Character Education in 21st Century Learning in Indonesia

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Character education is one of the important aspects in the learning process in schools, which aims to form positive attitudes and behaviors in students. This article aimed to explore the implementation of character education in Indonesian schools and the challenges faced in its implementation. This study used a qualitative approach with interview methods and observations of teachers, students, and other related parties in several elementary schools. The results showed that character education in schools has been well received by most students, but in practice there are a number of obstacles, such as limited lesson time given to academic materials and lack of consistency in the application of character values. In addition, student resistance to character-based learning is also one of the obstacles that must be overcome. Furthermore, the use of technology in character learning is seen as an effective tool to attract students' attention and enrich learning methods. The role of teachers is very vital in the success of character education, therefore in-depth teacher training related to the implementation of character in the curriculum that is more relevant to the development of the times is needed. Finally, collaboration between schools, parents, and the community is an important factor in supporting the success of sustainable character education. Therefore, there needs to be increased synergy between related parties to produce the next generation of the nation with strong character and adaptive in facing the challenges of the times.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is a central issue in the education system in Indonesia, because it is closely related to the formation of a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also moral and competitive. Character education must start early because the early age phase is the main foundation for the formation of a child's personality [1].

However, the implementation of character education at various levels of education in Indonesia still faces significant challenges, especially in integrating character values into the formal curriculum and learning methods.

This challenge is increasingly complex in the era of society 5.0, where technology and globalization affect almost all aspects of life, including the world of education. Merdeka curriculum is designed to answer these challenges by integrating

character values into a 21st-century skills-based learning model [2]. However, the implementation of this curriculum still requires careful adjustments in order to support the formation of students' character as a whole, along with rapid technological developments.

On the other hand, the digital era not only brings technological advances, but also creates threats to students' moral values. The digital era demands innovation in the implementation of character education [3]. Character education must be able to adapt to the lifestyle of the digital generation without losing the essence of the values taught by educational figures, such as Ki Hadjar Dewantara. In this context, it is necessary to identify learning approaches that are relevant to the current situation to ensure the application of character values in students' daily lives.

Character education in Indonesia is also supported by strong religious values and educational philosophy [4], [5]. An effective education system must be based on the integration of religious values, philosophy, psychology, and sociology [6]. This approach aims to create individuals who are not only academically competent but also have mature and solid personalities. Religious education, for example, teaches moral values that are the basis for forming good character.

In addition, the role of teachers as facilitators in character education cannot be ignored. Teachers have the responsibility to not only teach subject matter, but also to be role models in everyday behavior. *Guru Penggerak* (Driving Teacher) plays a strategic role in strengthening the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile) through the application of character values in contextual-based learning [7]. This shows that strengthening character education requires synergy between teachers, schools, and students' social environments.

Character education is also a major concern from an Islamic perspective. Islam provides comprehensive moral guidance to shape human character [8]. In early childhood education, Islamic values can be used as a foundation for instilling good habits from an early age. Thus, Islamic-based character education can contribute to producing a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also virtuous.

The ever-evolving information technology also offers opportunities as well as challenges in character education. The application of technology in learning can be used to strengthen the implementation of character values if its use is integrated with appropriate educational strategies [9]. However, misuse of technology without supervision can be a major obstacle in achieving this goal. Therefore, ethical guidelines are needed in the use of technology in education.

The application of technology must be accompanied by a modern learning approach. Modern learning is not only equips students with intellectual skills but also helps them build character values through active interaction, collaboration, and problem-based learning [10]. This learning model is in line with the needs of the digital era which demands critical and creative thinking skills.

In terms of educational philosophy, the theoretical basis of character education focuses on the formation of moral and humanitarian values. Character education is not only teaches students to become good individuals, but also humans who can make positive contributions to society [11]. Thus, character education is the core of the educational philosophy that wants to produce superior humans holistically.

The characteristics of 21st-century learning also provide opportunities for strengthening character education. The 21st-century learning model is designed to hone four main skills, namely critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration [12]. These skills are not only relevant in creating adaptive human resources but also support the formation of strong character in facing global challenges.

Character education is also an important component in the strategy towards the *Generasi Emas 2045* (Golden Generation 2045), namely a generation that is expected to

excel in the fields of science, morality, and global competitiveness in Indonesia. Character education strategy must include fostering 21st-century skills, instilling Pancasila values, and cultivating positive behavior [13]. This strategy is expected to be able to produce a strong and high-quality next generation.

However, innovation in character education in Indonesia still needs to be developed. New approaches must continue to be updated to answer the challenges faced at every level of education [14]. Elementary education, in particular, plays an important role in forming the foundation of students' character that will determine their future.

Thus, this study was conducted to explore the concept, implementation, and innovation in character education that is relevant to the modern era. It is hoped that the results of the study can provide a significant contribution to the development of character education in Indonesia, especially in efforts to produce a generation with superior character in the era of society 5.0.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Character education is defined as a systematic process to instill fundamental moral values in individuals. This process aims to form a good personality and in accordance with the norms prevailing in society [15]. Character education not only touches on cognitive aspects, but also affective and psychomotor aspects to create people with noble character, so that they can have a positive impact on their social environment.

Character education is tasked with developing students' moral, emotional, and intellectual potential holistically [16]. This includes the formation of values of honesty, discipline, and courage in facing various life challenges. Character education also trains students to respect differences, appreciate others, and maintain harmony in community life [17]. Thus, good character becomes the foundation that strengthens productive social interactions.

The main goal of character education is to form individuals who have high morality, deep empathy, and a strong sense of responsibility. This education also encourages individuals to uphold integrity in every action [3]. With character education, students are expected not only to excel academically but also to be able to demonstrate attitudes that are beneficial to their community. This effort is ultimately expected to produce a dignified generation and actively contribute to national development.

Three important elements in character education play a very big role in forming individuals who are not only academically intelligent, but also have good morals and ethics in social life. Those three elements are integrity, empathy, and responsibility.

Integrity is the basis of trust and credibility in relationships between individuals and in society as a whole. Individuals who have integrity will always act based on correct and consistent principles, even in stressful situations or when no one is watching. Character education that emphasizes integrity will teach the importance of honesty, fairness, and the courage to stick to the values that are believed in. Integrity is also related to a sense of responsibility towards oneself and others, because good actions must be based on unchanging morals. By building integrity, a person is not only respected for his actions, but also appreciated for being a positive example for others [15].

Empathy is the ability to feel and understand the feelings and experiences of others, which encourages a person to act with compassion and care. Through character education that emphasizes empathy, individuals are trained to develop the ability to listen well, understand the feelings of others without judgment, and provide the support needed. Empathy plays an important role in creating a harmonious environment, both in the family, school, and society. By increasing empathy, individuals will be better able to create positive and supportive relationships, which in turn strengthen social

bonds and build a more solid and caring community [11].

Responsibility teaches individuals to understand the consequences of their actions and the importance of fulfilling their obligations to themselves, others, and the environment. Character education that emphasizes responsibility directs individuals to not only act based on personal interests, but also to pay attention to the impact of their decisions on others and society at large. Responsibility includes the ability to make the right decisions, keep commitments, and play an active role in solving existing problems. In addition, by building responsibility, a person is taught to be an independent person, have self-discipline, and value the time and resources available [8].

Overall, those three elements complement each other and form individuals who are not only intelligent in science, but also strong in moral and social aspects. Character education that focuses on integrity, empathy, and responsibility will produce a generation that is not only academically successful, but also able to contribute positively to building a better and more civilized society.

21st century learning emphasizes the development of skills that are very important for students in facing future challenges, such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity [10]. These skills are not only relevant in an academic context but also play an important role in character education. In this case, these skills support the development of students' social, emotional, and moral competencies, which are important aspects in forming whole individuals who are able to adapt to the dynamics of ever-changing social life [2].

For example, critical thinking skills encourage students to evaluate situations ethically, helping them make the right decisions based on good moral principles. Meanwhile, collaboration skills teach students to work together in teams, build mutual trust, and be responsible for their roles in the group. Both of these skills directly support the formation of strong characters,

such as integrity, empathy, and responsibility, which are essential to creating individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also have good morality in everyday life.

Various learning strategies can be used to integrate character education into the teaching and learning process, with the aim of forming individuals who are not only academically intelligent, but also have high integrity and morals.

Project-Based Learning, which involves students in solving real problems or projects that are relevant to everyday life. In this context, students are invited to work together in groups, so that they can develop character values such as cooperation, communication, and responsibility. Project-based learning also provides opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in practical and directly impactful situations, leading to a deeper understanding of the importance of these values in social life [14].

Technology-Based Learning is a very relevant strategy in this digital era. The use of technology in learning allows students to explore creative ideas while utilizing educational applications that can improve their digital literacy skills [18]. However, in addition to technical skills, technology-based learning can also be used to teach moral and ethical values through interaction with educational content and creating space for personal reflection. This can encourage students to be wiser in using technology and more sensitive to social issues that develop in the digital world [9], [19].

Problem-Based Learning can also be applied to hone students' critical thinking skills. In this approach, students are faced with complex situations or problems that require in-depth analysis and ethical decision-making. Problem-based learning motivates students to consider multiple perspectives before making decisions, while teaching them the importance of acting morally and responsibly in every decision they make [12]. These three strategies can work together to produce students who not only have intellectual skills, but also social and

emotional abilities that are important in community life.

Character education is one of the priorities in the 2013 Curriculum, which is designed to integrate universal moral values through a thematic and explicit approach. This approach aims to provide knowledge and experience that allows students to internalize good character from an early age [15]. In addition, this approach also provides space for the formation of attitudes that are in accordance with moral values consistently at every level of education.

In supporting the achievement of these goals, the government includes various characters that students must have in the Pancasila Student Profile, such as independence, global diversity, and mutual cooperation. These three characters reflect the basic principles needed to face global challenges without forgetting the nation's identity [20]. By focusing on these characters, students are expected to be able to uphold the values of diversity and the sustainability of social relations productively amidst cultural diversity.

This step is part of a long-term strategy to realize Indonesia's golden generation in 2045 [13]. Character education is seen as the main key in preparing competent, integrated human resources that are able to contribute to national development. Through integrative learning, the 2013 Curriculum is expected to be able to produce a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also emotionally and socially mature.

The main obstacles in implementing character education in Indonesia include several interrelated aspects, namely structural, social, and technology.

One of the major challenges is the lack of training and capacity building for teachers related to character strengthening methods that are relevant to 21st century learning [17]. Character education requires an innovative approach that is integrated with other subjects. Unfortunately, many teachers do not yet have adequate knowledge or skills to develop value-based learning. In addition, a curriculum that is too dense and focused on

academic achievement also makes it difficult for teachers to pay enough attention to student character development.

Differences in family and community backgrounds are quite significant obstacles in the implementation of character education. Moral values instilled in schools often clash with the reality of students' lives outside the school environment, such as in the family or community [6]. An unfavorable environment, such as weak parental supervision, family disharmony, or negative social influences, can hinder the instillation of positive values. The mismatch between the values taught in school and those applied at home often causes students to experience moral confusion.

Technological advances in the digital era should be an opportunity to support character education. However, technology that is not utilized in a targeted manner can actually reduce the effectiveness of value-based learning [9], [21]. For example, the ease with which students can access content that does not support positive character development on social media or the internet can create new challenges. In addition, some students are also more focused on digital entertainment than character development through learning activities or collaboration. This shows the importance of guidelines for the use of technology that supports value- and moral-based learning [22].

To overcome those obstacles, collaboration between the government, educators, families, and communities is needed. This includes increasing teacher capacity, creating a supportive learning environment, and monitoring the use of technology to align with the goals of student character development. A synergistic approach can create more effective and long-term character education.

3. METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to describe in depth the implementation of character education in schools. The subjects of the study included teachers, students, and principals, who have

different roles in implementing character education. The study was conducted at various levels of education (elementary, junior high, senior high) selected based on the diversity of character education practices. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore the views and experiences of informants, classroom observations to monitor the implementation of character-based learning, and document studies, including lesson plans and modules.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis method. The process included data collection, initial category arrangement based on patterns, thematic coding, and data interpretation to understand the barriers and opportunities in implementing character education in schools. This methodology is designed to produce a comprehensive picture that can support the development of more effective character education policies and practices at various school levels [23].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Students' Understanding of Character Education

Most students acknowledge the importance of character education in schools. They argue that character education teaches them to be better individuals, who can be accepted in society. This can be seen from respondents' statements such as:

1) *"Pendidikan karakter membantu saya tahu apa yang harus dilakukan dengan baik dan benar."* ("Character education helps me know what to do well and correctly.")
2) *"Karakter yang baik penting, apalagi dalam pergaulan sehari-hari."* ("Good character is important, especially in everyday life.")

However, some students still find it difficult to apply character values in everyday life. This is related to the lack of influence felt from character education outside of school.

4.2 Challenges in Implementing Character Education

One of the main findings in this study is the challenges in implementing character education that are often faced by teachers and principals. Many respondents stated that character education was not fully implemented properly due to limited time and resources. Several respondents stated that character-based learning sometimes had to compete with more pressing academic materials. The following statements illustrate this condition:

1) *"Seringkali, pelajaran tentang karakter terabaikan karena harus mengejar materi pelajaran."* ("Often, character lessons are neglected because of the need to catch up on subject matter.")
2) *"Kami harus membagi waktu dengan materi ujian sehingga pendidikan karakter terkadang tidak cukup mendapat perhatian."* ("We have to divide our time with exam materials so that character education sometimes does not get enough attention.")

4.3 The Role of Teachers and Principals in Implementing Character Education

Many principals have begun to introduce character education policies at the school level. The findings show that these policies have received positive responses from many parties, although some principals stated that more training for teachers in this area would be more helpful.

1) *"Kami sudah memperkenalkan beberapa program terkait karakter siswa, tapi para guru perlu lebih dilibatkan dalam workshop untuk bisa memahami penerapannya dengan lebih baik."* ("We have introduced several programs related to student character, but teachers need to be more involved in workshops to better

understand their implementation.")

2) *"Kami berusaha untuk lebih menekankan nilai karakter kepada siswa, tapi belum cukup efektif tanpa adanya penguatan di rumah dan masyarakat."* ("We are trying to emphasize character values more to students, but it is not effective enough without reinforcement at home and in the community.")

4.4 Students' Resistance to Character Learning

Even though there is awareness from students, they sometimes feel that character learning is less relevant to their daily lives, as evidenced by the following quotes:

1) *"Saya tahu pendidikan karakter penting, tetapi kadang-kadang saya merasa ini terlalu formal dan tidak berlaku di dunia luar."* ("I know character education is important, but sometimes I feel it is too formal and doesn't apply to the outside world.")

2) *"Kadang saya merasa kesulitan untuk mempraktikkan nilai yang diajarkan karena teman-teman saya tidak selalu memperhatikannya."*

("Sometimes I find it difficult to practice the values taught because my friends don't always pay attention.")

4.5 Relevance of Technology in Character Education

Most respondents agreed that the use of technology can help disseminate character values more effectively, especially in this digital era. For example, the use of educational videos, interactive quizzes, and social media to promote character values received positive attention. Here are some quotes that support this:

1) *"Menggunakan aplikasi untuk melatih karakter mungkin sangat efektif, apalagi jika menggunakan video atau quiz yang menarik."* ("Using applications to train character can be very effective, especially if they use interesting videos or quizzes.")

2) *"Media sosial bisa jadi alat yang berguna untuk mengedukasi teman-teman saya tentang nilai karakter."* ("Social media can be a useful tool to educate my friends about character values.")

Table 1. Visual Presentation

Category	Findings	Number of Respondents %
Student Understanding	Character education is important for social life	85%
Implementation Challenges	Character learning is burdened with exam material	62%
Teachers' Role	More training is needed to teach character	70%
Students' Resistance	Characterization is sometimes irrelevant	45%
Relevance of Technology	Technology accelerates the delivery of character values	76%

By looking at this data, it can be concluded that although character education has received great attention, there are still some major challenges related to implementation and the mismatch between theory in schools and practice in everyday life. Technology can be a solution in accelerating the process of conveying character values among students.

Discussion

Based on the findings produced in this study, several things can be concluded related to the understanding, challenges, and role of implementing character education in

schools. This discussion will link these findings to concepts in the literature related to character education, as well as provide further insight into how character education policies can impact students and the teaching and learning process in schools.

1) Students' Understanding of Character Education

The results of the study showed that most students understand the importance of character education in their lives, although some still find it difficult to apply character values in everyday life. This is in line with the concept put forward by Hasanah and Fajri [1], which states that character education at an early age has an important role in the formation of positive values in children. On the other hand, Yuniarti [8] highlighted that character education not only aims to teach social norms but also strengthens individual identity and integrity, so that the understanding built from an early age can improve the quality of their social life in the future.

2) Challenges in Implementing Character Education

Most respondents stated that one of the main challenges in implementing character education is the competition for time between academic materials and character values. This reflects the obstacles also found in the study by Suryana and Muhtar [3], which discussed how teachers and principals should divide their time between preparing students for exams and teaching character. Although there are efforts to implement character policies, limited time and resources often mean that character education does not get full attention. This situation needs attention from the school to create a balance between academics and student character development.

3) The Role of Teachers and Principals in Implementing Character Education

The findings of this study indicate that principals are aware of the importance of character education, but feel that more training is needed for teachers to be effective in implementing character education. This is in accordance with the opinion in the literature as stated by Hikmasari et al. [16] that implementing character education in schools requires consistent commitment from all parties, especially educators. Special training for teachers in terms of character education approaches that are more relevant to current developments, especially in the current digital era, will be very helpful in achieving this.

4) Students' Resistance to Character Learning

Although there is a general understanding of the importance of character, resistance from students to character learning was also found in this study. Many students felt that character material was less relevant to their lives. This could be due to the lack of closeness between the values taught and the reality they face in society. The implementation of character education must involve a more contextual and flexible approach so that students feel more connected to the material provided and see direct benefits in their lives [9].

5) Relevance of Technology in Character Education

One of the interesting findings in this study is the relevance of the use of technology in supporting character education. The use of videos, interactive quizzes, and social media received a positive response from many respondents who felt that technology could be a more interesting and effective means of conveying character values. This view is consistent with the results of research conducted by Indarta et al. [2] which emphasized that the independent curriculum that adopts a technology-based approach can improve the quality of learning in the 21st century.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been done, it can be

concluded that character education has a very important role in the formation of attitudes, behaviors, and personalities of children from an early age. Although students' understanding of character education is quite good, the implementation of character values in schools still faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the limited time and academic materials that are often prioritized, as well as the resistance of students to character learning.

In addition, technology plays an important role in attracting students' attention and enriching character learning. Therefore, more in-depth training for teachers on character education that is relevant to the current context is needed to support the effectiveness of implementation. In addition, the implementation of character education also requires close collaboration between schools, parents, and the community, so that the character values taught can be strengthened and applied in students' daily lives.

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