

Constructivist Facilitation and Ethical Learning Culture at SMP Eksperimental Mangunan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how constructivist facilitation and ethical learning culture are enacted in the daily praxis of SMP Eksperimental Mangunan, a school known for its humanizing and student-centered philosophy. The research problem is rooted in the gap between the dominant instructional paradigm in Indonesian schools, characterized by teacher control, standardization, and transmission of knowledge, and the need for learning environments that nurture autonomy, participation, and ethical relationality. The purpose of this study is to analyze how learning facilitation is practiced, what ethical principles guide teacher–student interactions, and how these practices shape student learning experiences. Using an ethnographic qualitative approach, data were collected through prolonged classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, document analysis, and participation in daily school activities. The results show that learning at Mangunan is facilitated through inquiry-based, dialogic, and experiential processes that position students as meaning-makers rather than passive recipients. Teachers act as facilitators who provide freedom, encouragement, and reflective scaffolding instead of control and evaluation-centered authority. Ethical practices emerge in the form of respectful communication, emotional attunement, dialogic conflict resolution, and relational pedagogy where students' voices are genuinely valued. Students report increased confidence, critical thinking, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. The findings discuss how facilitation and ethics intersect to produce a humanizing learning culture, one that supports cognitive growth through trust, care, freedom, and responsibility. Constructivist learning is not merely a method but a school-wide relational ethic. The study concludes that Mangunan represents a viable model for shifting from instructional control to facilitative praxis, offering insight for schools seeking transformative pedagogy. As a recommendation, schools and teacher education programs should embed facilitative competencies and relational ethics as core pedagogical standards, not complementary practices.

Keywords: *Constructivist Pedagogy, Ethical Practices, Facilitating Learning, Humanizing*

1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of contemporary education is marked by tensions between traditional instructional paradigms and the growing demand for more humane, participatory, and constructivist-oriented approaches to learning. In many contexts, including Indonesia, the dominant pedagogical culture continues to rely on teacher-centered transmission, standardization, and compliance-based evaluation (Sagala, 2019; Suryadi & Idrus, 2021). This model positions the teacher as the primary authority and students as passive recipients of predetermined knowledge. While this paradigm

has long been institutionalized through curriculum structures, assessment systems, and school governance, it has also been widely critiqued for its inability to cultivate higher-order thinking, autonomy, ethical sensibilities, and deep learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2018).

Constructivist theories of learning challenge this transmissive model by asserting that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction, dialogue, and reflection (Fosnot, 2013; Bruner, 1996). Learning therefore emerges not from the delivery of content but from processes of meaning-making embedded in real experiences. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that learning is fundamentally social, mediated by cultural tools and sustained through collaborative engagement within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). These ideas, further developed by contemporary scholars of socio-constructivism, imply a radically different role for teachers: not as instructors who impose structure, but as facilitators who scaffold inquiry, support autonomy, and nurture relational trust (Sawyer, 2014; Murphy & Knight, 2016).

In parallel, a growing body of work highlights the importance of ethics, emotions, and relationality in education. Ethical pedagogy is not limited to moral instruction but encompasses the quality of interactions between teachers and students: respect, care, voice, recognition, and relational responsibility (Noddings, 2013; Biesta, 2022). Freire (1970) argues that humanizing education must be dialogical, grounded in mutual respect and the belief in learners' capacity to think, critique, and act. Such perspectives demand a shift from control-based teaching toward relational pedagogy, where learning is shaped through dialogue, empathy, and shared agency (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Research also shows that when students feel respected and emotionally supported, they develop stronger motivation, deeper engagement, and a greater sense of belonging, critical elements of holistic learning (Wentzel, 2016; Zins et al., 2004).

Within this global discourse, SMP Eksperimental Mangunan has emerged as an important site for examining how constructivist facilitation and ethical learning culture can be enacted as daily praxis. The school's philosophy, deeply influenced by the humanism of Y. B. Mangunwijaya, foregrounds freedom, trust, and lived experiences as central to children's growth. Learning at Mangunan is intentionally organized to honor students' agency, curiosity, and emotional worlds. This provides a unique counter-narrative to the widespread empirical studies documenting how facilitation and relational ethics operate in everyday school life remain limited. Most research tends to focus on curricular policy, instructional strategies, or learning outcomes without addressing the relational and ethical dimensions that sustain meaningful learning interactions (Rahardjo & Juwita, 2022; Hasanah, 2020). There is also a shortage of ethnographic research that captures the lived experiences of teachers and students as they negotiate autonomy, voice, and emotional attunement inside classrooms.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic research design. Ethnography is suited for examining cultural practices, relational behaviors, and pedagogical interactions within natural settings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Since the purpose of this study was to investigate how constructivist facilitation and ethical learning culture are enacted daily at SMP Eksperimental Mangunan, ethnography allowed for extended immersion in the field, capturing subtle relational dynamics and pedagogical patterns that cannot be observed in short-term visits.

Ethnography was chosen for three main reasons:

- (a) To generate thick descriptions of learning facilitation as a social and cultural practice (Geertz, 1973).
- (b) To understand relational ethics and facilitative interactions from the perspectives and lived experiences of teachers and students.
- (c) To document school-wide norms, routines, and values that shape a humanizing learning environment. The research approach involved prolonged classroom observations, active participation in school routines, in-depth interviews, and document analysis.

This design aligns with constructivist and interpretivist epistemologies that view knowledge as socially constructed and context-dependent (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.2. Participants of the Study

The study used purposive sampling and criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2015). Participants were selected because they met specific criteria relevant to the research questions: (a) actively engaged in daily learning activities; (b) familiar with facilitative classroom practices; (c) part of the school's ethical and relational culture.

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Participant Criteria	Number Group	Selection
Teachers	7	Consistently use dialogic, inquiry-based, and facilitative pedagogies.
Students	45	Represent Grades 7-9, diverse backgrounds, actively involved in Mangunan learning culture
School Principal	1	Understands the school's philosophy and pedagogical direction
School Staff	2	Engaged in routines shaping school culture

2.3. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through four complementary qualitative methods that allowed for an in-depth understanding of the pedagogical and ethical culture at SMP Eksperimental Mangunan. First, prolonged classroom observations were conducted over a period of 30 consecutive days, covering various subject and grade levels. These observations generated detailed descriptive and reflective fieldnotes that captured the nuances of facilitation practices, ethical interactions, emotional climate, discourse patterns, and classroom dynamics.

Second, in-depth interviews were carried out with key participants, including seven teachers, forty-five students (interviewed individually or in small groups), and the school principal. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and was recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices. Third, document analysis was used to examine a range of school artifacts, such as lesson plans, school philosophy statements, student journals and portfolios, and internal routine guidelines, which provided additional contextual insights into the school's pedagogical values and cultural norms.

Finally, the researcher engaged in participant observation by joining daily school activities, including morning circles, break-time interactions, community service engagements, and teacher meetings. This immersion enabled the researcher to access tacit cultural understandings and relational practices that might not surface through interviews or formal observations alone. Collectively, these methods created a rich, triangulated dataset that illuminated how constructivist facilitation and ethical relationality are enacted in everyday school life.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study followed the principles of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), with the support of NVivo 14 software to manage, code, and organize the qualitative dataset. The process began with data familiarization, during which the researcher repeatedly read all forms of data, including fieldnotes, interview transcripts, reflective memos, and document sources, to gain a holistic sense of emerging patterns. Following this, initial coding was conducted inductively and deductively, generating codes that captured specific features of the data related to facilitative strategies, dialogic practices, emotional attunement, ethical relationality, student agency, collaboration, and conflict resolution.

After coding, the researcher searched for themes by grouping related codes into broader conceptual clusters such as constructivist facilitation, ethical relational practices, humanizing pedagogy, dialogic learning culture, and student autonomy. These preliminary themes were then reviewed in relation to the entire dataset to ensure coherence, internal consistency, and alignment with both empirical evidence and

theoretical frameworks. Once validated, themes were refined, defined, and named to represent clear conceptual categories grounded in constructivist learning theory, relational pedagogy, humanistic educational philosophy, and ethics in education. The final stage involved producing the analytic narrative, where the themes were synthesized into a coherent report that integrated empirical findings with relevant theoretical perspectives to generate an interpretive understanding of facilitative and ethical learning practices in the school context.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal how SMP Eksperimental Mangunan constructs a learning culture grounded in facilitation, ethical relations, and humanistic educational philosophy. Through prolonged observations, interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis, several interrelated themes emerged. These findings demonstrate how teachers shift from traditional instruction to dialogic, relational facilitation and how this pedagogical stance shapes students' agency, engagement, and ethical consciousness.

3.1 Constructivist Facilitation as the Core Pedagogical Practice

Across classrooms and learning activities, teachers consistently enacted facilitation rather than direct instruction. Instead of beginning lessons with explanations, teachers invited students to explore problems, ask questions, and construct ideas collaboratively. Observation data show that teachers routinely responded to student inquiries with counter-questions, such as "What do you think?", "Why do you think it happens?", or "Who has a different view?", which positioned students as active meaning-makers.

Teachers described this approach as a shift from "mengajar" to "membelajarkan," emphasizing learning as a dialogic and relational process. Interviews revealed that teachers viewed their role not as transmitters of knowledge but as designers of experiences and facilitators of student reasoning. This aligns with constructivist learning theory, where knowledge emerges through interaction, experimentation, and social negotiation.

Students also articulated a heightened sense of ownership of learning. Many reported that they "feel trusted" and "feel heard," highlighting how facilitation fosters both autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Classroom observations confirmed that students were more willing to take risks, challenge ideas, and contribute to group discussions when teachers positioned them as capable thinkers.

3.2 Relational and Emotional Pedagogy: Ethics, Care, and Classroom Climate

Findings from this study indicate that ethical relationality and emotional attunement are not separate dimensions of pedagogy at SMP Eksperimental Mangunan but form an integrated relational, emotional pedagogy that underpins all learning processes. Teachers' ethical practices are enacted through emotionally responsive interactions that cultivate trust, psychological safety, and a sense of belonging, thereby enabling meaningful engagement and deep learning.

Classroom observations consistently revealed that teachers prioritize relationships over procedural efficiency. Ethical relational practices were expressed through attentive listening, respectful dialogue, non-coercive guidance, and sensitivity to students' emotional states. Teachers frequently paused academic activities to acknowledge students' feelings, mediate interpersonal tensions, or facilitate reflective conversations. Such actions demonstrate that care and ethics are embedded in pedagogical decision-making rather than treated as supplementary or reactive measures.

Students described their teachers using relational terms such as *sahabat belajar* (learning companions), *pendamping* (mentors), and *teman bicara* (dialogue partners). These descriptions reflect a learning environment characterized by emotional closeness and mutual respect. Many students reported feeling "not afraid of being wrong," which encouraged them to express ideas, ask questions, and engage in dialogue without fear of judgment. This sense of emotional safety aligns with humanistic principles of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity (Rogers, 1969), as well as relational ethics emphasizing recognition and care (Noddings, 2013).

Emotions were treated as legitimate and integral to learning rather than distractions from academic goals. Observations showed that lessons often began with emotional check-ins, such as teachers asking students how they were feeling that day. These practices set a tone of openness and emotional acknowledgment, allowing students to bring their whole selves into the learning process. Emotional literacy was further developed through reflective discussions on conflict, fairness, responsibility, and personal growth, reinforcing students' ethical awareness and social understanding.

The classroom climate that emerged from these relational and emotional practices was marked by warmth, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. Physical arrangements, such as flexible seating and shared learning spaces, reinforced a sense of ownership and belonging. Peer interactions reflected high levels of care and cooperation, with students voluntarily offering support, validating each other's contributions, and resolving disagreements through dialogue. These dynamics demonstrate how emotional attunement and ethical relationality work together to sustain engagement and deepen learning.

The findings suggest that ethical pedagogy at Mangunan is not primarily rule-based or disciplinary in nature, but relational and affective. Ethics are lived through daily interactions that honor students' dignity, emotions, and voices. In this sense, relational and emotional pedagogy functions as a foundational condition for constructivist facilitation, enabling students to participate actively, take intellectual risks, and develop both cognitive and ethical capacities. This integrated approach reinforces the argument that humanizing education requires attention not only to how knowledge is constructed, but also to how relationships and emotions shape the conditions of learning.

3.3 Dialogic Learning Culture and the Centrality of Meaning-Making

The school fosters a dialogic learning culture where meaning-making occurs through collective inquiry. Conversations, not worksheets, lectures, or testing, serve as the main medium of learning. Dialogues were rich, open-ended, and collaborative, often extending beyond the academic content to include values, emotions, and lived experiences. Teachers facilitated discussions that invited multiple perspectives, encouraged disagreement, and supported students in justifying their reasoning. Discourse analysis from classroom dialogues revealed high levels of turn-taking, question-posing, clarification requests, and elaborations indicative of deep engagement.

During several observed lessons, students organically formed inquiry communities, using talk to explore concepts such as justice, environmental responsibility, social empathy, and personal identity. This aligns with dialogic theories (Freire, Bakhtin) where dialogue is a vehicle for critical consciousness and ethical awareness. In interviews, students reported that learning at Mangunan “feels like a conversation,” “is connected to real life,” and “helps us understand ourselves and others.” Such remarks highlight the school's success in constructing learning as a meaning-making journey rather than a procedural academic task.

3.4 Student Autonomy and Agency as Outcomes of Facilitation

One of the most salient findings is the emergence of strong student autonomy as both a pedagogical outcome and cultural expectation. Across activities, students demonstrated independence in choosing tasks, organizing group work, negotiating roles, resolving conflicts, and seeking help when needed. Teachers intentionally designed learning spaces to support agency, for example, flexible seating, open access to learning materials, co-created class rules, and student-led presentations. Students frequently initiated questions, shared ideas without prompting, and made decisions about project direction.

Interviews revealed that students perceived autonomy not merely as freedom but as responsibility. They frequently used terms such as “*mengatur diri*,” “*tanggung*

jawab,” and “*berinisiatif*,” indicating internalization of self-regulation and accountability. This agency extended beyond academic tasks. During break times, morning circles, and community service, students independently facilitated discussions, negotiated issues among peers, and demonstrated leadership. The findings suggest that facilitation-oriented pedagogy cultivates students’ capacity for self-regulated learning, ethical decision-making, and collaborative problem-solving.

3.5 Ethical School Culture Beyond the Classroom

Ethical and facilitative practices extended into broader school life. Morning circles fostered democratic participation and communal bonding, while teacher meetings modeled the same dialogic and reflective practices used with students. Community service activities cultivated social empathy, responsibility, and connection to the environment. Document analysis confirmed that the school explicitly grounds its culture in values such as solidarity, justice, respect, and community participation. These values were not merely stated but observable in daily routines and teacher–student interactions.

The principal emphasized that ethical culture is “*bukan aturan, tetapi cara hidup bersama*” (not a rule, but a way of living together). This perspective was evident in how conflicts were resolved through dialogue rather than punishment, and how students were encouraged to reflect on the consequences of their action.

3.6 Synthesis: Interconnected Ecosystem of Facilitated, Ethical, and Humanizing Learning

The findings reveal an integrated ecosystem where constructivist facilitation, ethical relationality, dialogic culture, emotional attunement, and student agency work together to create a humanizing learning environment. These elements mutually reinforce each other:

- (a) Facilitation cultivates autonomy and agency.
- (b) Ethical relations nurture psychological safety and trust.
- (c) Dialogic practices deepen meaning-making and critical thinking.
- (d) Emotional attunement strengthens engagement and belonging.
- (e) School culture sustains values that permeate teaching and learning.

This ecosystem aligns with humanistic education (Rogers), dialogic pedagogy (Freire), constructivism (Vygotsky, Piaget), and contemporary theories of ethical and relational teaching (Biesta, Noddings). Overall, the results demonstrate that SMP Eksperimental Mangunan successfully embodies a model of education that is deeply facilitative, ethical, relational, and humanizing, providing an alternative to conventional, instruction-driven schooling.

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how constructivist facilitation and ethical learning culture are enacted at SMP Eksperimental Mangunan through the daily interactions between teachers and students. The findings reveal that Mangunan has successfully developed a pedagogical ecosystem where facilitation replaces control, dialogue replaces one-way instruction, and ethical relations replace authoritarian discipline. The first research question *how is learning facilitation practiced in the school?*, is answered through the observation that teachers consistently adopt inquiry-based, dialogic, and experiential approaches that position students as active constructors of knowledge. Facilitation emerges not merely as a teaching strategy but as a deeply embedded stance characterized by providing space, scaffolding thinking, encouraging questions, and nurturing students' autonomy.

The second research question, *what ethical principles guide teacher–student interactions*, is addressed through evidence of relational ethics embedded in everyday practices? Teachers demonstrate empathy, respect, emotional atonements, and non-coercive guidance, shaping a learning environment grounded in trust, care, and mutual dignity. Ethical practices are not confined to formal instruction but permeate school routines, conversations, conflict resolution, and shared community life, affirming that ethics is a lived experience rather than a set of rules.

The third research question *how do these pedagogical and ethical practices shape student experiences?* is answered by students' reports of increased confidence, critical thinking, agency, collaboration, and belonging. Students describe feeling heard, trusted, and valued, which enhances their willingness to take risks, articulate ideas, and engage deeply in learning. The school successfully fosters a humanizing learning culture that integrates cognitive, emotional, and social development, demonstrating that facilitation and ethics are mutually reinforcing.

Based on these conclusions, several suggestions emerge for educational stakeholders. For schools seeking transformative pedagogical change, it is recommended that facilitation be adopted not as an alternative method but as a foundational orientation toward learning. Creating dialogic spaces, encouraging student autonomy, and embedding reflective inquiry into classroom routines can support deeper engagement and ethical sensitivity. School leaders may consider reorienting institutional culture toward relational trust, shared responsibility, and collaborative decision-making so that ethical practice becomes a whole-school norm rather than an individual teacher's initiative.

For teachers and practitioners, the study suggests the importance of developing facilitative competencies such as crafting open-ended questions, offering non-directive guidance, listening with empathy, and cultivating emotionally safe learning environments. Professional development programs should integrate modules on

relational pedagogy, emotional atonement, and ethical classroom communication to strengthen teachers' capacity to enact humanizing practices.

For teacher education institutions, it is advisable to embed facilitative pedagogy and relational ethics as core components of curriculum rather than optional or supplementary topics. Pre-service teachers should be provided with authentic opportunities to experience facilitating learning, observing dialogic classrooms, and practicing ethical decision-making. Such preparation is essential for developing future educators who can shift from instructional dominance to facilitative praxis.

Finally, for policymakers, the findings indicate the need to design policies that allow schools greater flexibility in pedagogical design, assessment practices, and relational approaches to discipline. Policies should support schools that prioritize autonomy, participation, and holistic student development instead of reinforcing standardization and control.

In sum, SMP Eksperimental Mangunan offers a compelling model of constructivist and ethical education in practice. Its example demonstrates that humanizing, student-centered learning cultures can flourish when facilitation, dialogue, and ethics are intentionally cultivated as intertwined dimensions of schooling.

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