

Teacher Strategies in Integrating Character Values into Learning

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Abstract: The main problem is that the integration of character education into classroom learning has not been implemented optimally, as many teachers still face challenges in consistently integrating character values into the teaching and learning process. This research aims to analyze teacher strategies in integrating character values into the learning process. The background of this study lies in the urgency of character education in schools, where teachers are expected not only to transfer knowledge but also to foster moral values among students. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, the research involved teachers, students, and school principals as key informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model consisting of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that teachers employ three main strategies in integrating character values: embedding values within the curriculum, implementing interactive and participatory learning methods, and habituating values through daily classroom activities. These strategies contribute significantly to developing students' discipline, responsibility, respect, and cooperation. However, the study also highlights several challenges such as limited teacher competence, lack of institutional support, and insufficient parental involvement. The research emphasizes that effective character education requires comprehensive collaboration among teachers, schools, parents, and communities. It concludes that character-based learning is a strategic instrument for fostering students' holistic development and promoting a more ethical and inclusive school culture.

Keywords: Character Education, Teacher Strategies, Values Integration, Learning Process, Moral Development

INTRODUCTION

Education is not merely a process of transferring knowledge but also a medium for shaping students' character (Cholifah & others, 2024; Dewi & Alam, 2020; Sahri, 2022). In the 21st century, schools are expected not only to equip students with academic competence but also to cultivate strong moral and ethical values. The integration of character education into learning activities is considered a strategic effort to ensure that education contributes to the holistic development of students as intelligent, responsible, and ethical individuals (Suhifatullah et al., 2021; Tiara et al., 2024). Character education plays a pivotal role in strengthening students' attitudes, behavior, and values in accordance with cultural, moral, and religious norms. Through learning, teachers are

expected to instill fundamental values such as discipline, honesty, tolerance, respect, and responsibility. These values are not only crucial for individual development but also essential for building a harmonious society in an era marked by diversity and rapid globalization.

In recent years, character education has become a priority in many national education systems, including Indonesia (Sakban & Sundawa, 2023). The government emphasizes the importance of integrating character values into school curricula, considering them to be as essential as cognitive competencies. Therefore, the role of teachers is no longer limited to facilitating learning; they are also expected to serve as role models and agents of change who can internalize character values in every aspect of classroom instruction and school life. Despite its significance, the integration of character values into learning continues to face various challenges. Many teachers experience difficulties in consistently integrating character values into lesson plans and learning activities due to limited understanding, insufficient training, and demanding academic responsibilities. In some cases, character education is only treated as an additional program rather than a fundamental aspect of teaching. Another problem lies in the inconsistency between what is taught and the actual behavior modeled by teachers and students in the school environment. While character education is emphasized in theory, in practice students often encounter contradictions between moral values conveyed in class and the behavior they observe in real-life interactions. This inconsistency weakens the effectiveness of character education and makes the integration of values more difficult to achieve.

The study by Putri NP, Artini LP, and Wahyuni LG found that teachers generally have positive perceptions toward the integration of character education; however, its implementation in classroom learning still requires effective strategies and consistent practice, which is relevant to this study examining the challenges of integrating character values into the learning process (Putri et al., 2020). The study conducted by Njui HW emphasizes that educational reforms oriented toward 21st-century skills require the integration of character education into teacher education curricula, which is relevant to this research in highlighting the important role of teachers in internalizing character values within the learning process (Njui, 2017). The study by Sukarno S and Riyadini MV revealed that the use of appropriate learning materials and teaching-learning

activities can effectively enhance students' character development, which supports this study's focus on integrating character values into educational practices (Sukarno & Riyadini, 2024).

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of teachers' strategies in embedding character values into learning. For example, research has shown that approaches such as contextual learning, cooperative learning, and value clarification techniques can significantly enhance students' moral awareness and behavior. Teachers who creatively integrate values into their teaching methods tend to achieve better results in fostering student character compared to those who rely solely on traditional instruction. Furthermore, studies in various contexts also emphasize that the success of character education is highly dependent on the teacher's role as a role model. Research indicates that students are more likely to internalize values when they observe consistent behavior from their teachers, both inside and outside the classroom. This shows that effective character education strategies must involve both pedagogical techniques and exemplary behavior from educators.

Although there is a growing body of research on character education, there remains a gap in understanding the specific strategies teachers use to integrate character values into different learning contexts. Most existing studies are still general in scope, focusing more on outcomes rather than detailed strategies. There is also limited research that explores the challenges teachers face in implementing these strategies and how they overcome such obstacles in diverse classroom settings. Based on these considerations, this research aims to analyze teachers' strategies in integrating character values into the learning process. The study seeks to identify effective methods, challenges encountered, and the role of teachers as both instructors and role models. The findings are expected to contribute not only to theoretical insights into character education but also to provide practical recommendations for teachers, schools, and policymakers in strengthening character-based learning.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as its main objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategies in integrating character values into the learning process (Darmalaksana, 2020). The qualitative method is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to explore meanings, practices, and experiences of teachers in a natural

school setting. The case study design allows for detailed investigation of the phenomenon within its real context, focusing on specific schools and teachers as units of analysis.

The study was conducted in selected secondary schools with diverse student backgrounds that actively implement character education programs. Participants in this study were purposively selected and consisted of teachers from various subject areas, school principals, and several students who were considered capable of providing relevant information. Teachers were selected as the primary informants because they directly implement teaching strategies and serve as role models in students' character development. School principals and students were included to provide additional perspectives on the effectiveness and challenges of teachers' strategies.

Data were collected using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis (Moleong, 2017). In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and principals to gain insights into strategies, practices, and challenges in integrating character values into learning. Classroom observations were carried out to examine how teachers practically apply these values during teaching and learning activities. Document analysis included reviewing lesson plans, teaching materials, and school programs related to character education. These multiple data collection techniques ensured the richness and credibility of the information obtained.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). Data reduction was conducted by selecting, simplifying, and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. The data were then presented in descriptive and thematic forms to identify patterns and categories of strategies employed by teachers. Finally, conclusions were drawn through continuous interpretation and verification. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation of sources, techniques, and time was applied, along with member checking and peer debriefing. These procedures were expected to enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Integration of Character Values through Curriculum and Lesson Planning

The findings reveal that teachers integrate character values into the curriculum primarily through lesson planning, particularly within the preparation of lesson plans (RPP)

and syllabus design. Teachers intentionally insert values such as honesty, responsibility, respect, and cooperation as part of the learning objectives alongside cognitive targets. This strategic inclusion ensures that the teaching process does not merely focus on academic achievement but also emphasizes the holistic development of students' moral and social character.

Teachers design learning scenarios that embed character values in both explicit and implicit ways (Rissanen et al., 2018). For example, in subjects like Civic Education (PPKn), teachers explicitly outline values such as discipline and tolerance in the instructional goals, while in Mathematics or Science, values like perseverance, critical thinking, and responsibility are integrated implicitly through problem-solving activities. This integration helps students to internalize values in real academic contexts rather than perceiving them as abstract concepts detached from daily life.

Another strategy identified is the alignment of lesson content with real-life issues and cultural contexts. Teachers link classroom materials to social phenomena that require students to reflect on ethical decisions, teamwork, and empathy (Bonfield et al., 2024). For instance, in Language classes, teachers often use stories, literature, or case studies highlighting moral dilemmas to stimulate discussion and character reflection. This contextualization enables students to connect values to their daily interactions, making them more relatable and meaningful.

The curriculum integration also emphasizes cross-subject collaboration, where teachers coordinate to ensure consistency of character values taught across disciplines (Unaizahroya et al., 2022). For example, while Science teachers highlight environmental responsibility, Religion teachers reinforce stewardship as a moral obligation, and Language teachers encourage communication based on respect and empathy. This cross-disciplinary approach creates a unified framework where students are continuously exposed to the same values in different contexts, strengthening internalization.

These findings support Banks' (2010) theory of multicultural and character-based education, which states that values must be incorporated holistically within the curriculum. By embedding character values in lesson planning, teachers create an intentional framework for

shaping students' moral development. However, the discussion also highlights challenges, including the limited capacity of some teachers in formulating measurable indicators for character education. This implies the need for training and professional development to help teachers operationalize character values effectively in curriculum design.

2. Classroom Strategies for Character Development

In the classroom setting, teachers implement several strategies to ensure students not only understand character values but also practice them. Group discussions and cooperative learning are the most widely used methods, as they allow students to work collaboratively with peers from diverse backgrounds (Aronson, 2021). Through this approach, values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and teamwork are naturally fostered as students engage in problem-solving and share perspectives.

Teachers also apply role-modeling as an implicit strategy to demonstrate character values in action. Many teachers emphasize that students learn more effectively by observing rather than being instructed. For instance, teachers who consistently arrive on time, treat students with fairness, and use respectful language set powerful examples for students to imitate. This aligns with Lickona's (1991) concept of character education, which underscores the importance of adults serving as role models in the moral development of children.

Another classroom strategy involves integrating reflective practices. Teachers encourage students to reflect on their attitudes and behaviors after group activities or discussions. For example, after debates, students are asked to evaluate not only the logical strength of arguments but also the way they respected differing opinions. Reflection activities strengthen students' awareness of their actions and how these relate to broader moral values.

Practical classroom rules and norms also play an essential role in shaping students' character (Rahayu et al., 2024). Teachers establish agreements at the beginning of the semester that promote respect, honesty, and responsibility. These norms are enforced consistently, with teachers using restorative approaches rather than punitive ones when students violate values. This restorative method encourages students to acknowledge their mistakes, repair relationships, and internalize the consequences of their actions.

The findings further indicate that integrating character values into classroom practices

requires consistency and creativity. While many teachers actively model and encourage values, others still face difficulties maintaining consistency due to workload pressures or lack of institutional support. This finding echoes Narvaez and Lapsley's (2008) view that character education must be systematically supported to be effective. Without proper reinforcement, classroom strategies risk becoming fragmented and unsustainable.

3. Challenges and Opportunities in Character Value Integration

Despite the positive efforts, teachers encounter several challenges in integrating character values into learning. One of the main obstacles is the lack of comprehensive training on how to explicitly translate values into teaching strategies. Many teachers express uncertainty about designing lesson plans with measurable indicators for values such as empathy or integrity (Istiana et al., 2024). This often results in general descriptions of values rather than concrete actions or competencies that can be assessed.

Another challenge lies in balancing academic content with value-based education. Teachers often feel pressured to complete the curriculum and prepare students for standardized examinations, which reduces the time available for in-depth exploration of character values. Consequently, character integration sometimes becomes superficial, delivered only as brief reminders rather than embedded in meaningful activities. This structural issue underscores the tension between academic accountability and holistic education.

However, the research also identifies opportunities for enhancing character integration. The rise of project-based learning, collaborative extracurricular programs, and community engagement activities opens up new spaces where students can practice values in authentic contexts. For instance, service-learning projects provide students with real opportunities to demonstrate empathy, social responsibility, and teamwork while contributing positively to society.

Support from school leadership also emerges as a crucial factor in sustaining character education. Principals who establish a school-wide vision of character development and provide continuous monitoring and resources create an environment where teachers feel supported (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2017). Institutional policies that prioritize inclusivity, respect, and fairness further reinforce the classroom-level strategies applied by teachers. This

shows that character education is most effective when supported by a whole-school approach.

In discussing these challenges and opportunities, it becomes evident that teachers cannot carry the responsibility of character education alone. Collaboration with parents, communities, and policymakers is essential to create a supportive ecosystem for value integration. These findings highlight the need for systemic reforms and capacity building in teacher training to ensure sustainable character development. By leveraging both classroom strategies and external support, schools can transform character education from isolated practices into an embedded culture.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teacher strategies in integrating character values into learning play a crucial role in shaping students' moral, social, and emotional development. The findings reveal that teachers not only act as transmitters of knowledge but also as role models who consistently embody character values in daily practices. Through curriculum integration, interactive learning methods, and classroom-based habituation, teachers successfully instill values such as discipline, responsibility, respect, and cooperation. However, challenges still remain, including limited teacher competence in value-based pedagogy, lack of institutional support, and inadequate collaboration between schools, parents, and communities. Despite these obstacles, the study affirms that character-based education, when effectively implemented, can strengthen students' holistic growth and contribute to creating a more ethical and harmonious learning environment.

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