

Character Development of Students in the Elementary School Environment

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan karakter di sekolah dasar menjadi isu penting seiring dengan meningkatnya tantangan moral dan sosial pada peserta didik akibat perkembangan zaman. Permasalahan yang sering muncul adalah lemahnya internalisasi nilai karakter dalam proses pembelajaran yang masih berorientasi pada aspek kognitif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji konsep pendidikan karakter, nilai-nilai karakter yang dikembangkan, peran guru, lingkungan sekolah, serta strategi pengembangan karakter peserta didik di sekolah dasar. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi kepustakaan dengan mengkaji berbagai sumber literatur berupa buku, artikel jurnal, dan dokumen kebijakan yang relevan. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik deskriptif-kualitatif untuk memperoleh pemahaman komprehensif terhadap topik kajian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan karakter yang efektif memerlukan integrasi nilai karakter dalam pembelajaran, keteladanan guru, lingkungan sekolah yang kondusif, serta strategi yang berkelanjutan melalui kegiatan ekstrakurikuler dan pembiasaan positif. Implikasi penelitian ini diharapkan dapat menjadi rujukan teoretis bagi sekolah dan pendidik dalam merancang dan mengimplementasikan pendidikan karakter secara sistematis dan berkesinambungan.

ABSTRACT

Character education in elementary schools has become a crucial issue in response to increasing moral and social challenges faced by students in the era of rapid development. One of the main problems is the weak internalization of character values in learning processes that tend to focus primarily on cognitive aspects. This study aims to examine the concept of character education, the character values developed, the role of teachers, the school environment, and strategies for developing students' character in elementary education. This research employs a library research method by reviewing relevant literature, including books, academic journal articles, and educational policy documents. The data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach to obtain a comprehensive understanding of character education. The findings indicate that effective character education requires the integration of character values into learning activities, teacher role modeling, a supportive school environment, and sustainable strategies through extracurricular activities and positive habituation. The implications of this study are expected to serve as a theoretical reference for schools and educators in designing and implementing systematic and sustainable character education.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of students' character is one of the main objectives of national education that must be realized from the elementary school level (Mulianti et al., 2023; Suprayitno, 2025a). At this stage, students are in a phase of forming attitudes, values, and habits that will influence their personalities in the future. Elementary schools function not only as places for the transfer of knowledge but also as environments for moral and social development (Kartini & Winahyu, 2019). Values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and social care need to be systematically instilled through the educational process. The school environment plays a strategic role in creating conditions conducive to character formation (Azis et al., 2024; Baihaqi & Utama, 2025). Interactions among teachers, students, and all members of the school community serve as the primary medium for internalizing character values. Therefore, character development in elementary schools requires serious and continuous attention. Strong character education is expected to shape a generation that is morally upright and competitive.

In addition, the rapid development of the times and advances in technology also influence the behavior and character of elementary school students (Hikmayana, 2025; Jariah et al., 2024; Sri Ratna Dewi et al., 2024). Today's students face various social challenges, such as declining manners, low environmental awareness, and increasing individualistic behavior. This condition demands that schools take an active role in strengthening students with solid character values. The school environment becomes the main space for habituating positive behavior through rules, school culture, and learning activities. Teachers, as role models, have a great responsibility to instill character values through their daily attitudes and actions (Mahmoudi, 2025; Osman, 2024; Suprayitno, 2025b). Consistent habituation carried out at school will help students build good character. Thus, character development in elementary schools is a necessity that cannot be ignored. These efforts must be implemented in a planned and integrated manner.

However, in reality, character development of students in elementary school environments still faces various problems. Not all schools are able to create a school culture that optimally supports character formation. Some students still display undisciplined behavior, low responsibility, and a lack of respect toward teachers and peers. The learning process often emphasizes academic achievement more than character development. In addition, teachers' limited understanding of character education strategies also becomes an obstacle. A less conducive school environment can hinder the internalization of character values among students. The lack of parental involvement in supporting character education at school further exacerbates these conditions. These problems indicate that character development has not yet been fully effective.

The research conducted by Nurlailah & Ardiansyah (2022) found that the school environment has a positive influence on the formation of students' character in Civics (PKN)

lessons, with educators and peers showing a greater positive impact than negative effects on character development. Overall, the results showed that factors such as the influence of teachers, classmates, the canteen, the classroom, and the playground contribute positively to character formation, indicating that a supportive school environment helps strengthen moral development in students (Nurlailah & Ardiansyah, 2022). The research conducted by Suardin, Mulianti, and Sulisworo (2023) found that the management of character education at SD Laompo was implemented systematically through three stages: planning character-based learning and discipline programs, executing these plans by embedding character values into the curriculum and school culture, and then evaluating students' development across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The study also revealed that while character education was effectively integrated into both learning activities and the creation of a character-focused school culture, there remain management challenges that require continuous improvement to enhance the overall effectiveness of character education (Mulianti et al., 2023).

Although there have been many studies on character education, there are still research gaps that need to be explored more deeply. Most studies focus more on certain values, such as religiosity or discipline, without examining the role of the school environment as a whole. In addition, research that examines the integration of school culture, teachers' roles, and social interactions in students' character development is still relatively limited. This condition indicates an opportunity to present a new, more holistic study. This research seeks to fill this gap by examining the development of students' character in the elementary school environment as a whole. This approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the character formation process. Thus, this study has novelty in the context of character development in elementary schools. The novelty of the research lies in its focus on the school environment as an integrated system for character formation.

Based on the description above, this study aims to examine the development of students' character in the elementary school environment. This research focuses on the role of the school environment in shaping students' attitudes and behavior. In addition, this study aims to describe the forms of character development implemented in elementary schools. This research also aims to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the development of students' character. The results of the study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of character education studies. Practically, this research is expected to serve as a reference for schools in creating environments that support character formation. Thus, this study can help improve the quality of character education in elementary schools.

METHOD

This study employs a library research method, which is a research approach conducted by reviewing and analyzing various written sources relevant to the topic of character education in

elementary schools (Mustofa, 2023). The data sources in this study include textbooks, scientific journal articles, previous research findings, educational policy documents, and official regulations related to character education. The selection of sources is carried out selectively by considering their relevance, credibility, and currency, so that the data used can provide a strong and comprehensive theoretical foundation for discussing concepts, values, the role of teachers, the school environment, and strategies for developing students' character (Muhammad Mustofa, 2023).

Data collection techniques are carried out through a systematic literature search, beginning with the collection of sources, in-depth reading, recording key points, and grouping data according to the focus of the study. The collected data are then analyzed using descriptive-qualitative analysis techniques by comparing, interpreting, and synthesizing various theoretical perspectives and relevant research findings. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of coherent and structured narrative descriptions to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' character development in elementary schools. Through this library research method, the study is expected to provide valid theoretical contributions and serve as a reference for the development of character education practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. The Concept of Character Education

Character education is a systematic and continuous process of instilling moral values, ethics, and positive attitudes in students in order to form good personalities, noble character, and a sense of responsibility. Character education does not focus solely on the mastery of cognitive aspects but also encompasses the development of affective and psychomotor domains. Thus, students not only understand character values conceptually but are also able to feel, internalize, and implement them in real behavior in their daily lives. At the elementary school level, character education serves as a fundamental foundation in shaping students' behavior and attitudes from an early age, allowing these values to be firmly embedded and to develop sustainably as students grow.

Character education plays a strategic role in building high-quality human resources, especially in facing the increasingly complex challenges of modern times. Globalization, technological advancement, and rapid social change require students to possess not only intellectual intelligence but also emotional, social, and moral intelligence. Therefore, character education becomes an essential means of equipping students with values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, hard work, tolerance, and social awareness. These values are

expected to shape students into individuals with integrity, independence, and the ability to adapt positively within society.

In formal education, character education at the elementary school level needs to be holistically integrated into the learning process, school culture, and extracurricular activities (Nufa & others, 2025). Teachers play a central role as role models in instilling character values through their attitudes, behaviors, and daily interactions with students. In addition, the implementation of character education can be carried out through positive habituation, the reinforcement of noble values in every subject, and the creation of a conducive, safe, and supportive learning environment oriented toward the holistic development of students' personalities.

The success of character education is not solely the responsibility of schools but also requires synergy among families, communities, and the surrounding environment. Parental involvement in supporting the habituation of character values at home is essential to ensure continuity between education at school and within the family environment. Through effective collaboration among schools, families, and communities, character education in elementary schools is expected to produce a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also possesses strong character, ethical values, and the ability to contribute positively to the nation and society.

2. Character Values in Elementary School Education

The character values developed in elementary school education include religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, and social care (Kartika et al., 2023). These values are selected because they are relevant to the moral and social developmental needs of students at the elementary school age, which is a stage of forming basic attitudes and habits. The inculcation of character values at this stage is very important because students tend to easily imitate, accept, and habituate behaviors that they see and experience within the school environment. Therefore, elementary schools serve as a strategic setting for instilling character values as the foundation for students' personality development.

Religious values play a role in shaping students' spiritual attitudes, faith, and devotion in accordance with their respective beliefs. Through the habituation of prayer, mutual respect among followers of different religions, and the application of moral values in daily life, students are taught to develop spiritual awareness from an early age. Meanwhile, honesty and discipline serve as the foundation for forming responsible and trustworthy behavior. Honesty is instilled through truthful speech, refraining from cheating, and having the courage to admit mistakes, while discipline is developed through obedience to school rules, punctuality, and consistency in carrying out responsibilities.

In addition, the values of responsibility and cooperation play an important role in developing students' social abilities. Responsibility is taught through the assignment of individual and group tasks that must be completed earnestly, both inside and outside the classroom. Through group activities, students learn to work together, help one another, and respect the roles of each group member. Strengthening the value of cooperation is essential to train students to interact positively, solve problems collaboratively, and develop a sense of togetherness and solidarity.

The values of tolerance and social care complement students' character formation so that they are able to live harmoniously in diversity. Tolerance is instilled by teaching respect for differences in opinions, backgrounds, cultures, and individual abilities. Meanwhile, social care is developed through sharing activities, empathy toward peers, and involvement in social activities within the school environment. The early inculcation of these character values aims to equip students with strong moral foundations, enabling them to face future social and academic challenges with positive, responsible, and ethical attitudes.

3. The Role of Teachers in Developing Students' Character

Teachers play a highly strategic role in the development of students' character, particularly at the elementary school level. Teachers do not function merely as transmitters of learning content but also as educators, mentors, and role models for students (Damanik et al., 2025). In daily school life, the intensive interactions between teachers and students make teachers figures who are easily imitated. Therefore, teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and ways of communicating have a significant influence on the formation of students' character, both directly and indirectly.

As educators, teachers play a role in integrating character values into the learning process. Values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance can be instilled through the selection of appropriate learning methods, such as group-based learning, discussions, and assignments that encourage students to be active and responsible. In addition, teachers can embed character values through learning materials that are connected to everyday life, enabling students to understand the meaning and importance of these values in real-life contexts.

As mentors, teachers have the responsibility to guide, accompany, and nurture students in developing positive attitudes and behaviors. Teachers need to provide reinforcement, motivation, and guidance to students who experience difficulties in applying character values. Through a persuasive and humanistic approach, teachers can help students understand the consequences of their actions and encourage them to improve their behavior gradually. This mentoring role is crucial in creating a conducive learning environment that supports students' character development.

Teachers' exemplary conduct is a key factor in students' character development. Teachers who demonstrate discipline, honesty, fairness, and responsibility in carrying out their duties provide concrete examples for students. This exemplarity is reflected in punctuality, consistency in enforcing rules, and respectful attitudes toward students. With strong role modeling from teachers, students will more easily imitate and internalize positive behaviors in their daily lives, allowing character development in elementary schools to proceed effectively and sustainably.

4. The School Environment as a Means of Character Building

The school environment plays an important role as a supporting medium in the formation of students' character, particularly at the elementary school level. The school environment does not only encompass physical conditions but also includes school culture, existing rules, and patterns of social interaction among members of the school community (Astor et al., 2021). A well-organized, clean, safe, and comfortable environment can have a positive influence on students' attitudes and behavior. Thus, the school becomes a strategic space for instilling and developing character values in a sustainable manner through various daily activities.

A positive school culture is one of the main elements in shaping students' character. This culture is reflected in the habits, traditions, and values upheld by all members of the school community, such as mutual respect, discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. The implementation of clear and consistent school rules also plays a role in training students to understand boundaries, comply with norms, and act responsibly. Through continuous habituation, character values can be embedded in students and become part of their personality.

A conducive, safe, and value-rich school climate greatly influences students' character development. Harmonious relationships between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, create a comfortable and supportive learning atmosphere. In a positive school climate, students feel valued, accepted, and motivated to demonstrate good behavior. Healthy social interactions within the school environment also help students learn empathy, tolerance, and effective communication skills.

Routine activities and habituation carried out in elementary schools serve as effective means of internalizing character values. Activities such as flag ceremonies, classroom duties, religious activities, community service, and various extracurricular programs provide students with direct experiences in applying character values in daily life. Through these experiences, students not only understand character values theoretically but are also able to internalize and practice them in real contexts. Therefore, a well-managed school environment

can become a key supporting factor in shaping students who are characterized, ethical, and responsible.

5. Strategies for Developing Students' Character

The development of students' character is a process that requires well-planned, consistent, and sustainable strategies. These strategies must be designed comprehensively so that character values are not only understood theoretically but can also be applied in everyday life. In the context of elementary school education, character development strategies need to involve various aspects of learning and the educational environment, so that character formation can take place holistically and continuously. The strategies for developing students' character can be described as follows.

a. Integration of Character Values in the Learning Process

The integration of character values into the learning process is a primary strategy in the development of students' character. Character values can be instilled through every subject by linking learning materials with positive attitudes and behaviors. Teachers can cultivate values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and cooperation through active learning methods, group discussions, assignments, and learning evaluations that emphasize processes and attitudes rather than solely academic outcomes. Through this integration, students learn that character values are an inseparable part of learning activities, enabling them to become accustomed to applying these values in various situations.

b. Character Development through Extracurricular Activities and Positive Habits

Extracurricular activities and positive habituation serve as effective means of developing students' character beyond formal classroom learning. Through extracurricular activities such as scouting, sports, arts, and religious programs, students can cultivate values including cooperation, leadership, discipline, responsibility, and social awareness. In addition, positive habituation carried out routinely such as praying before and after activities, maintaining cleanliness in the school environment, and practicing mutual respect helps students internalize character values naturally through direct experience.

c. Cooperation between Schools, Parents, and the Community Environment

Collaboration among schools, parents, and the wider community is an important strategy in supporting the successful development of students' character. Character values instilled at school need to be reinforced through habituation in the family and community environments to ensure continuity in character education. Parents play a role in providing examples and supervising students' behavior at home, while the community serves as a social environment that also influences character formation. With strong synergy among

schools, parents, and communities, the development of students' character can proceed optimally and sustainably.

Discussion

Based on the discussion of character education concepts presented above, it can be understood that character education is a holistic process that encompasses the development of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. This perspective is in line with the character education theory proposed by Lickona, which emphasizes three main components of character: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These three components are interrelated and inseparable in the process of character formation. Therefore, character education in elementary schools is not sufficient if it only provides theoretical understanding of values; it must also encourage students to internalize and practice these values in their daily lives. This finding reinforces the view that character education should be implemented continuously and integrated into all educational activities, rather than treated merely as an additional program.

The character values developed in elementary schools—such as religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, and social care—are also aligned with theories of children's moral development proposed by Piaget and Kohlberg. At the elementary school age, students are in the early stages of moral development, where habituation and role modeling have a very strong influence on the formation of attitudes and behavior. Therefore, instilling character values through concrete experiences and daily habituation is a more effective strategy than purely verbal or instructional approaches. This strengthens the finding that elementary school is a crucial phase in character formation, as values instilled at this stage tend to persist and influence students' behavior at subsequent levels of education.

The role of teachers in students' character development can also be examined through the perspective of Bandura's social learning theory. This theory emphasizes that individuals learn through observation and imitation of models in their environment. In the context of elementary schools, teachers serve as primary role models whose behaviors and attitudes are observed and imitated by students. Teachers' exemplarity in demonstrating discipline, honesty, fairness, and responsibility becomes a determining factor in the success of character education. This finding reinforces the concept that the success of character education is not only determined by instructional planning but also heavily depends on the personal and professional qualities of teachers in fulfilling their roles as educators and role models.

The school environment as a medium for character formation also has strong relevance to school climate theory and the concept of the hidden curriculum. A conducive, safe, and value-oriented school climate functions as a hidden curriculum that indirectly shapes students' character. Harmonious social interactions, a culture of mutual respect, and consistent

enforcement of school rules serve as effective media for character learning. This finding supports the view that character education occurs not only in the classroom but also through the entire dynamics of school life. However, if the school environment is less conducive or rules are applied inconsistently, the character formation process may become weak and less optimal.

Character development strategies through the integration of learning activities, extracurricular programs, and positive habituation align with the whole-school approach to character education. This approach emphasizes the involvement of all components of the school in the process of shaping students' character. Integrating character values into learning strengthens the cognitive and affective dimensions, while extracurricular activities and positive habituation provide opportunities for the actualization of values in real contexts. This finding reinforces the theory that effective character education must be contextual and applicable. Nevertheless, this strategy requires high levels of consistency and commitment from schools to ensure that it does not remain merely at the level of formal programs.

Collaboration among schools, parents, and communities is an important aspect that complements and strengthens students' character development. This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which states that individual development is influenced by multiple interacting environmental systems. A lack of continuity in values between school and family environments can weaken the process of character internalization in students. Therefore, this finding indicates that effective character education requires cross-environmental synergy. Conceptually, this opens up a new insight that the success of character education is determined not only by the quality of learning at school but also by the intensity of communication and collaboration among schools, families, and communities in instilling consistent values.

CONCLUSION

Character education in elementary schools is a holistic and continuous process aimed at shaping students' personalities in a comprehensive manner through the development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. The inculcation of character values such as religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, and social care serves as an essential foundation in equipping students to face future social and academic challenges. The success of character development is strongly influenced by the role of teachers as educators, mentors, and role models, and is further supported by a conducive school environment and a positive school culture. In addition, the implementation of integrated character development strategies within learning activities, extracurricular programs, and positive habituation, along with synergistic collaboration among schools, parents, and communities, constitutes the key to fostering students

who are not only academically competent but also possess strong character, ethical values, and a sense of responsibility.

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