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Strengthening The Character Of 21st Century Educators: A Philosophical Analysis Of The Ministry Of Education And Primary Education's Teacher Psychological Welfare Program

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Abstract

21st-century education demands that teachers not only transfer knowledge but also shape students' values and character. In practice, administrative burdens, professional demands, and emotional exhaustion can hinder the optimization of teachers' roles as educators. This study uses a qualitative approach through literature review and document analysis to examine the conceptual framework and implementation of a teacher psychological well-being program developed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kemendikdasmen). The results show that the program integrates the concepts of eudaimonia, ontological security, self-reflection, and value inculcation through micro-habits to support educator well-being and strengthen character. This program is not only oriented towards stress management but also encourages teachers to achieve meaningful professional lives and be role models for students. Thus, strengthening teacher psychological well-being can be an important strategy in supporting student character formation and realizing a higher-quality 21st-century education ecosystem.

Keywords:Teacher Psychological Well-being, Philosophy of Education, Character Education, Ontological Security, Eudaimonia.

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INTRODUCTION

Amidst the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasizes the development of creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability, the role of educators has become increasingly central and complex (Teo, 2019). Educators no longer function merely as conveyors of information, but as facilitators, inspirators, and role models. However, to fulfill this noble role, educators must be mentally and emotionally well-off. Teacher psychological well-being is no longer merely a personal issue, but rather a fundamental foundation for creating a healthy and transformative educational ecosystem.

Unfortunately, the reality on the ground shows that modern teachers face a series of challenges that can impact their well-being. Excessive administrative burdens, dynamic curriculum demands, and the emotional burden of managing diverse classrooms often lead to high levels of burnout or job burnout (Fogelgarn, 2020). Furthermore, educators can experience professional dilemmas due to systemic dynamics, a profound dissonance between professional ideals and systemic realities that limit professional autonomy and decision-making space. In this article, the term "professional dilemmas due to systemic dynamics" is used to refer to the dissonance between professional values and systemic constraints, not as a normative assessment of teachers as individuals. As documented in various international post-pandemic contexts, this dissonance can undermine the intrinsic motivation and professional resilience that are essential to the teaching profession (Pressley, 2021; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020).

Recognizing this urgency, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kemendikdasmen) is designing strategic initiatives in the form of a Technical Guidance Program (Bimtek) for Teacher Psychological Well-Being and a Teacher Psychological Well-Being Survey Program. These initiatives have already been piloted and mark a significant shift in education policy, recognizing teacher well-being as a prerequisite, not merely a byproduct, of a quality education system. We present these programs as case studies that offer philosophical and practical answers to the systemic challenges facing the teaching profession.

Therefore, this article poses a central research question: "How can the Ministry of Education and Culture's Teacher Psychological Well-Being Program, viewed from a philosophical perspective, serve as a vehicle for strengthening the values and character of 21st-century educators?" To answer this question, we will analyze the program as a prototype for addressing the professional dilemmas posed by systemic dynamics and work burnout. We argue that the program is not simply a well-designed intervention, but rather a model that can be adopted for

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systemic policy reform. To establish an analytical lens for this inquiry, the following section will establish a theoretical framework that integrates the goals of flourishing education, the psychological imperative of ontological safety, and the pedagogical mechanisms of character cultivation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims to develop a theoretical and philosophical framework that will serve as a foundation for analyzing the Ministry of Education and Culture's Teacher Psychological Well-Being Program. This framework draws from the intersection of educational philosophy, well-being psychology, and character education theory.

Paradigm Shift in Education: From Human Capital to Flourishing

For decades, the dominant paradigm in global education has focused on the development of "human capital." Within this framework, the primary goal of education is to prepare students for a productive workforce that will drive economic growth. While important, this approach often reduces education to a purely instrumental function, neglecting the full scope of human development.

A global movement is now emerging that is pushing for a shift in educational goals toward flourishing, or well-being, as the primary objective (Curren et al., 2024). Flourishing should not be equated with fleeting happiness or hedonism, but rather refers to Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, a life lived well, filled with meaning, and realizing one's highest human potential (Curren et al., 2024). In the educational context, this means creating an environment that not only supports academic achievement but also fosters virtue, resilience, and a sense of purpose. If flourishing is the goal for students, then logically, the educators who guide them must also be supported to achieve this state first.

Psychological Well-being and Ontological Safety of Educators

Psychological well-being is a multidimensional concept that goes beyond the mere absence of mental health problems. A comprehensive model proposed by Ryff (1989) identifies six key dimensions: autonomy, positive relationships, purpose in life, self-acceptance, personal growth, and environmental mastery. These dimensions align closely with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which states that human well-being and intrinsic motivation depend on the

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fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In a teaching profession fraught with uncertainty and demands, the concept of ontological security becomes highly relevant. Ontological security is the fundamental need for individuals to maintain a sustainable, stable, and coherent self-narrative in the face of life's turmoil (cited in Kelcey, 2023, which refers to Chase, 2013). The application of this concept, originally used to understand the experiences of refugees in liminal spaces, is justified in the context of the modern teaching profession. Constant policy changes, often conflicting systemic demands, and shifting social expectations create a form of "professional liminality" that challenges teachers' identity narratives. Without ontological security, teachers can experience instability in their professional identity and a diminished sense of meaning in their profession.

In addition to the psychological well-being framework, contemporary pedagogical literature demonstrates that teachers' psychological well-being directly impacts the quality of their learning practices. Slavich and Zimbardo (2012), through their concept of Transformational Teaching, assert that transformative teaching requires emotional engagement, personal meaning, and authentic relationships between teachers and students. This approach positions teachers not merely as transmitters of material but as agents of change capable of motivating, providing individual attention, and stimulating reflective thinking in students. In this context, teachers' psychological well-being is a crucial prerequisite, as emotional exhaustion and work burnout have been shown to hinder teachers' capacity to deliver transformative and meaningful teaching.

Values and Character Education Through Habituation

Values and character education cannot be successful if taught solely cognitively or through memorization. Educational philosophy, particularly that rooted in the Aristotelian tradition, emphasizes the importance of habituation in character formation. Values such as honesty, empathy, and resilience must be instilled through repeated practice until they become part of a person's character (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2015).

In the school context, this habituation can be realized through concrete practices integrated into the school culture. The "Prosperous School" model (Dinas Pendidikan, Pemuda dan Olahraga Daerah Yogyakarta & Faculty of Psychology, Gadjah Mada University, 2017) is an example of a comprehensive framework that not only emphasizes positive discipline and the

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cultivation of appreciation, but also includes the development of school policies, teacher training, and a system for handling student problems. This program from the Ministry of Elementary and Secondary Education can be seen as a continuation of this holistic tradition, with a specific focus on strengthening the internal conditions of teachers as the main driving force for creating a "prosperous" school environment more broadly. This theoretical framework, which combines the goals of flourishing, fulfilling psychological well-being, strengthening ontological security, and the process of habituating values, will be used as an analytical lens in examining the teacher welfare program that is the focus of this research.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach to gain a deep, rich, and substantive understanding of the phenomenon under study. This approach was chosen because the research goal was to provide a philosophical interpretation of a program, not to measure its impact quantitatively.

The research design used was a descriptive-analytical case study (Sukmadinata, 2012). The focus of this research was an in-depth analysis of the Teacher Psychological Well-Being Technical Guidance Program and the Teacher Psychological Well-Being Survey Program conducted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education as a single phenomenon. This design allowed the researcher to explore the complexities of the program in its real-life context and connect it to the established theoretical framework.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data are official program documents issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, which include the Good Habits Habituation Guide (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, n.d.-c), the Habituation Diary (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, n.d.-b), activity modules such as the "Circle of Appreciation" material (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, n.d.-a), and the conceptual metaphor "My Tree". Meanwhile, secondary data include relevant academic literature, previous research results, and related program guides such as the Prosperous School Program Guidebook (District of Education, Youth and Sports of Yogyakarta Province & Faculty of Psychology UGM, 2017).

The data analysis technique used was thematic analysis. The analysis process involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Specifically, we mapped the practical elements found in the program documents (e.g., types of activities, metaphors used,

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reflection instructions) and then analyzed how these elements reflected or resonated with philosophical and theoretical concepts outlined in the literature review, such as eudaimonia, ontological security, Ryff's dimensions of well-being, and the principle of habituation.

RESEARCH RESULT

An analysis of program documents from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education reveals a structured intervention architecture rich in psychological and philosophical content. The findings are presented in two main sections: the structure of the technical guidance program and the conceptual framework of the well-being survey.

Structure of the Technical Guidance Program for Teacher Psychological Welfare

The Bimtek program is systematically designed using interrelated metaphors, habituation practices, and resilience techniques.

The “My Tree” Metaphor as a Holistic Framework

The conceptual foundation of the entire Bimtek program is the metaphor of a "tree that grows strong and shady." This metaphor serves as an intuitive roadmap for teachers to understand the process of developing self-well-being. According to the guidance document (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, n.d.-c), the program has seven sequential components that represent the dimensions of psychological well-being:

- **Introduction to Psychological Well-being**: An opening session introducing the metaphor of "A Tree that Grows Strong and Shady" as the main framework.
- **"Recognizing Seeds"**: A module that focuses on Self-Acceptance, inviting participants to understand their strengths and areas of self-development.
- **"Strengthen the Roots"**: Sessions discussing Self-Autonomy, training teachers to build a strong and independent internal foundation.
- **"Finding the Sun"**: The focus is on finding a meaningful Life Purpose as a source of energy and direction.
- **"Caring for the Ecosystem"**: A module that emphasizes the importance of building positive relationships with colleagues, students, and the community.
- **"Maintaining the Quality of Planting Media"**: Sessions aimed at increasing capacity in managing work and personal environments effectively.

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- **"Growing New Branches"**: A closing module that focuses on continuous Self-Growth.

Well-Being Habituation Practices

This program emphasizes the formation of new habits through concrete activities. The Habituation Diary (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, n.d.-b) provides a series of daily exercises, including:

- **"5 Minute Gratitude Journal"**: A short reflective exercise in the evening to note things for which you are grateful.
- **Exercise on Formulating Internal Boundaries**: A structured guide for teachers to set healthy personal boundaries related to work.
- **"Circle of Appreciation"**: A group activity in which participants give each other written appreciation to build a culture of recognition and positive relationships (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, nd-a).

Self-Resilience Techniques

This program equips teachers with practical techniques for stress management. Key examples include:

- **5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique**: Sensory awareness exercises to calm yourself when feeling anxious or overwhelmed (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, nd-c).
- **Positive Affirmations**: Using self-affirming phrases to combat negative thoughts and build self-confidence.

Conceptual Framework of Teacher Psychological Well-being Survey

The Teacher Psychological Well-Being Survey Program is designed to complement the Technical Guidance by providing comprehensive diagnostic data. This survey framework maps teacher psychological well-being multidimensionally using Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being (PWB) model.

The six main dimensions measured in Ryff's (1989) PWB framework include:

- Self-acceptance
- Positive relations with others
- Autonomy
- Environmental mastery

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- Purpose in life
- Personal growth

These six dimensions are considered relevant to the program's orientation, which emphasizes the search for meaning, strengthening relationships, and developing teachers' reflective capacity. Thus, the survey assesses not only the absence of stress but also teachers' capacity to fully develop in their profession.

DISCUSSION

This section will synthesize the research findings from the program document analysis with the philosophical framework developed in the literature review. This synthesis aims to answer the primary research question: how the Ministry of Education and Culture's Teacher Psychological Well-Being Program can serve as a vehicle for strengthening the values and character of 21st-century educators.

Teacher Well-Being Programs as Eudaimonia Practices in the 21st Century

An analysis of the Ministry of Education and Culture's programs demonstrates a paradigm shift from reactive interventions (stress management) to a generative-salutogenic approach (achieving eudaimonia). While stress management aims to return individuals to a neutral state, the eudaimonia approach aims to move individuals beyond this state to a state of full development or flourishing.

This is evident in the structure of the "My Tree" module. Modules such as "Finding the Sun" (A Meaningful Life Purpose) and "Growing New Branches" (Personal Growth) directly reflect the search for an authentic and meaningful life, a core tenet of Aristotle's eudaimonia (Curren et al., 2024). The program not only asks "How can I reduce my stress?" but also asks deeper questions: "What makes this profession meaningful to you?" and "How can you continue to grow as an educator and a human being?" Activities such as the "Circle of Appreciation" are practical manifestations of the "Positive Relationships" dimension of Ryff's (1989) model. These activities not only provide a momentary feeling of well-being but also build the foundation of a supportive social ecosystem where flourishing can occur collectively, not just as an individual achievement.

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Building Ontological Security Through Self-Reflection and Autonomy

The teaching profession faces constant uncertainty. In such circumstances, the ability to maintain a coherent self-narrative becomes crucial for mental health. The Ministry of Education and Culture's program intelligently integrates practices that serve as tools for building and maintaining ontological security (cited in Kelcey, 2023).

Reflective practices such as the "5-Minute Gratitude Journal" and writing a "Letter to Your Future Self" (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, n.d.-b) are mechanisms for weaving everyday experiences into a meaningful self-narrative. The professional dilemmas resulting from the systemic dynamics outlined above are rooted in fragmented professional narratives. Practices like the "Gratitude Journal" directly combat this by empowering teachers to write coherent and empowering narratives of their daily experiences, thereby restoring ontological security that can be disrupted by systemic dissonance. On the other hand, the "Strengthen the Roots" (Self-Autonomy) module and the "Define Internal Boundaries" exercise directly empower teachers to assert their agency. This empowerment of autonomy is an essential foundation for building robust ontological security.

Strengthening Educators' Character Through the Inculcation of Core Values

This program explicitly uses the term "habituation," indicating that its goal is not simply momentary skills training, but rather a continuous process of character building (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2015). The micro-habits introduced, such as grounding techniques or reciting positive affirmations, are a form of internalizing core values in concrete actions. Grounding techniques are not simply about calming oneself; they are a practice of cultivating the character of calmness and mindfulness. The "Gratitude Journal" cultivates the character of gratitude and humility.

Thus, when a teacher routinely practices self-well-being, he or she is engaged in the process of strengthening his or her character. Teachers who are able to calmly manage their emotions, who can see the positive side of challenges, and who have appreciative relationships with their colleagues will indirectly become authentic character role models for their students. The most effective character education is not that taught through dogmatic lectures, but rather that demonstrated through lived example. This synthesis demonstrates the program's deep philosophical foundation, revealing a powerful model for educator empowerment whose implications for policy and future research will now be explored.

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CONCLUSION

This research shows that the Ministry of Education and Culture's Teacher Psychological Well-Being Program can be an effort to strengthen educators' values and character in facing the demands of 21st-century education. This program not only focuses on teachers' psychological well-being but also encourages self-development, a more meaningful life, the ability to reflect, and the formation of positive habits. The concept of eudaimonia is implemented through efforts to help teachers achieve self-development and a better professional life. Furthermore, self-reflection can increase teachers' self-confidence and ability to face various professional challenges. Habituating values through micro-habits also helps teachers develop a calm, resilient attitude and become role models for students.

These results indicate that teacher psychological well-being needs to be a key component of professional development and education policy, not simply an add-on program. Support in the form of reduced administrative burdens, increased autonomy, and a positive work environment are necessary for teachers to optimally fulfill their roles. Therefore, improving teacher well-being not only benefits educators but can also support student character development and the creation of a quality educational environment. Further research can be conducted to examine the long-term impact of programs on teacher performance, school conditions, and student development.

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