

## Character Education: A Review of Implementation and Challenges in Schools

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### Abstract

Character education is an important effort in instilling moral and ethical values in the personality of learners, not only within the scope of school but also at home and society. In Indonesia, its implementation is faced with various challenges, including gaps in teachers' understanding, lack of resources, and student behavior that shows non-compliance with character values. Nonetheless, character education brings great opportunities in shaping individuals who are moral, responsible and have an awareness of the importance of tolerance and cooperation in society. Joint efforts between educators, parents and communities as well as strong policy support are needed to overcome barriers and strengthen character education to create an educational environment that supports the moral and ethical growth of Indonesia's young people.

**Keywords:** character education, implementation, challenges, schools, Indonesia

### 1. Introduction

Character education is an ongoing effort to instill good habits in students, so that they have the ability to act and behave in accordance with the values that have become an integral part of their personality (Yandri, 2022). Character education is not only limited to the school environment, but it is also important to be taught and strengthened in the context of the home and social environment of the community. Today, the importance of character education is not only relevant for children and adolescents, but also for adults (Widodo, 2021). Through holistic character education, individuals can gain a strong moral foundation, form a meaningful personality, and develop positive attitudes in daily life.

In Indonesia, the implementation of character education is not only about overcoming obstacles but also exploring opportunities to strengthen the moral and ethical foundations of education. Among the challenges mentioned in the study (Yansah et al., 2023) is the gap in understanding and implementing character education among teachers. Furthermore, another challenge described by (Kurdi, 2023) is the lack of resources to teach character education content. In addition, other challenges arise from the behavior of students who still violate school rules, leave from learning hours, yell at their teachers, and even hurt their teachers in verbal and non-verbal ways (Rahmat et al., 2020) indicating non-compliance with school rules and lack of awareness of character values.

Therefore, greater efforts are needed to harmonize this understanding through contextualized and continuous training for educators. Along with this, there needs to be strong policy support to ensure that resources including books, curricula and teaching aids appropriate to the content of character education are adequately available and that counseling, coaching and awareness-raising efforts related to the importance of moral values need to be increased not only in the school environment but also involving parents and the community at large.

However, in the midst of these challenges, character education carries great potential for student development. With the right approach, character education can be the foundation for forming

individuals who have integrity, moral leadership, and awareness of the importance of cooperation and tolerance in a diverse society (Febriantina et al., 2021). This allows them to become individuals who are moral, uphold honesty, and have a sense of tolerance among others (Ministry of Education and Culture RI, 2023). Through learning values such as empathy, honesty and responsibility, students can be empowered to become individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also have a strong moral sensitivity (Yusriadi, Anwar, et al., 2020).

A careful analysis of the challenges and opportunities in implementing character education is not only important to understand the constraints but also to identify appropriate solutions and provide recommendations to relevant parties. This will help in creating an educational environment that supports the growth of strong character in every generation of students in Indonesia. Thus, character education is not only a school program, but also the main foundation in shaping morals and ethics for individuals and society as a whole.

## **2. Method**

The research methodology for exploring the implementation and challenges of character education in schools should begin with a qualitative research design, focusing on a detailed, in-depth analysis. This could ideally take the form of a case study approach, where specific schools with established character education programs are examined closely. The selection of participants is crucial. A purposive sampling method should be used to select a diverse group of participants, including teachers, school administrators, students, and parents. It's important to include schools from various socio-economic and geographical backgrounds to ensure a well-rounded understanding. Data collection should be multi-faceted. In-depth interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents will provide insights into their perspectives. Focus group discussions with students can offer a deeper understanding of their experiences. Observational methods, such as attending character education sessions and general school environments, alongside the review of existing documentation and reports, will add contextual depth to the data. Ethical considerations are paramount. Informed consent must be obtained from all participants, and particular care should be taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of student participants. The cultural and social contexts of the schools must be respected throughout the research process. For data analysis, transcribing interviews and focus group discussions verbatim ensures accuracy. Thematic analysis will be used to identify and explore key themes and patterns. Triangulating data from various sources enhances the credibility of the findings.

## **3. Result**

The findings of this research on the implementation and challenges of character education in schools illustrate various aspects related to the direct experiences of stakeholders in the context of character education. The following is a more detailed explanation of the findings of this study:

### **Variations in Teacher Understanding**

In-depth interviews with teachers revealed that their understanding of the concept of character education varied. Some teachers had a clearer idea of how character values should be integrated in the curriculum and daily classroom activities, while others had different interpretations or a more limited understanding. Interview results from a teacher who is an English teacher in a secondary school, emphasized the importance of incorporating character values into every aspect of learning. She has a clear opinion that the subject matter should be a vehicle to elicit discussions about moral values such as honesty, cooperation and empathy. She actively looks for moments in the lesson to present concrete examples and discuss how students can apply these values in their daily lives.

On the other hand, another teacher who teaches Mathematics at the same level had a slightly different view. Although she also agreed on the importance of character values, she focused more on the

application of these values in practical daily situations. For her, math is a tool to teach role modeling, responsibility and discipline. In the interviews, it was revealed that these differences in understanding stem not only from their teaching backgrounds, but also from each teacher's personal approach to how character values should be integrated in their learning contexts.

### **Obstacles in Integrating Character Values**

Direct classroom observations and analysis of learning materials and extracurricular activities provide an overview of the extent to which character values are applied in practice. Findings indicate that some character values are explicitly applied in learning, while others are less integrated or only a secondary focus. Observations made in class 10A showed that teachers put significant emphasis on character values such as cooperation and honesty during discussion sessions. Concrete examples were given when students were invited to work together to complete group tasks, and discussions on honesty were presented in the context of everyday reality. However, other values such as empathy or responsibility were less highlighted in the learning process.

On the other hand, in the extracurricular activities of the literature club, there is an obvious attempt to integrate character values. However, in an in-depth analysis, it appears that the implementation of character values still tends to be something more secondary. Although there are efforts to discuss character values, the application is still limited to a few moments, and not the main focus of the activities. The obstacles that arise from this finding lie in several factors. One of them is the time restriction in a tight curriculum, which may make it difficult for teachers to thoroughly explore character values in each lesson. In addition, there may be limited resources and training for teachers to effectively integrate character values in daily learning. In extracurricular activities, the constraint may lie in the more specific focus of the activity, making the teaching of character values secondary to the main agenda of the activity.

### **Student and Parent Perceptions**

Interviews and group discussions by students and parents provided insights to this study on how they perceive the effectiveness of character education in schools. The findings reveal the extent to which students feel engaged in learning character values as well as whether parents feel the values are reflected in their child's attitude and behavior at home. Interviews with students showed a varied understanding of character education at school. One student stated, "I feel that learning about values such as cooperation and honesty really helps me in getting along with my classmates." However, there was also a student who expressed, "I think we learn the values, but I don't always see how it can be applied in real life." From the interviews with students, it appears that there are differences in their perceptions of character education at school. One student showed a positive experience by directly benefiting from learning values such as cooperation and honesty in daily interactions with his classmates. This shows that there are students who feel involved and can apply these character values in real situations.

However, there were other students who expressed doubts regarding the application of these values in real life. They feel that there is a gap between what they learn in school and how these character values can be implemented in their daily lives outside the school environment. This suggests a potential need to strengthen the link between classroom learning and practical application in students' lives outside the formal education environment. In conclusion, the results of the interviews show that while some students perceive direct benefits from learning character values, there is also a need for improved or closer linkages between what is learned in school and its application in the context of students' daily lives outside the educational environment. This highlights the importance of making the learning of character values more relevant and practically applicable in students' real lives.

Group discussions with parents revealed mixed views. Some parents expressed their satisfaction with the school's efforts in educating their children's character. One parent said, "I see the development of responsible attitudes in my children after they are involved in character programs at school." However,

some parents also expressed concerns regarding the consistency of the application of character values at school and how it can be reflected in children's behavior at home. One parent stated, "We want the values taught at school to be reinforced in the home environment." From the group discussions with parents, there is a diversity of views regarding character education at school. Some parents were satisfied with the school's efforts in developing their children's character. They see a positive development in their children's responsible attitude after being involved in character programs at school. This view shows that the school's efforts in shaping children's character are appreciated and considered successful by some parents.

However, some parents also expressed concerns regarding the consistency of the application of character values at school and how this is reflected in children's behavior at home. They wanted the values taught at school to be reinforced and applied more consistently in the home environment. This suggests that parents expect a closer collaboration between character education at school and stronger support from the home environment to reinforce these values in their children's daily lives. In conclusion, the results from the group discussions show that some parents feel helped by the school's efforts in character education, while others feel that there is a need for stronger collaboration between school and home in strengthening and applying character values consistently in their children's lives. This highlights the importance of synergy between character education in schools and the role of parents in shaping children's character holistically.

#### **4. Discussions**

Based on the findings above, factors that can be supporting or inhibiting the effective implementation of character education in the school environment can be identified (Ahmda et al., 2020). Supporting factors are aspects that facilitate or strengthen the implementation of character education, namely: a) the role of school leadership in the form of strong commitment and support from the principal for character values that are applied in all school activities; b) collaboration between teachers to integrate character values into the curriculum and their learning practices; and c) the involvement of parents who play an active role in supporting character education at home and at school (Yusriadi, 2019).

Meanwhile, inhibiting factors are aspects that can hinder or block the successful implementation of character education in schools, namely: a) Lack of resources, indicated by limited access or availability of resources such as books or supporting materials, limited time, or lack of training for teachers to implement character values in learning (Yusriadi, 2019a); b) Inconsistency in the implementation of character values, the absence of consistency in the application of character values in every aspect of school activities; and c) No strong leadership support because the lack of commitment or support from school leadership to character education can hinder the effectiveness of the program (Yusriadi, bin Tahir, et al., 2020).

The character education implementation strategy above is supported by research conducted by (Gestiardi & Suyitno, 2021) which suggests that there are several efforts to strengthen character building in schools by: 1) integrating the character value of responsibility into learning; 2) focusing the character education strengthening program on the value of responsibility in doing each task given by the teacher; and 3) schools work with parents to implement responsibility character education for students in assisting learning while at home.

Other strategies that have not been put forward by previous researchers are then supported by research by (Pandiangan, 2019) mentioning several strategies for implementing student character education can be done through: 1) Internalization of positive values instilled by all school residents, habituation and practice, giving examples and role models, creating an atmosphere of character in schools, and acculturation; and 2) Implementation of student character education is carried out through the integration of character building with learning, school management, and extracurricular activities.

Through this combination of strategies, schools are expected to find solutions that strengthen the implementation of character education, minimize existing barriers and create an educational environment that supports the holistic growth of student character (Yusriadi, 2018, 2019b; Yusriadi & Farida, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

In the face of various challenges in implementing character education in school settings in Indonesia, this study has identified a number of supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the effectiveness of the program. School leadership support, collaboration between teachers and parental involvement emerged as key factors supporting the success of the program while lack of resources and inconsistent implementation of character values were the main barriers. In addition, the findings of the qualitative method that has been implemented through interviews, observations, and data analysis show that there are several solutions that can be taken. Training support for teachers, integrated curriculum development, close collaboration with parents, real case-based learning approaches, extracurricular program development and regular evaluative monitoring are workable solutions to improve the implementation of character education in schools. Suggestions for future research include a focus on continuous evaluation of character education programs, measuring their long-term impact on students, as well as further research to deepen the understanding of how to engage parents more effectively in supporting character values at home and at school. Thus, future research is expected to refine a holistic and comprehensive approach to character education implementation, in order to create an educational environment that nurtures students' character growth in an optimal and sustainable manner.

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