



The Urgency of Integrating Character Education in The Elementary School Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Character education is a crucial element in the development of students at the elementary school level, where they begin to form identities and moral values. This article discusses the strategy of character education for students at the elementary school level and the urgency of integrating character education in the elementary school curriculum as an effort to form a young generation who are not only cognitively intelligent, but also have good character. The method of writing this article uses the literature review method. In this method, the author searches for themes related to character education in the elementary school curriculum. Then continue by summarizing the results of related literature to find the intended results. The results of this study reveal that in the elementary school curriculum, the integration of character education can be applied through school subjects such as Civic Education (PKn) and Social Sciences. In addition, character education can also be integrated in activities in schools to build social awareness and the student environment. Character education helps students become responsible individuals and care for others and the environment, while reducing bullying behavior. Through routine activities and example, students are taught to have sensitivity to the environment and others. Thus, character education plays an important role in creating a generation that is ethical and able to face moral challenges in daily life.

Keywords: Curriculum, Elementary School, Integration of Character Education

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is now a major concern in the education system in Indonesia, especially in the midst of globalization and rapid technological advancements. This has resulted in significant social changes, including an increase in individualist attitudes among the younger generation. Therefore, education needs to focus on developing

students' ethics, morals, and attitudes so that they do not only focus on the knowledge aspect (Asbari 2024). We are witnessing various changes in behavior patterns and moral values among children, especially at the elementary school (SD) level. The phenomenon of moral decadence can be traced from the case of bullying received by a 9-year-old child in Sukabumi. Coupled with the occurrence of physical violence between elementary school students in Tasikmalaya which ended in physical injury. In another case, precisely in Yoyakarta, there was online bullying that was also carried out by elementary school students, where they sent abusive messages to classmates through social media. Even in Surabaya, some elementary school students were found to have access to cigarettes and other prohibited substances.

Primary school is the initial stage in the formal education process, where students begin to build the foundations of their character (Safitri et al. 2022). Wati and colleagues (2023) revealed that character formation at the elementary school level is something that needs special attention. However, character education cannot only be done in theory, its implementation requires support from the school environment and the community. This is important because children tend to imitate the behavior they see around them (Nurleli, 2020).

Character education faces many challenges due to globalization. Prabandari (2020) stated that one of the main challenges is the ease with which outside cultural influences enter. This can change the attitudes and behaviors of children and keep them away from the noble values of the Indonesian nation. So according to Shalahuddin and his colleagues, character education aims to help the younger generation internalize ethical values, respect the rights of others, and do right even though it is not always beneficial to themselves. That's where schools not only play a role as a place of learning, but also as an institution responsible for shaping the character of students. Nucci added that educational ethics should be an important part of the curriculum to help students think and act responsibly in everyday life. This approach shows that character education is the key to forming a good personality in the next generation, both in terms of academic and moral integrity (Shalahuddin et al. 2024).

Previous research has discussed strategies to minimize moral decency such as bullying which is instilled through character education in elementary schools (Jumarnis et al. 2023). Several studies also examine the implementation of character education in elementary schools (Prabandari 2020). Results (Galuh et al. 2021) revealed that character education can be integrated into school subjects such as Civic Education (PKn) and Social Sciences (IPS) (Siska, Yufiarti, and Japar 2021). There are also those who discuss character education that can be integrated into daily activities at school to build social awareness and the environment of students (Hariandi et al. 2023) (Faruq, Wahidah, and Mukhsin 2024).

Based on this, the researcher is interested in summarizing the results of previous studies and examining the strategy of character education and the importance of integrating educational character in the elementary school curriculum as a strategic step

to produce a young generation who are academically intelligent and have good morals or character.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The object of discussion in this paper is Elementary School (SD) because according to (Safitri et al. 2022), Primary School is the initial stage in the formal education process, where students begin to build the foundations of their character. This study uses the literature review. Method literature review In this study, it is used to identify whether or not there is research progress through the results of literature related to the topic of character education at the elementary school level. The strategy used by researchers in searching for articles is to search using keywords (Keyword). The next stage is to study and summarize the literature that has been obtained. Then finally, the researcher makes a conclusion to find the answer to the intended research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Character Education

In the Great Indonesian Dictionary, character is defined as traits, psyche, morals, or ethics that distinguish a person. This meaning is similar to morality in Islam, which is the trait that arises from within a person to act spontaneously without first considering (Musyafak et al., 2023). According to Mustoip et al. (2018), character reflects a person's way of thinking and acting in daily life. Daga (2021) added that character is a characteristic of human behavior in certain situations. Thus, it can be concluded that character is part of a person's innate traits that affect the way they think and act in various situations.

Character education should start from childhood, which is called the golden age. According to Piaget's theory, this is an important concrete operational stage to develop a child's potential. Therefore, character education must begin in the family and school, which is the first environment for the development of children's character (Afandi, 2011).

The main goal of moral education is to form individuals who are responsible, moral, and caring, as well as instill the foundation of Islamic education in the form of piety to Allah Swt. (Afendi & Farihatun, 2022). Moral education also aims to help individuals develop the ability to make decisions, have a good attitude and act in accordance with the right values (R. Afifah et al., 2020). Sinulingga (2016) also added that moral education in schools greatly helps students in improving their moral consideration, thinking, and reasoning. Research shows that moral education can increase students' level of moral thinking and consideration.

Strategies for Cultivating Students' Character

Character instillation has an important role in shaping children's morals, especially at the elementary school level (Lestari et al. 2024). Lestari and his colleagues also revealed that Character cultivation strategies can be carried out by teachers being role models in ethical and moral behavior, demonstrating integrity, empathy, and good

values in daily life. Additionally, case-based learning can be used to introduce students to real-life situations that require ethical and moral thinking, helping them understand the consequences of their actions. The ethics of discussion also need to be encouraged so that students can share their views and consider different perspectives. The integration of ethics in the curriculum is very important so that students can see the relevance of moral values in various contexts. Structured character development programs can be applied to help students understand moral values and develop good character.

In addition, parents and the community also play an important role in supporting the formation of students' character. Collaboration between schools, parents, and the community can strengthen the ethical and moral values taught. The strengthening of empathy and caring must be taught to students so that they can understand and feel the feelings of others and encourage them to care for the welfare of others. In line with this opinion, Haniati Gowasa and her colleagues (2024) explained that the role of parents and the surrounding environment is very crucial in shaping children's morals, where introducing morally good traits and behaviors and providing positive examples are important first steps in helping children learn about morality through character education.

Character education requires cooperation and involvement from all parties in order to run effectively' (Saharani et al. 2024). So that the integration of strengthening character education between schools, families and communities can be a powerful strategy to strengthen the character of students (Fikri et al. 2023).

Character building strategies can also be applied by rewarding ethical behavior. This encourages students to continue to apply these ethical values. With the consistent implementation of these strategies, it is hoped that students' awareness and understanding of ethical and moral values will increase, so that they can become responsible and ethical individuals in their daily lives (Lestari et al, 2024).

Integration of Character Education in the Elementary School Curriculum

Given the moral crisis that is happening today due to the decline in character values, especially among elementary school students, this is due to the tendency of children at the elementary school level to imitate the behavior of their peers. When they see a friend behaving negatively, they tend to follow, which can develop into a bad habit that damages character. Rahayuningtyas and Mustadi (2018) emphasized that the success of further education is highly dependent on the foundation built in basic education. This shows how important education at the primary school level is in shaping children's moral principles from an early age.

Fatimah and Aminah (2024) revealed that the integration of character education in the elementary school curriculum has been carried out through a systematic and contextual approach. According to Shalahuddin and colleagues (2024), the cultivation of character values based on Islamic education has a significant positive impact on the formation of student character in schools. The integration of Islamic values such as honesty, compassion, humility, and justice in the character education curriculum helps

form a solid moral foundation for students. Islamic character-based education not only promotes good behavior individually but also teaches collective values and self-reliance, which are essential in forming a responsible and empathetic generation towards society.

In addition, character education can also be integrated into various subjects in elementary schools. As stated in the results of his research that the integration of character education can be applied in the learning of civic education or commonly called PKn. Agreeing with, he stated that PKN is one of the subjects that makes a positive contribution to the character education of students (Safitri et al. 2022; Galuh et al. 2021).

The integration of character education in civic education learning not only helps students understand civic concepts, but also shapes their character as individuals who are responsible, tolerant, and caring for the environment and others. Character education also provides a strong foundation for students to face moral and ethical challenges in daily life. So according to him, character education is quite important to be integrated through PKn lessons.

Character education at the elementary school level can be integrated in Social Sciences (IPS) subjects. According to Siska and her colleagues (2021), social studies subjects are not only conveying social knowledge, but also serve to shape students to become citizens of society and the state who are responsible for the community, nation, and state. The integration of character values in social studies learning is very important to educate students so that they can contribute positively to their social lives. This integration can provide students with an understanding of the concept of life that can build social and environmental awareness from an early age. Where this is the scope of social studies discussions related to social ethics. In addition to being able to develop students' basic abilities in logical and critical thinking, social studies learning can increase social and humanitarian awareness and can develop students' ability to communicate, cooperate, and compete in a pluralistic society.

Character education not only strengthens relationships with fellow humans but also with the surrounding environment. As expressed that the implementation of character education for the environment is based on sensitivity to environmental concern which aims to encourage students' habits and behaviors so as not to damage the surrounding environment by instilling an attitude of sensitivity and care for the environment which is carried out through routine habituation activities, spontaneous habituation activities, exemplary habituation activities, conditioning, school culture, and environmental health (Hariandi et al. 2023).

CONCLUSION

Integrating character education into the elementary school curriculum is not merely an addition but a crucial necessity for shaping future generations. This integration aims to develop students into individuals with strong moral foundations,

responsibility, and the ability to navigate future challenges. Several key conclusions highlight the urgency of this integration.

Firstly, character education plays a vital role in fostering well-rounded and responsible individuals. Elementary school represents a formative period for character development, making early integration essential. By instilling positive values and ethics, students are empowered to become individuals of integrity and contribute positively to society. This process involves collaboration among teachers, schools, and the community to create a supportive environment for positive character formation.

Secondly, character education acts as a safeguard against negative behaviors. By instilling moral values early on, it is expected that students can avoid detrimental actions and become agents of positive change. This education helps students develop a positive attitude towards themselves, others, and their environment. They also learn about their rights, obligations, and responsibilities as good citizens.

Thirdly, integrating character education enhances students' understanding of moral and ethical concepts. Through this integration, students learn to apply concepts like honesty, responsibility, and integrity in both academic and real-life contexts. This not only improves academic performance but also builds strong character traits. It also prepares teachers to better face contemporary challenges and guide students to become better individuals in attitude and behavior.

Furthermore, character education aims to empower the Indonesian generation to become individuals and citizens who are faithful, productive, creative, innovative, and emotionally intelligent, capable of making positive contributions to society, the nation, the state, and world civilization. This integration ensures students not only acquire knowledge but also develop the essential character traits needed to thrive in an increasingly complex world.

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