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The Case of Character Education Implementation in Elementary Schools: How are Promotions and Its Problems?

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Abstract

Nowadays, the attitude and behaviour of Indonesian students are declining. As a character-building component, schools have an important task in instilling morals, ethical values, noble morals, and strong and resilient character. This study was conducted to analyse the implementation of character education at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan. Qualitative research with an ethnographic approach was used in this study on implementing character education in elementary schools during one semester of 2021/2022. A total of 20 participants were interviewed, including principals, teachers, parents and students. Observation, interviews and documentation were used as research instruments. Character education promotion implemented at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan covers 20 aspects. This research describes the character education strategies: exemplary habituation, school climate conditioning, integration in all subjects, and integration through extracurricular activities. Good cooperation from all school members is a supporting factor for character education at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan. However, character education is hampered by the lack of parental concern at home and the negative response of some parents to the enforcement of school regulations. To overcome this, schools should improve communication with parents.

Keywords: ***character education; elementary school; character-building***

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INTRODUCTION

Along with the times, education has an essential and effective role and purpose in developing human personality and character to develop the potential and order of human existence (Inceköse, 2019; Muhtar et al., 2020). The creation of a strong national character as the basic capital in building a high-level civilisation is highlighted as one of the tasks and objectives of Indonesian national education (Hasibuan et al., 2018). Character education is not a new policy because, since 2010, character education in schools has become a National Movement (Insani et al., 2021). Today, a lot of work needs to be done to ensure the process of instilling and cultivating character values is ongoing and sustainable so that it can answer the challenges of an increasingly complex era, which ranges from issues that threaten the integrity and future of the nation to global competition.

Currently, there are many students whose behaviour tends to be indifferent to the environment (Baiocchi, 2019; Izzati et al., 2019). In addition, various negative behaviours, such as the habit of skipping school, cheating during exams, alcohol, violence and anarchist acts, theft, brawls between students, and immoral acts, often colour the world of Indonesian education (Ramdhani, 2017). For the sake of the nation's future, this situation must be addressed immediately. Character education must be reintroduced as a solution to this problem, especially in basic education, which is the foundation for instilling character values. Character education is a system that instils character values in learners, including knowledge, individual awareness, determination, and willingness and action to implement values towards God, self, fellow human beings, the environment, and the nation (Muassomah et al., 2020).

Various studies have been conducted on implementing character education in elementary schools. Insani et al. (2021) analysed character education in Civics learning to develop attitudes and characters in elementary school students. Then there are also studies that raise character education in online learning in elementary schools (Fitri, H., Maulidasari, I., & Rinzani, 2021; Hidayat et al., 2022; Mithhar et al., 2021; Santika, 2020). Rosyad (2019) has also analysed the surrounding environment in schools to support character education. On the other hand, a scientific approach has also been carried out to implement character education in elementary schools (Atika et al., 2019; Safitri, 2020). Then, Nugraha (2020) and Hafina et al. (2022) analysed the integration of character education with the application of blended learning during the pandemic.

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Previous studies agree that the current character decline in Indonesia needs attention, especially after almost three years of online learning. In other words, various studies agree that character education is very important to be developed for elementary school students. Therefore, this study also takes a position to analyse the implementation of character education in Indonesia, with a case in SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan, Purbalingga Regency, Central Java. Suppose previous studies have only focused on one aspect of school character education: extracurricular activities, school culture, learning integration, and online learning. In that case, this study is significant in describing the implementation of character education in schools more broadly and comprehensively to understand the phenomenon holistically.

METHOD

A qualitative method with an ethnographic approach was used in this study on the topic of character education implementation in elementary schools. Qualitative research explores a person's thoughts or opinions on an issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2016). Ethnographic qualitative research aims to discover the essence and complexity of culture that can describe a community. The culture in question is the attitudes, knowledge, values, and beliefs that shape individuals in the group (Ograjenšek, 2012). The research was conducted at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan, Purbalingga Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. Observation, interviews, and documentation were used to collect information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research occurred during the odd semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. A total of 20 people were interviewed at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan, including the principal (1 person), class teacher (2 people), religion teacher (1 person), students (15 people), and parents (1 person).

The data analysis technique uses the Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) model, which includes data condensation, data collection, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data analysis was carried out interactively and took place continuously until completion. The researcher became the main research instrument and was assisted by observation protocols, interviews, and documentation studies. The ethnographic research process is broken down into six steps: 1) selecting the project, 2) asking questions, 3) collecting data, 4) making notes, 5) analysing data, and 6) producing ethnography. Data validation tests were conducted by 1) constant observation, growing diligence, triangulation, and reference materials; 2) writing research reports with complete, clear, systematic, and reliable descriptions; 3) conducting supervisory audits of the entire research process; and 4) seeking approval from data sources.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings were obtained through observation, interviews, and document analysis related to the predetermined research sub-focus, namely:

Promotion of Character Education

Character education in schools is very important to implement (Muassomah et al., 2020; Muhtar et al., 2020); this is reinforced by research observations that the implementation of character education can shape children's personalities, educate them on how to behave, train discipline, and help them become better and more focused. Several teacher and parent interviews reinforce the importance of character education. As one of the teacher interviews put it: "the existence of a shared understanding of this point of view implies that schools and parents believe that students not only need to master various sciences but also need to know how to act and behave in accordance with the values and standards of society". In other words, the education process at school should focus on maximising children's growth in all dimensions (cognitive, physical, social, emotional, creative and spiritual). This is important in accordance with the study of Muassomah et al. (2020), that character education prepares the nation's future generation.

School as a place of learning is very important in shaping children's character (Baiocchi, 2019). The promotion of character education used at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan aims to develop students' potential to be smarter, more sensitive, and healthier. From the observation results, habits that strengthen physical and mental strength are carried out, such as sports, cleaning the classroom, and reciting the Koran together. This is expected to be an asset for life in the future. Students can develop the basic potential that every human being has to become a human being who thinks well, has a good heart, and behaves well through character education (Arfiariska & Hariyati, 2021). This policy is something that continues to be done and becomes a good habit. In addition, prizes are given to students who are role models and excel in all fields. According to the principal: "prizes will make students more excited and enthusiastic in carrying out school rules based on character education."

In addition to school policies, character education requires the involvement of all school members, including parents. However, everyone must first understand the need for school character education to support its implementation. Character education cannot be done in isolation, such as by parents or schools, but involves constructive synergy and cooperation

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between all aspects. Character education must be carried out gradually and incrementally over time and include various supporting elements such as family, school, community, and government. The four components are jointly responsible for character education. Character education will fail without consistency and harmony between these elements (Izzati et al., 2019). This is in line with several other research arguments that education policy should be directed towards achieving moral teaching in the classroom. As stakeholders, parents, teachers and administrators should all adhere to this policy to encourage children to lead lives that reflect these positive values (e.g. Hafina et al., 2022; Hidayat et al., 2022; Lestari et al., 2021; Mithhar et al., 2021).

Character Values Instilled at School

According to Nugraha (2020), schools play an important role in children's character development, especially if children do not receive character education at home. In reality, students spend a lot of time at school; therefore, what is recorded in their memory will affect their personality as they grow older. SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan has tried to instil character education such as religion, discipline, responsibility, leadership, tolerance, cooperation, love of cleanliness, tidiness, politeness, perseverance, courage, confidence, thrift, independence, honesty, acceptance of diversity, nationalism, justice, creativity, and useful achievements. These character values are instilled and developed through various forms of activities at school, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Activities at school in character education adaptation

Number	School activities based on character education	
	Character Value	Observed activity
1	Religion	Teachers greet students at the school entrance (for Muslim children); Pray before and after learning, eating, and activities; Dzuhur prayer at school for Muslim students; Dhuha prayer; Zakat on Eid al-Fitr; Display religious messages such as "Don't forget to pray five times."
2	Discipline	Enforce entry, break, and return hours according to applicable regulations; uniform according to the rules; Put shoes and learning materials in place; Dispose of garbage in its place; Do all homework

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		and assignments; Provide warnings and sanctions for those who break the rules.
3	Responsibility	Complete learning tasks; carry out class picket duties; participate in selected extracurricular activities; students are appointed as ceremony officers.
4	Leadership	Class leader duties; alternating ceremony leaders; alternating prayer leaders; and forming group leaders in learning.
5	Tolerance	Providing opportunities for every religious believer to worship peacefully, Mutual respect between religious believers at school and around the environment.
6	Cooperation	Making class picket schedules and tasks; group work to complete learning tasks; working together to clean the class; working together in preparing and returning ceremonial tools; working together in distributing zakat; working together to clean the school environment.
7	Love of cleanliness	Throwing garbage in its place; washing hands before eating; installing cleanliness slogans and slogans in the school environment; working together to clean the school environment every third week.
8	Neatness	The practice of dressing neatly according to the day, lining up when entering class, placing school supplies neatly and orderly, and during ceremonies and scout activities lining up properly.
9	Politeness	The habit of speaking politely; when entering the school or teacher's room, shake hands with the teacher. When passing others, please excuse yourself; put up phrases such as "Salam, Sapa, Senyum, Sopan, dan Santun " and "Adab is a reflection of the nation."
10	Perseverance	Provide learning and training tasks; guidance on not getting discouraged easily and not rushing to complete assignments or homework.

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11	Courage	Asking students to do assignments in front of the class; daring to be a ceremonial officer; raising your hand when you ask a question; daring to go to school alone.
12	Self-confidence	Not cheating on tests; giving the confidence to be class leader, group leader or ceremonial officer; advising students to be confident in themselves.
13	Thrifty	Using water and electricity as needed; making a habit of saving money at school every Monday and Thursday.
14	Independence	Parents are not allowed to wait while students are in class; they work on their learning tasks; Students eat and then wash their eating utensils.
15	Honesty	Get students used to telling the truth; ask students to admit their mistakes; Students who lie should be reminded.
16	Diversity acceptance	The school accepts children from any ethnicity or religion; respects and loves each other even though they are different in various ways; asks students' awareness to share and help their friends who are different, for example, by moving seats during learning activities.
17	Nationalism	Integration in subjects, e.g. knowing the map of Indonesian regions, tribes and customs; organising flag ceremonies every Monday, commemorating independence day.
18	Justice	Teachers set an example of impartiality, treating all students the same despite different backgrounds (religion, ethnicity, social and economic status, etc.); enforcing school rules for all students; giving educational punishment to all students who make mistakes; assessing students according to their abilities.
		Creativity Making handicrafts; creating poems; writing personal letters; painting and colouring; creating group games with certain equipment.
19	Creativity	Make crafts; create poems; write personal letters; paint and colour; create group games with specific equipment.

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20	Helpful	Teachers give prizes to students who behave well; give applause when students successfully do or achieve something; post students' work on the classroom board; attach photos and give congratulations on the board to students who achieve certain achievements.

Due to space limitations, researchers could not document all character education activities and policies at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan. However, referring to Goleman's opinion that character education is value education that includes nine interrelated basic values, the school has implemented character education well (Muhtar et al., 2020). Figure 1 shows the research documentation related to the school's strategies and efforts in developing students' character values at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan.


Monday ceremony


Community work


Handshake


Reading Iqro


Drumband extracurricular


Morning literacy


Flashcamp


Appreciation for Students

Figure 1: Example of a school's strategic efforts in developing students' character values

From the research results, SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan uses various techniques to implement character education optimally, including exemplary; habituation; conditioning the school atmosphere, integration in the learning process in topics; and integration through extracurricular

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activities. These methods are then deconstructed into concrete actions based on what researchers found in the field. These strategies are relevant to the research arguments of Muassomah et al. and Muhtar et al. (Muassomah et al., 2020; Muhtar et al., 2020).

Exemplary behaviour is the first method used by SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan in character education. The example in question is everything about a person's words, actions, attitudes, and behaviour that others can imitate or copy. Character education can be implemented by providing exemplary behaviour to students. This is in line with Rosyad's findings which show that providing examples of appropriate behaviour may have a good influence on students and can then influence student attitudes (Rosyad, 2019). According to Muhtar et al. (2020), principals, teachers, and other education personnel must be able to play an active role as cultural ambassadors who can socialise all character values and provide all students to behave in accordance with the values adopted by the school. When a school seeks to implement the values of discipline, for example, all school staff must first be disciplined in carrying out their responsibilities. All principals, treasurers, and educators must be able to manage school finances clearly if the school wants to have the principles of honesty and transparency. In essence, no matter how good one's strategy is, it will fail if it is not supported by example. As a result, teachers are seen as role models because the attitudes and behaviours of instructors have a huge impact on students.

The next strategy is habituation. Student character development can be done by getting used to certain positive behaviours in everyday life. Habituation is a process of forming attitudes and behaviours that are relatively permanent and automatic through a repetitive learning process, whether done together or individually, such as praying before learning, praying in congregation, washing hands before and after eating, washing their own utensils, throwing garbage in its place, and so on. Character development through this habituation can be done on a scheduled or unscheduled basis inside and outside the classroom. Muassomah et al. (2020) suggested that one of the methods of character building in schools is through habituation.

Integrating character education into all courses is the next method of implementing character education. This concept is based on the idea that all instructors should be character educators (Insani et al., 2021). All disciplines are also believed to have a role in shaping students' noble character. Integration in issues includes incorporating values into the content of all topics and developing learning activities that allow the application of values in all activities inside and outside the classroom for all disciplines. Learning activities in the context of developing student

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character can use a contextual approach as a teaching and learning concept that helps teachers and students connect the material taught with real-world situations so that students can connect their knowledge with its application in everyday life (Muhtar et al., 2020). That way, through contextual learning, students have more comprehensive results not only at the cognitive level but at the affective level and psychomotor.

Character education in elementary schools can be implemented through various techniques, including conditioning the school environment. School should be a comfortable place for students to learn, share hobbies, play and socialise as it becomes their second home (Rosyad, 2019). Positive school climate conditioning is based on the research findings by creating a safe, clean, beautiful and comfortable school environment, installing motivational slogans, providing trash bins, establishing school rules and building good relationships. Collective perceptions of routine behaviour will influence attitudes and behaviour at school.

Integration through extracurricular activities is the next approach to implementing character education. Various extracurricular activities organised by SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan include scouts, drum band, ICT, and science club. These activities also contribute to student character development and formation (Muhtar et al., 2020). Extracurricular activities can broaden students' knowledge regarding the relationship between subjects, channel talents and interests, and complete the development of a whole person. The results of this study support previous research that emphasises the importance of extracurricular activities in developing student character.

Supporting factors and implementation problems

According to this study's findings, supporting character education and cooperation from all school members, including principals, teachers, and parents, is a supporting factor for character education in elementary schools. Education as a system consists of interconnected components, one of which is the educator-non-educator component. All school members must work together to succeed in the school program, one of which is character education for students, to meet institutional education goals (Hafina et al., 2022).

Character education at SD Negeri 2 Pengadegan is hampered by the lack of character education at home and the negative response of some parents to the enforcement of school regulations. To overcome this, schools should increase contact with parents. As most children spend most of their time at home, schools should highlight the importance of character

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education at home. Parents act as role models for their children, acting as mirrors (Mithhar et al., 2021). Character education at school will fail if parents do not support it. Character education at school will not succeed if parents do not support it. All school activities, including school regulations, are directed at building students' character so that they can grow into obedient and good human beings per the goals of national education.

CONCLUSION

This study has described the implementation of character education in schools with a wider range, comprehensiveness and depth to comprehensively understand the phenomena that occur in the field. The character values instilled in elementary schools include religion; discipline; responsibility; leadership; tolerance; cooperation; love of cleanliness; tidiness; politeness; perseverance; courage; confidence; economy; independence; honesty; diversity of acceptance; nationalism; justice; creativity; and appreciation of achievement. This research also describes the character education strategies implemented in elementary schools, namely exemplary; habituation; school climate conditioning; integration in learning in all subjects; and integration through extracurricular activities. In addition, the barriers to implementation are the lack of character education in the family environment and the negative response of some parents to the enforcement of school regulations. Therefore, all school activities are directed at building students' character so that they can grow into obedient and good human beings in accordance with the objectives of national education.

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