

RESEARCH

Received: May 3, 2026

Revised: May 29, 2026

Accepted: June 15, 2026

Reconstructing Character Education Through Semiotic Analysis of Wall-E in Islamic Education: Media Literacy, Humanitarian Ethics, and Socio-Political

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Abstract

The increasing dominance of technology and consumer culture has intensified humanitarian crises, including environmental degradation, declining social empathy, and the erosion of moral agency. These challenges raise important concerns for character education, particularly within Islamic education, which emphasizes humanitarian ethics, social responsibility, and ethical citizenship. This study aims to reconstruct character education through a semiotic analysis of the animated film WALL-E and examine its relevance as a pedagogical medium for media literacy in Islamic education. Using a qualitative research design, this study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework of denotation, connotation, and myth to analyze selected visual and narrative scenes. Data were collected through repeated film observation and supported by literature on semiotics, character education, media literacy, and Islamic education. The findings show that WALL-E represents reconstructed educational values, including ecological responsibility, moral agency toward technology, social empathy, critical thinking, collective responsibility, and socio-political awareness. At the mythological level, the film critiques technological domination and consumerism while promoting moral reconstruction grounded in human dignity and ethical engagement with society and nature. This study contributes to educational discourse by bridging visual representation, humanitarian ethics, and character education for the digital age.

Keywords: Character Education; Semiotic Analysis; Media Literacy; Islamic Education; Humanitarian Ethics

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology and consumer culture has profoundly transformed human life, social relations, and moral orientations. While technological progress has offered efficiency and convenience, it has simultaneously intensified humanitarian crises manifested in environmental degradation, social alienation, and declining ethical responsibility. These crises reflect not only ecological problems but also deeper moral and structural challenges in contemporary society, where technological development often advances without adequate ethical reflection (Alatas, 2020; Muthmainnah, 2020).

Within the context of Islamic education, these humanitarian challenges pose significant concerns for character formation. Islamic education emphasizes the development of ethical individuals who uphold humanitarian values, social responsibility, and moral agency. However, contemporary educational practices frequently prioritize cognitive achievement and technological competence, leaving moral and affective dimensions underdeveloped. As a result, learners may become digitally skilled yet lack critical ethical awareness and social responsibility (Sulistyarini & Fatonah, 2022).

Recent educational research highlights the growing role of media, particularly film, as an alternative pedagogical resource for character education. Film integrates visual symbolism, narrative structure, and emotional engagement, allowing learners to reflect on moral dilemmas and social realities in a contextual and experiential manner (Arsyad et al., 2021; Maharani, 2019). In Islamic education, such media-based learning approaches provide opportunities to contextualize humanitarian ethics and character values in ways that resonate with learners' lived experiences (Yunansah et al., 2022).

The pedagogical potential of film is closely related to visual literacy, defined as the ability to interpret, analyze, and critically evaluate visual messages. Visual narratives construct meaning through signs, symbols, and ideological representations that shape viewers' perceptions of reality (Avgerinou & Ericson, 1997; Serafini & Reid, 2024). From a semiotic perspective, visual texts do not merely reflect reality but actively construct moral, cultural, and ideological meanings, making semiotics a relevant analytical framework for educational research (Stokes, 2002).

The animated film *WALL-E* presents a dystopian depiction of a future shaped by environmental destruction, technological domination, and human passivity. Through strong visual symbolism and minimal dialogue, the film critiques consumerism, ecological neglect, and the erosion of human agency. Several studies have examined *WALL-E* in relation to environmental ethics and moral messages (Hamzah & Nafsika, 2021; Zubaedah, 2021), indicating its relevance as a cultural text with educational potential.

Previous studies on film and character education have largely focused on identifying moral values or character traits embedded in cinematic narratives (Chaniago, 2020; Widiyanto et al., 2020; Natasari & Kurniawan, 2022). While these studies contribute to understanding film as a moral medium, they often adopt descriptive and normative approaches, emphasizing value transmission rather than reflective moral reasoning. In the context of Islamic education, such approaches may limit opportunities for critical ethical engagement and deeper character formation (Arthur et al., 2016; Walker & Thoma, 2017).

Despite the expanding literature on film-based character education, limited attention has been given to systematically integrating semiotic analysis with educational theory, particularly within Islamic education. Existing studies on *WALL-E* tend to analyze moral messages or environmental themes without articulating how visual signs generate layered educational meanings relevant to contemporary humanitarian and socio-political challenges (Aulia & Rozi, 2023; Kevinia et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a lack of conceptual frameworks that bridge visual semiotics and character education in Islamic educational contexts.

Addressing this gap requires an approach that moves beyond surface-level moral interpretation toward a reflective analysis of meaning-making processes. Roland Barthes' semiotic model denotation, connotation, and myth offers a critical lens for uncovering ideological and ethical dimensions embedded in visual narratives (Oktaviani et al., 2022). When applied within Islamic education, semiotic analysis enables the reconstruction of

character education as a reflective and dialogical process, emphasizing moral agency, humanitarian ethics, and socio-political awareness rather than moral indoctrination.

Therefore, this study aims to reconstruct character education through a semiotic analysis of WALL-E by positioning animated film as a reflective pedagogical medium in Islamic education. Unlike previous studies that merely identify moral messages, this research proposes a semiotic-based framework that synthesizes visual signs, humanitarian narratives, and educational values. This reconstruction contributes to Islamic educational discourse by offering an alternative model for fostering ecological responsibility, moral agency, social empathy, and socio-political awareness in response to the ethical challenges of the digital age.

Implications for Character Education and Media Literacy

The conceptual framework developed in this study carries significant implications for character education and media literacy, particularly within the context of Islamic education. As humanitarian crises increasingly emerge from environmental degradation, technological domination, and social alienation, character education can no longer rely solely on normative moral instruction. Instead, it must engage learners in reflective and critical processes that enable them to interpret ethical challenges embedded in contemporary social realities. Visual media, especially animated films, provide a pedagogical space where such ethical reflection can be meaningfully facilitated.

From the perspective of character education, the semiotic analysis of WALL-E demonstrates that moral values are not transmitted explicitly but are constructed through layered visual meanings. The reconstruction of educational values—such as ecological responsibility, moral agency toward technology, social empathy, critical thinking, collective responsibility, and socio-political awareness emerges through the interaction between denotative images, connotative interpretations, and mythological narratives. This approach aligns with contemporary Islamic education, which emphasizes character formation through reflective understanding, ethical awareness, and moral agency rather than prescriptive instruction.

In relation to media literacy, this study underscores the importance of positioning learners as active interpreters of visual texts. Media literacy within Islamic education involves not only understanding media content but also critically examining how visual representations construct ideological and moral meanings. By engaging with films through a semiotic lens, learners are encouraged to question assumptions related to technology, consumption, authority, and social responsibility. This process fosters critical visual literacy and supports the development of socio-political awareness as part of ethical citizenship.

Furthermore, integrating semiotic analysis into character education enables Islamic education to respond more effectively to the challenges of the digital age. Visual narratives function as mediating texts that connect humanitarian ethics with learners' lived experiences, allowing moral values to be contextualized within contemporary socio-cultural realities. As illustrated in the semiotic table, the reconstruction of character education values is grounded in visual narratives rather than abstract moral discourse, reinforcing the relevance of media-based learning in ethical education.

Overall, these implications highlight the potential of animated film as a reflective pedagogical medium that bridges character education and media literacy in Islamic education. By adopting a semiotic-based approach, educators can facilitate learning experiences that promote humanitarian ethics, critical engagement with media, and socio-political awareness without reducing character education to moral indoctrination. This conceptual orientation

strengthens the relevance of Islamic education in addressing ethical and social challenges in an increasingly visual and digital world.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design to address the research questions concerning how humanitarian crises are represented in the animated film WALL-E and how these representations can be reconstructed into educational meanings relevant to character education, media literacy, and Islamic education. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret symbolic meanings embedded in visual narratives rather than to measure variables quantitatively. This method enables an in-depth exploration of ethical values, ideological messages, and socio-political awareness constructed through cinematic representation.

Research Approach and Analytical Framework

The research adopts a semiotic approach based on Roland Barthes' model of signification, which consists of three analytical levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. This framework is used to systematically examine how visual and narrative elements in WALL-E construct layered meanings related to humanitarian crisis, technology, social relations, and moral responsibility. Semiotics is particularly relevant for this study because animated films rely heavily on visual symbolism and minimal dialogue, making meaning construction largely dependent on images, signs, and narrative structures.

At the denotative level, the analysis identifies what is explicitly depicted in selected scenes, including characters, settings, actions, and visual composition. The connotative level explores the implied meanings associated with these visual elements, such as emotional responses, cultural assumptions, and moral interpretations. At the mythological level, the analysis examines broader ideological narratives that naturalize certain worldviews, including consumerism, technological domination, and human responsibility toward society and the environment. This layered analysis allows the reconstruction of educational values that are relevant to contemporary character education within Islamic education.

Research Object and Unit of Analysis

The object of this research is the animated film WALL-E, produced by Pixar Animation Studios. The film was selected due to its strong visual narrative, limited verbal dialogue, and explicit representation of environmental degradation, technological dependency, and social alienation. These characteristics make WALL-E an appropriate text for semiotic analysis and educational interpretation.

The unit of analysis consists of selected visual and narrative scenes that represent humanitarian crisis and moral transformation. Scenes were selected based on their relevance to the research focus, particularly those illustrating environmental destruction, human technology relations, social interaction, authority, and ethical decision-making. The analysis prioritizes visual signs such as imagery, character actions, spatial arrangements, and symbolic objects rather than dialogue alone.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through repeated and careful observation of the film to ensure comprehensive understanding of its visual and narrative structure. During this process, significant scenes and visual signs relevant to the research questions were identified and documented. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly literature on semiotics, character education, media literacy, and Islamic education, which provided theoretical grounding and

contextual support for the analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted through a systematic semiotic process. First, visual signs within selected scenes were identified and described at the denotative level. Second, these signs were interpreted at the connotative level to uncover moral, social, and educational meanings. Third, mythological analysis was applied to reveal broader ideological narratives related to humanitarian ethics, socio-political awareness, and moral agency. The results of this analysis were then synthesized into reconstructed character education values such as ecological responsibility, moral agency toward technology, social empathy, critical thinking, collective responsibility, and socio-political awareness which form the basis for discussion in the context of Islamic education and media literacy.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study employs theoretical triangulation by relating the analytical interpretations to established theories in semiotics, character education, media literacy, and Islamic education. This strategy helps minimize subjective bias and ensures that the reconstructed educational values are grounded in recognized scholarly frameworks. Through this methodological rigor, the study aims to produce findings that are analytically coherent and pedagogically meaningful.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the semiotic analysis of WALL-E by integrating empirical interpretation of visual signs with theoretical perspectives on character education, media literacy, and Islamic education. The discussion does not merely describe cinematic scenes, but reconstructs educational meanings through layered semiotic interpretation denotation, connotation, and mythresulting in a conceptual framework for character education grounded in humanitarian ethics and socio-political awareness.

Table 1. Semiotic Reconstruction of Character Education in WALL-E within Islamic Education

Visual Scene / Sign	Denotation	Connotation	Myth (Barthes)	Reconstructed Character Education Values (Islamic Education)
Earth covered with towering piles of waste	A deserted Earth filled with garbage	Environmental neglect caused by excessive consumption	Modern civilization sacrifices ethical responsibility for convenience and profit	Ecological responsibility, stewardship of creation, environmental ethics
WALL-E persistently cleaning the Earth alone	A robot performing repetitive cleaning tasks	Responsibility, care, and moral consistency despite isolation	Ethical values endure even when humanity abandons responsibility	Moral responsibility, perseverance, ethical commitment
Humans living passively aboard the Axiom	Humans rely entirely on automated technology	Loss of autonomy, bodily disengagement, dependency	Technological governance replaces ethical human agency	Moral agency toward technology, critical awareness, ethical self-control

Social interaction mediated by digital screens	Humans communicate only through screens	Emotional detachment and weakened social bonds	Digital connectivity can mask social alienation	Social empathy, relational ethics, human dignity
AUTO controlling the spaceship	An automated system governing human life	Suppression of human decision-making	Systems dominate when ethics are excluded from governance	Critical thinking, ethical leadership, resistance to unjust authority
Discovery of a living plant	A small green plant found on Earth	Hope, renewal, moral awakening	Nature symbolizes ethical rebirth and responsibility	Hope, care for life, sustainability ethics
Captain's resistance against AUTO	Human challenges automated authority	Reclaiming moral and ethical leadership	Humans must restore ethical judgment in social systems	Ethical citizenship, leadership, socio-political awareness
Humans returning to Earth and cultivating land	Humans walk, work, and plant together	Collective effort and responsibility	Humanity is restored through ethical labor and cooperation	Collective responsibility, cooperation, public responsibility

Table 1 presents the semiotic reconstruction of character education derived from the analysis of WALL-E by mapping visual signs across denotative, connotative, and mythological levels and translating them into reconstructed educational values relevant to Islamic education. Rather than functioning as a descriptive summary of film scenes, the table demonstrates how visual narratives generate layered humanitarian meanings that are transformed into ethical and pedagogical categories. Through this reconstruction, character education is conceptualized as a reflective meaning-making process mediated by visual semiotics, emphasizing ecological responsibility, moral agency toward technology, social empathy, ethical citizenship, and socio-political awareness. This synthesis provides the analytical foundation for the subsequent discussion and supports the study's contribution to character education and media literacy within Islamic education.

Finding 1: Environmental Crisis and the Reconstruction of Ecological Responsibility

The findings reveal that WALL-E constructs environmental crisis as a fundamental dimension of humanitarian collapse. At the denotative level, the film depicts Earth as an abandoned planet covered by massive piles of waste. Connotatively, these visual signs symbolize the consequences of excessive consumption and the neglect of environmental responsibility. At the mythological level, the film naturalizes a critique of modern civilization that prioritizes convenience and consumerism over sustainability.

Within the context of Islamic education, this representation reconstructs the value of ecological responsibility as an essential component of character formation. Environmental care is not portrayed as a technical issue, but as a moral and ethical obligation linked to human responsibility toward creation. This finding extends previous studies that emphasize environmental messages in WALL-E (Hamzah & Nafsika, 2021; Zubaedah, 2021) by demonstrating how ecological ethics emerge through visual symbolism and narrative structure, offering a reflective pedagogical resource for character education.

Finding2: Technology, Dehumanization, and Moral Agency

Another central finding concerns the representation of technology and its impact on human agency. The depiction of humans living passively aboard the Axiom spaceship illustrates technological dependence at the denotative level. Connotatively, these scenes signify physical disengagement, loss of autonomy, and weakened social interaction. At the mythological level, WALL-E critiques technological determinism and forms of technological governance that marginalize human agency and ethical judgment. Educationally, this representation reconstructs the value of moral agency toward technology, emphasizing critical awareness rather than technological rejection. In Islamic education, moral agency is closely related to ethical responsibility and conscious decision-making. The film's critique of automated authority, particularly through the character of AUTO, highlights the importance of ethical leadership and human accountability. This finding supports the integration of critical media literacy into character education, enabling learners to reflect on the socio-political implications of technology in shaping human behavior and social structures.

Finding 3: Social Alienation and the Reconstruction of Empathy

The analysis further indicates that social alienation constitutes a key aspect of the humanitarian crisis portrayed in the film. Scenes in which human interaction is mediated entirely through digital screens illustrate emotional detachment and weakened interpersonal bonds at the connotative level. Mythologically, these representations convey a warning about the illusion of connectivity in digital culture, where technological proximity does not necessarily foster social empathy. From the perspective of Islamic education, this representation reconstructs the value of social empathy as a relational and ethical imperative. Rather than framing empathy as an individual trait, WALL-E situates it within social interaction and shared responsibility. This finding aligns with educational approaches that emphasize ethical relations, compassion, and social awareness as core dimensions of character formation. Through visual narratives, the film encourages reflective engagement with issues of social responsibility and human dignity.

Finding 4: Moral Reconstruction, Collective Responsibility, and Ethical Citizenship

A further finding concerns the film's depiction of moral reconstruction through collective action. The Captain's resistance against the automated system symbolizes the reassertion of ethical leadership and human agency. At the mythological level, this conflict represents the necessity of reclaiming moral judgment from rigid systems and technological domination. The return of humans to Earth and their engagement in cultivation and cooperation symbolize the restoration of dignity, responsibility, and communal life. This narrative reconstructs the values of collective responsibility and ethical citizenship, which are central to character education in Islamic education. Moral responsibility is presented not only as an individual concern, but as a shared socio-political obligation within society. By framing moral reconstruction as a collective endeavor, WALL-E provides a pedagogical basis for discussing citizenship, leadership, and public responsibility in educational settings.

Finding 5: Toward a Semiotic-Based Reconstruction of Character Education

Synthesizing these findings, this study proposes a semiotic-based reconstruction of character education derived from the visual narratives of WALL-E. As summarized in the

semiotic table, visual signs are transformed through layered semiotic interpretation into reconstructed educational values, including ecological responsibility, moral agency toward technology, social empathy, critical thinking, collective responsibility, and socio-political awareness. This reconstruction does not propose a new curriculum, but reconfigures character education as a reflective meaning-making process mediated by visual semiotics. Within Islamic education, this reconstructed framework emphasizes humanitarian ethics, ethical citizenship, and critical engagement with contemporary social realities. By positioning animated film as a reflective pedagogical medium, the findings demonstrate how semiotic analysis can bridge visual representation, media literacy, and character formation. This approach contributes to educational research by offering a conceptual model that responds to the ethical and socio-political challenges of the digital age.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the animated film *WALL-E* can serve as a reflective pedagogical medium for reconstructing character education through semiotic analysis within the context of Islamic education. By applying Roland Barthes' semiotic framework denotation, connotation, and myth this research has shown how visual narratives in the film construct layered humanitarian meanings that extend beyond entertainment. The findings reveal that environmental crisis, technological domination, social alienation, and moral reconstruction are symbolically represented and transformed into reconstructed educational values relevant to contemporary character education.

The reconstructed values identified in this study include ecological responsibility, moral agency toward technology, social empathy, critical thinking, collective responsibility, ethical citizenship, and socio-political awareness. These values highlight that character education, particularly in Islamic education, is not merely concerned with moral transmission but with fostering reflective ethical awareness and responsible engagement with social realities. Through visual semiotics, animated film becomes a mediating space where learners can critically interpret humanitarian issues and develop moral agency in response to the ethical challenges of the digital age.

This study contributes to educational research by proposing a semiotic-based framework for character education that bridges visual representation, media literacy, and humanitarian ethics in Islamic education. Rather than offering a prescriptive curriculum, the framework reconfigures character education as a meaning-making process that encourages critical reflection, ethical judgment, and socio-political awareness. In doing so, this research expands the use of film-based learning as a conceptual and pedagogical resource within Islamic educational contexts.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited to textual and visual analysis of a single animated film. Future research may extend this framework by incorporating empirical studies in educational settings, such as classroom-based implementations, learner reception analysis, or experimental designs to examine the impact of semiotic-based film learning on character development. Further studies could also explore comparative analyses across different films, cultural contexts, or religious educational traditions to deepen understanding of how visual narratives shape humanitarian ethics and socio-political awareness. By pursuing these research directions, future scholarship can strengthen the role of media literacy and semiotic interpretation in advancing character education in an increasingly visual and digital world.

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