bandura in 1977. This theory highlights that a person can learn behavior through observation of the people around him, such as teachers, parents, or friends (Aziz & Zakir, 2022). In addition, according to Thomas Lickona, character is related to moral understanding (moral knowing), moral feelings (moral feeling), and moral actions (moral behavior). From these three elements, it can be concluded that positive character is based on knowledge of good things, the desire to do good, and the implementation of good deeds (Susanti, 2022). Then the next theory, namely Vygotsky's theory, which states that this theory focuses on the way in which children's thinking develops, can be influenced through social relationships (Qiptiyah & titin mariatul, 2024). And according to Erikson's view, psychological development occurs due to the interaction between the process of maturity or physical needs and the social demands and forces of society faced in daily life (Rizki, 2024).

The results of the study on beggars among children found a beggar named Lina, 13 years old. Lina's family background comes from an underprivileged family and which motivates Lina to beg because she follows her peers who are also beggars, besides that Lina's mother is also a beggar in the cemetery area. Lina has a low level of independence in her knowledge but in her actions Lina has shown independence. When asked about Lina's knowledge of independence, Lina was unable to explain the definition of independence in words. This shows that Lina has low knowledge of independence, the concept of independence is not fully understood by her.

Limited access to formal education and lack of support from the people around her made Lina not recognize this term as an important value that must be had. But even though she doesn't fully understand what independence is, Lina feels proud when she earns her own money from begging, especially if she can buy something herself without asking for money from her parents. This sense of pride reflects a positive feeling of independent experience, even though it has not been linked to a healthy self-identity or social value. In terms of behavior, Lina shows independence by adapting to life as a beggar. He actively searches for crowded places, as well as manages the money he gets. Then when asked about her daily life, Lina also mentioned that she used to do things on her own without the help of others, Lina also often did household chores such as sweeping without being told by her parents. These actions reflect courage and initiative, even in less fortunate situations. The experiential learning theory of David Kolb in (Pujaningtyas, Kartakusumah, & Lathifah, 2019). explains that learning occurs through cycles of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

There are factors that affect Lina's independence, the first is her family. Economic difficulties in the family encouraged Lina to be involved in informal economic activities since childhood. According to (Ranianisa Rahmi, Desyandri, & Irda Murni, 2023), the problem of children's begging behavior is often caused by difficulties due to the social and economic conditions they experience. Her parents tend to be passive and let Lina be a *sodaqoh* requester. Parents do not give direct prohibitions or directions, but let the child decide for himself what he wants to do, including choosing to participate in asking for *sodaqoh*.

Then the second factor is peers. Lina's colleagues are also street children who have experienced similar things. Interacting with them reinforces survival values, creates solidarity based on experience, and encourages Lina to be independent of adults. However, because of its focus on survival, not self-development, the values of independence that are formed are pragmatic and unclear in their direction. In addition, his schoolmates are also neutral towards the activity of asking for *sodaqoh*. The absence of negative reactions or ridicule from their friends encourages the normalization of these behaviors, so that children feel no need to be ashamed or worried. This makes him comfortable in the activity and reinforces the tendency to continue it for a certain period of time (Download, 2023) In the case of Lina, who carried out begging activities as a form of economic independence, this shows that even though children have shown independent behavior, an unhealthy environment can affect the quality of self-reliance that develops.

Unconducive environmental factors, such as poverty and lack of moral guidance, can lead to risky actions and deviation from social norms (Susanti et al., 2024). Then, school factors play less active role in shaping children's independent character and behavior in this context. The absence of interventions or coaching programs detected from the school side shows a lack of attention to the social dynamics of children living around the pilgrimage area. In fact, activities such as asking for *sodaqoh* can interfere with the focus of learning and reduce the quality of education if not handled appropriately (Zega & Suprihati, 2021).

The second respondent is a child named Riyan, he is 12 years old with a poor family background. Riyan's motivation in doing begging activities is because he follows his peers who also beg. Riyan has a sufficient level of independence because when asked about the meaning of independence, Riyan understands independence as *"doing things on your own without help*
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from others."(Riyan, interview, 2025). He can give examples such as completing homework without help, choosing his own clothes, and helping with homework. This limitation of conceptual understanding is in line with Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development in (Yanti, Riskya, Rahayu, & Intani, 2024) , where children aged 7–11 years are in the concrete operational stage. In this stage, the child is able to understand abstract concepts slowly, but still needs real experience to strengthen his understanding. Therefore, it is not surprising that Riyan can define independence in the abstract, but has been able to recognize and carry out behaviors related to independence (Huda & Susdarwono, 2023).

Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism in (Irawati, Suryani, Luji, & Mulyanto, 2023) It also supports these findings, which states that children's knowledge is formed through social interaction and direct experience in their cultural environment. This shows that cognitively, Riyan has quite understood the concept of independence, most likely influenced by formal education and communication patterns in the family. In addition, Riyan expressed his pride when he was able to do it himself. He feels more appreciated by his family and friends when he shows his ability to be independent. This feeling suggests a relationship between self-identity and self-actions, which according to Erikson is an important basis in the development of the industrial stage versus inferiority. Riyan also does various activities independently, such as waking up early without a reminder, preparing school supplies, and taking care of her sister while her parents work. He can also make small decisions such as setting time to study and play. This illustrates the balance between understanding, feelings, and actions in the aspect of independence.

Factors that affect Riyan's independence are family, Riyan's parents are aware and do not prohibit him from engaging in begging activities. Then his peers, Riyan's friends were very influential in arousing his desire to do begging activities, because Riyan often did these activities with them. Then the environment, the environment around Riyan's residence also supports begging activities, because many people around him tolerate these activities.

The third respondent is a child named Bagas. Bagas is 12 years old, his family's economic background is underprivileged, the main motivation for Bagas to become a beggar is because he sees his housemate who is also a beggar. He has a low level of independence because when asked by Bagas he could not explain what independence is, he only answered "*don't know*". This answer shows that he does not yet have a clear mental picture of what independence means. This reflects his weak cognitive aspect and lack of experience that could help him understand the concept. In addition, Bagas felt anxious and uncalm when he had to do something without the help of others. He prefers to be accompanied or helped, and feels afraid when he has to bear responsibility. Like when doing begging, Bagas did it together with his mother. This is in accordance with the findings (Mulati, 2023) If parents can be a positive role model for their children, they are more likely to have good qualities. He admitted that he carried out begging activities because he was supported by his mother. This feeling hinders the development of self-confidence which is very important in building emotional independence. In his daily activities, Bagas is very dependent on adults. He has not been able to manage himself independently and is always waiting for instructions to complete tasks. This shows that from a psychomotor and social perspective, Bagas's independence is still very limited.

The first factor that affects Bagas' independence is family. Economic uncertainty in the family is the main reason, where the limited income of parents encourages Bagas to contribute

to begging activities. The second is the environment. The neighborhood where Bagas lives supports begging activities and views these activities as commonplace. And lastly, peers. Bagas' friends even strengthened his dependence. He tends to follow his friends and does not have a firm attitude. His friends also often do begging. In this case, peers serve as an inhibitor of independence, as they reinforce the habit of dependence and the fear of trying on their own.

The results of the interviews show that children who carry out the begging routine tend to have an effect on their independence attitude, where begging is not a positive independence. The independence shown by the children involved in begging activities at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cemetery in Cirebon is a form of deviant independence, because it is a social tradition and economic pressure, not from instilling moral values or positive productive skills.

The high number of children who are beggars in the area of the Sunan Gunung Jati cemetery, Cirebon, reflects complex and diverse social problems. Through observations and interviews, it was revealed that the presence of children begging in these locations was not only due to reasons of financial poverty, but also influenced by social and cultural systems that allowed even in some situations, to encourage the practice. From a sociological point of view, this situation shows a lack of supervision from the public and the authorities of child exploitation in public spaces. Children who should be learning in school are instead engaged in economic activities on the streets that are fraught with dangerous risks. From a psychological perspective, children's participation in begging activities can affect their mental and moral growth. Children become accustomed to dependence on the goodness of others and miss out on opportunities to understand independent values, responsibilities, and work ethic. An environment that allows children to beg can also create a cycle of poverty that continues to repeat from generation to generation. To understand this phenomenon more comprehensively, researchers conducted observations and interviews with three informants who had direct involvement.

CONCLUSION

The tradition of tourists and pilgrims giving *shodaqoh* or charity at the Sunan Gunung Jati Cirebon Cemetery Complex is deeply ingrained in the community, fostering beliefs in spiritual blessings. However, this practice indirectly supports begging behaviors among adults and children, particularly elementary school-age children who show a form of independence shaped more by economic hardship and social pressure than by genuine character development. This dependence on begging negatively impacts their growth in responsibility and work ethic. Without integrated character education and oversight from family, school, and community, the *sodaqoh* tradition risks perpetuating this reliance and hindering true independence. Future research should explore effective interventions combining cultural traditions with character education programs to support children's independence while respecting community values at pilgrimage sites like Sunan Gunung Jati.

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