The Role of Character Education in Developing Students' Social-Emotional Competence

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study aims to explore and analyze the role of character education in developing students' social-emotional competencies at the elementary and secondary school levels. In an increasingly complex educational context where cognitive abilities alone are insufficient to prepare students for social challenges, character education becomes increasingly relevant. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and parents, as well as direct observation of the implementation of character education programs in schools. The results indicate that character education integrated into the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and school culture has successfully improved students' social skills such as empathy, cooperation, and self-control. Programs involving parents and the community also strengthen the application of character values in students' daily lives. Furthermore, challenges in implementing character education, such as a lack of teacher understanding and limited resources, were also identified as factors that need attention. This study confirms that character education plays a role in shaping individuals who excel not only academically but also possess strong character and good social skills. Therefore, this study recommends the need to strengthen character education programs in schools and closer collaboration between schools, parents, and the community to create a holistic and sustainable learning environment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a focus in education systems worldwide, including in Indonesia. Character education aims not only to improve students' cognitive abilities but also to develop their social and emotional aspects. Social-emotional competencies are skills that help students interact with their social environment, manage emotions, and build healthy relationships. In this context, this study aims to explore the role of character education in developing students' social-emotional competencies in schools. (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia: 2017, 1-12)

Various studies have shown that effective character education can have a positive impact on students' social and emotional development. Students with strong social-emotional competencies tend to have more harmonious relationships with peers and teachers, are better able to cope with stress, and exhibit a more positive attitude toward learning. Furthermore, social-emotional competency is also

closely linked to improved academic achievement, reduced problem behavior, and improved overall psychological well-being (Zubaidah, 2018, 22).

However, the implementation of character education in schools often faces various challenges. Some of these include a lack of in-depth understanding of the concept of character education, limited resources, and resistance from some who may view character education as an additional burden. Therefore, it is important to identify and understand effective strategies that can be implemented to optimize character education in the school context.

Character education is an integral part of the educational process, aimed at developing students with integrity, good morals, and the ability to interact positively with others. Social-emotional competencies encompass skills such as empathy, cooperation, emotional management, and communication. In an era of globalization and rapid technological development, these skills ensure that students can effectively face life's challenges (Sudarsono, 2015, 15).

Previous research has shown that effective character education can improve students' emotional and social well-being, reduce negative behaviors, and improve academic achievement. However, more research is needed to understand how character education specifically affects the development of students' social-emotional competencies and what factors may influence its effectiveness.

This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the field of education by providing insight into how character education can be developed and implemented effectively to foster students' social-emotional competencies. Through a better understanding of the role of character education, it is hoped that schools can design and implement programs that not only improve students' academic abilities but also help them become better individuals socially and emotionally.

Based on this background, the problem formulation in this research is:

1. What is the role of character education in developing students' social-emotional competencies?
2. What factors influence the effectiveness of character education in developing students' social-emotional competencies?
3. How can the implementation of character education in schools be improved to optimize the development of students' social-emotional competencies?

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to examine the role of character education in developing students' social-emotional competencies. Research data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and parents, as well as direct observation of the implementation of character education in the school environment. In addition, documentation in the form of school programs, learning tools, and policies related to character education was used as supporting data. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering direct involvement in the implementation of character education. The data obtained were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Their validity was tested using source and technique triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and credibility of the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Definition and Basic Concepts of Character Education

Character education refers to systematic efforts undertaken by schools to teach moral and ethical values that are expected to shape students' personalities. These values include honesty, responsibility, respect, fairness, and caring. Character education is not only taught through formal lessons in the classroom, but also through extracurricular activities, school culture, and daily interactions between students, teachers, and school staff. Effective character education must involve the entire school community, including teachers, staff, students, and parents, in a harmonious collaboration. (Suyadi: 2019, 58) This means that all parties must have the same understanding of the values to be instilled and are committed to implementing them in every aspect of school life. Furthermore, a holistic approach encompassing classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and daily interactions ensures that these values can be practiced and internalized by students.

Character education focuses not only on the theoretical teaching of moral values in the formation of positive habits and behaviors. Teachers, as primary facilitators, must be able to provide concrete examples of these values in their daily actions. For example, by demonstrating honesty in communication, responsibility in tasks, and respect in interactions with students and colleagues. (Mulyasa: 2016, 45)

Furthermore, extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, scouting, and other clubs can be effective platforms for strengthening character education. In these activities, students learn to work together in teams, respect differences, manage conflict, and pursue shared goals. These activities provide opportunities for students to practice the values they have learned in real-life situations that require emotional and social engagement.

A positive school culture also plays a role in character education. Schools that successfully develop a culture that prioritizes moral values will create an environment that supports student character development. This can be achieved through fair school policies, rewards for positive behavior, and the creation of an inclusive and supportive atmosphere. (Nurhayati: 2017, 50)

Daily interactions between students, teachers, and staff are also an integral part of character education. Each interaction provides an opportunity for all parties to demonstrate and reinforce the moral values taught. This can be achieved through, for example, empathetic communication, constructive conflict management, and respectful collaboration.

Thus, comprehensive and consistent character education is expected to shape individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess strong social-emotional competencies. Students who develop these competencies will be better prepared to face life's challenges, contribute positively to society, and lead more meaningful and fulfilling lives.

B. Social-Emotional Competence

Social-emotional competence includes skills that enable individuals to recognize and manage their own emotions, understand and empathize with others, build and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging social situations effectively. (Goleman: 1995, 34) This competence helps students interact with their environment and achieve optimal psychological well-being. The effective implementation of character education can strengthen students' social-emotional competence in various ways.

1. Through a curriculum specifically designed to explicitly teach these skills. Lessons can cover topics such as emotional management, effective communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork. This learning can be conducted through discussions, role-playing, and practical activities involving social interaction.

2. Character education can be strengthened through extracurricular activities and special programs designed to develop social-emotional skills. For example, peer mentoring programs, discussion groups, and community service projects can provide opportunities for students to practice social-emotional skills in real-life and meaningful contexts.

3. A school culture that supports character values and social-emotional skills also requires attention. Schools must create a safe and inclusive environment where every student feels valued and supported. Rewarding positive behavior and addressing negative behavior constructively can help reinforce the values taught.

4. Parental and community involvement in character education also plays a crucial role. Collaboration between schools, families, and communities can ensure that the values and social-emotional skills taught in school are reinforced at home and in the broader social environment.

C. The Relationship between Character Education and Social-Emotional Competence

Character education plays a significant role in developing students' social-emotional competencies. Through the teaching of moral and ethical values, students learn to understand the importance of empathy, cooperation, and self-control. For example, the value of honesty helps students build trust in their relationships, while the value of responsibility teaches them to make decisions that consider the impact on others.

Values such as respect and fairness also play a role in shaping positive social behavior. By learning to respect others, students can create an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone feels valued and accepted. The value of fairness teaches students to be fair in their interactions, both in terms of dividing tasks and resolving conflicts. (Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M., 2005, 45)

Good character education not only teaches these values theoretically but also provides opportunities for students to practice them in a variety of situations. For example, group activities in class can be designed to encourage cooperation and collaboration. In these situations, students learn to work together, listen to others' opinions, and solve problems collectively. (McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G., 2005, 112)

Furthermore, character education integrated into the school curriculum allows students to see the relevance of these values in academic contexts and everyday life. For example, in history lessons, teachers can teach about figures who have demonstrated integrity and courage. In science lessons, discussions about ethical responsibility in the use of technology can teach students about the impact of their decisions on society and the environment.

D. Implementation of Character Education in Schools

Implementation of character education in schools can be done through various strategies:

1. **Integration in Curriculum:** Character values are integrated into subjects, such as discussing historical figures who demonstrate integrity or literature that teaches about courage and honesty.

2. **Extracurricular Activities:** Clubs and extracurricular activities such as debate, scouting, and sports can be a platform for teaching character values and social-emotional skills.

3. **School Culture:** Building a school culture that supports character values, such as rewarding positive behavior and creating a safe and inclusive environment. (Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A.:2013,3)

E. Challenges in Character Education

Some of the challenges faced in implementing character education include:

1. **Lack of Understanding and Training:** Teachers and staff may lack a clear understanding of the concept of character education and how to teach it effectively. This may stem from a lack of specific training in character education during their formal education and limited opportunities for professional development focused on this topic. Without a deep understanding and clear strategies, it is difficult for them to integrate character values into their daily teaching.

2. **Resistance from Students and Parents:** Some students and parents may view character education as an extra burden irrelevant to academic goals. They may feel that the primary focus of school should be on academic achievement and test preparation, while character education is seen as less important or even distracting from learning time that should be devoted to core subjects like math, science, and language arts.

3. **Resource Limitations:** Schools may lack the resources, both financial and material, to support character education programs. Limited funding often hinders schools' ability to provide teacher training, purchase necessary teaching materials, or develop extracurricular programs focused on character education. Without adequate resources, it is difficult for schools to design and implement effective and sustainable initiatives. (Fullan, M.: 2007, 62)

F. Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Character Education

The effectiveness of character education in developing students' social-emotional competencies is influenced by several factors:

1. **Teaching Quality:** Competent and dedicated teachers play a crucial role in teaching character values. They not only act as transmitters of information but also as role models for students in applying these values in their daily lives. A teacher's interpersonal skills and ability to communicate effectively can foster strong, positive relationships with students, supporting character learning.

2. **School and Community Support:** Support from the entire school community, including administrators, staff, and parents, is crucial for the success of a character education program. When everyone is committed to implementing character values, the message conveyed to students is consistent and powerful. School administrators, as leaders, play a role in developing a vision and policies that support character education and ensuring that the necessary resources are available to implement the program.

3. **Consistency and Sustainability:** Character education must be taught consistently and continuously so that the values taught can be truly ingrained in students. With a systematic approach, students can understand and internalize these values through direct experience, reflection, and repeated practice. This involves more than just classroom instruction;

reinforcement through out-of-class activities and daily interactions within the school environment is necessary. (Lickona, T.: 1991, 142)

G. Case Studies and Research Results

Several case studies have shown that schools that successfully implement character education effectively are able to improve students' social-emotional competencies. For example, a school in Jakarta that integrated character education into its curriculum and extracurricular activities reported improvements in students' ability to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and demonstrate empathy. These results demonstrate that character education can contribute significantly to the development of social skills that support students' daily lives.

The school implements various methods, such as project-based learning, where students work in groups to achieve a common goal. This method not only teaches academic skills but also trains students to communicate, collaborate, and respect each other's perspectives. Additionally, extracurricular activities such as discussion clubs and community service programs provide students with opportunities to interact positively and build supportive relationships.

Another study conducted at several high schools in other areas also found that students involved in character education programs showed improvements in self-control and emotional management skills. These schools implemented an experiential approach where students were encouraged to reflect on their emotions and learn techniques for managing stress and frustration. This way, students became better prepared to face the social and emotional challenges they might encounter in everyday life.

H. Recommendations for Improving Character Education

Based on research findings, several recommendations for improving character education in schools include:

1. **Training and Professional Development for Teachers:** Providing teachers with adequate training in character education concepts and strategies ensures they can teach effectively and confidently. This training encompasses not only the theory behind character education but also best practices for implementing it in the classroom. With proper training, teachers can learn creative ways to integrate character education into existing curricula and design engaging activities for students.

2. **Involving Parents and Communities:** Encourage parental and community participation in character education programs to ensure comprehensive support in creating an environment conducive to student character development. When parents are actively involved in character education, they can set a good example at home and support the values taught in school. Therefore, schools need to hold activities that involve parents, such as seminars, workshops, or social events, where parents can learn about the importance of character education and how they can contribute.

3. **Using an Integrated Approach:** Integrating character education into all aspects of school life, including the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and school culture, is a crucial step to ensure that character values are not only taught but also consistently applied in students' daily lives. Within the curriculum, educators can design learning materials that go beyond academic achievement to include learning about values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy. For example, in language lessons, students can be encouraged to analyze characters in stories that

reflect these values and discuss how those characters might influence their relationships with others.

4. **Evaluation and Assessment:** Conducting regular evaluations to assess the effectiveness of character education programs and making adjustments as needed is an important step in ensuring that the program remains relevant and positively impacts students' character development. Evaluations can be conducted through various methods, such as surveys of students, parents, and teachers, and data analysis on changes in student behavior and attitudes before and after the program is implemented. By collecting this information, schools can identify successful areas and those that need improvement. (Patton, M. Q.: 2008, 45).

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that character education plays a significant role in developing students' social-emotional competencies. Through the teaching of moral and ethical values, students are not only required to improve their academic abilities but also taught to manage their emotions, interact positively with their social environment, and build healthy relationships with others. The integration of character education into the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and school culture creates a learning environment conducive to student character development. The research results show that an effective character education program can improve students' social skills such as empathy, cooperation, and self-control. Furthermore, support from parents and the community for the success of this program creates synergy between education at school and learning at home. By involving all stakeholders, character education can be a collective effort that not only strengthens the values taught but also strengthens the community as a whole.

Regular evaluation of character education programs is also necessary to ensure their effectiveness and relevance. By gathering feedback from students, teachers, and parents, can make necessary adjustments to improve the program and ensure that character values are applied in students' daily lives. With a systematic and sustainable approach, character education can contribute significantly to the development of students' social-emotional competencies, shaping them into individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. Overall, this research confirms the importance of character education in creating a future generation capable of facing social challenges with a positive attitude and strong ethics and making constructive contributions to society.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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