

## **Exploration of Character Education Programs and Their Contribution to the Moral Formation of Junior High School Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to analyze the impact of character education programs on the moral formation of students in the junior high school environment. The context of this research arises from the growing concern about the decline of moral values among adolescents, which is reflected in issues such as indiscipline, lack of respect for teachers and peers, and weak sense of responsibility in the school environment. Character education is therefore seen as one of the strategic efforts in instilling moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect in students from an early age. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a case study in one of the junior high schools in Indonesia. Data collection techniques were conducted through observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, as well as documentation of character education activities. The results showed that the implementation of character education program has a positive impact on the moral behavior of students, especially in aspects of discipline, responsibility, and empathy for others. Learning that is integrated with character values, as well as support from the school environment and family, are key factors in the success of the program. However, there are still some challenges such as the lack of consistency in the implementation of the program and the limitations of teacher training in implementing a character-based approach. In conclusion, the character education program has a significant contribution in the formation of student morale, but its sustainability and effectiveness are highly dependent on the commitment of all components of the school as well as collaboration with parents. The recommendations of this study emphasize the importance of periodic evaluation, teacher training, and active involvement of all parties in building a school culture of character.*

**Keywords:** Character, Morality, Values, Formation, Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Character education is a systematic effort that aims to instill moral and ethical values to students so that they are able to become individuals with integrity in community life<sup>1</sup>. This process not only takes place through formal teaching in the classroom<sup>2</sup>, but also through the example shown by teachers, social interaction at school, and the culture built within the educational environment. Character education emphasizes the importance of forming a full-fledged student personality, which includes cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects.<sup>3</sup> In this case, character is not something genetically inherited, but the result of a constant process of education and habituation. The values promoted in character education include various universal moral aspects, such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, hard work, respect for others, discipline, social care, and love for the homeland. These values are an important foundation for the formation of a good person and a responsible citizen. When these values are instilled early and consistently reinforced, it is expected that students will grow into individuals capable of making correct decisions, acting ethically, and contributing positively to society.<sup>4</sup>

The Indonesian government recognized the importance of character education and began to formally integrate it into the national curriculum, especially through the 2013 curriculum.<sup>5</sup> In this curriculum, character education is not taught as a separate subject, but rather integrated into all subjects, extracurricular activities, and everyday life in schools. Each teacher is expected not only to convey the subject matter, but also to be a character-forming agent by providing an example and creating a learning atmosphere that supports the moral development of students. The implementation of character education in the 2013 curriculum also emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach, where families, schools, and communities work together in the process of forming student character. Thus, the success of character education depends not only on teachers and schools, but also on broader environmental support. The government through the Ministry of Education has also issued various guidelines and modules on character education, as well as conducting teacher training so that they have understanding and skills in integrating character values in learning activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Rudiyanto and Ria Kasanova, "Pembentukan Karakter Mahasiswa Indonesia Melalui Pendidikan Karakter," *Student Scientific Creativity Journal* 1, no. 1 (2023): 233–47, <https://doi.org/10.55606/sscj-amik.v1i1.1119>.

<sup>2</sup> M. Natsir, "Sistem Pembelajaran Di Pondok Pesantren Al-Aziziyah Analisis Terhadap Metode Dalam Kegiatan Pembelajaran Formal Dan Nonformal," *JURNAL PENELITIAN KEISLAMAN* 16, no. 1 (June 23, 2020): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.20414/jpk.v16i1.1104>.

<sup>3</sup> Mahmudulhassan, Mariam Elbanna, and Muhammad Abuzar, "THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY (CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION)," *JURNAL PEDAGOGY* 18, no. 1 (April 30, 2025): 01–08, <https://doi.org/10.63889/pedagogy.v18i1.248>.

<sup>4</sup> Yudo Handoko Yudo Handoko, "Disiplin Dan Nilai-Nilai Religius Dalam Membentuk Perilaku Tagguh Dan Tanggung Jawab," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Religious Education* 1, no. 2 (April 28, 2025): 201–12, <https://doi.org/10.63243/32mpnt61>.

<sup>5</sup> Isa Anshori, "Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Di Madrasah," *Halaqa: Islamic Education Journal* 1, no. 2 (December 4, 2017): 63–74, <https://doi.org/10.21070/halaqa.v1i2.1243>.

Although many efforts have been made, the implementation of character education in the field still faces various challenges.<sup>6</sup> Some of them are the lack of deep understanding from educators regarding the essence of character education, limited time and means, as well as the weak involvement of parents in the educational process. Therefore, it is important to conduct research to determine the extent to which the character education program that has been implemented is able to have a real impact on the moral formation of students.<sup>7</sup> This study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of the program and become the basis for future improvements. School as a formal educational institution has an important responsibility in shaping the personality and character of learners.<sup>8</sup> In addition to being a place of knowledge transfer, the school is also a vehicle for fostering moral and ethical values that become the provision of students in life. Character education in schools is not only reflected through teaching materials, but also in school culture, social relations between school personnel, as well as a consistently applied habituation system. With a planned and structured approach, schools can be effective spaces in instilling values such as honesty, hard work, tolerance, and responsibility.

Character development programs in schools are often carried out through integration in the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and daily habituation practices. For example, routine activities such as flag ceremonies, literacy programs, and joint service work are not just formal activities, but also a means to train discipline, respect, and social care. In addition, a contextual approach that relates the subject matter to real-life situations is also an important strategy in the internalization of character values. This requires teachers to be creative and reflective in managing character-charged learning. The role of teachers in character education is very central. The teacher not only acts as a transmitter of knowledge, but also as an example for students in their daily attitudes and behaviors. The teacher's example in terms of discipline, honesty, and responsibility has a strong influence on the moral formation of students. Therefore, it is important for teachers to have a deep understanding of the essence of character education as well as skills in applying it in the classroom. Without the support of competent teachers, character education programs will be difficult to achieve the expected goals.

However, the implementation of character education in schools often encounters various obstacles that hinder its effectiveness. One of the main obstacles is the lack of training and assistance for teachers in implementing character values effectively. Many teachers still consider character education as the responsibility of religious teachers or counseling guidance alone. In addition, the density of the curriculum is also the reason why character education is often marginalized and does not get an adequate portion of time in learning activities. Other obstacles come from the social environment of students, especially support from families that have not been

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<sup>6</sup> Anggi Afrina Rambe et al., "Implementasi Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Kurikulum 2013," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Agama Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan* 21, no. 2 (October 31, 2024): 238–49, [https://doi.org/10.25299/al-hikmah:jaip.2024.vol21\(2\).16354](https://doi.org/10.25299/al-hikmah:jaip.2024.vol21(2).16354).

<sup>7</sup> Mohammad Rudiyanto and Ria Kasanova, "Pembentukan Karakter Mahasiswa Indonesia Melalui Pendidikan Karakter," *Student Scientific Creativity Journal* 1, no. 1 (January 22, 2023): 233–47, <https://doi.org/10.55606/sscj-amik.v1i1.1119>.

<sup>8</sup> Lilik Nofijantie, "Peran Lembaga Pendidikan Formal Sebagai Modal Utama Membangun Karakter Siswa," *At-Tajdid : Jurnal Ilmu Tarbiyah* 3, no. 1 (2014): 45–71, <http://ejournal.stitmuh-pacitan.ac.id/index.php/attajdid/article/view/28>.

optimal. The discrepancy between the values taught at school and the behavior they see at home or in the environment can generate moral confusion in students. This situation reinforces the need for synergy between schools, families, and communities in shaping the character of students as a whole. Therefore, an analysis of the implementation of character education programs and their impact on the moral formation of students is very important to be done as an evaluation and development of more effective and contextual education policies. This study aims to explore the real impact of character education programs on the moral formation of students in junior high school. The focus of the study is directed at changing the behavior of students in their daily lives, both in the school environment and outside of school, after they follow a character education program that is integrated in the learning process. The selection of Junior High School as the object of research was based on the consideration that early adolescence is a critical phase in the formation of identity and character. At this stage, the student begins to show independence of thinking, but is still strongly influenced by his social environment. Therefore, character education intervention at this age is very important to form a strong moral foundation.

The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth overview of the implementation and impact of character education programs from the perspective of teachers, students, and schools. The study was conducted in one of the public schools that have implemented a structured character education. The school as a formal institution has a great responsibility in establishing the personality and character of learners. In addition to being a place of knowledge transfer, the school serves as an arena for value development-whether through curricula, extracurricular activities, social interaction between school residents, or integrated cultural organizations. With continuous and structured education, schools can be an effective space to manifest values such as honesty, hard work, tolerance and responsibility. These efforts must be carried out by the entire school, companies active in education as an example, parental involvement, as well as community support so that the process of internalizing values does not change sporadically but continuously.

Previous research relevant to this topic involved various studies in understanding the character of Education. Siti Haerun Nisa et al., (2025)<sup>9</sup> developed the importance of character value integration in the curriculum and the role of teacher role models, but this research focuses on the concept and lacks support for contextual case studies in secondary schools in Indonesia. Roni Ali Rahman Roni Ali Alfatani (2024)<sup>10</sup> Through their literature review managed to identify effective program strategies, such as application instruction and moral discussion, but the generalizing nature of the study however made it lacking in understanding the process of internalizing values at a specific school level. A local study conducted by Agustinus Hermino,

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<sup>9</sup> Siti Haerun Nisa et al., "ANALISIS STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN UNTUK PENGUATAN PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER DI SEKOLAH," *SECONDARY: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Menengah* 5, no. 2 (June 28, 2025): 158–67, <https://doi.org/10.51878/secondary.v5i2.5754>.

<sup>10</sup> Roni Ali Rahman Roni Ali Alfatani and Nur Nafisa Salsabila, "Implementasi Strategi Pembelajaran Berbasis Karakter Untuk Meningkatkan Etika Dan Moral Murid Di Era Digital," *EDUCOUNS GUIDANCE: Journal of Educational and Counseling Guidance* 1, no. 2 (December 27, 2024): 36–41, <https://doi.org/10.70079/egjcg.v1i2.48>.

(2015)<sup>11</sup> directed the implementation of character education in one of the junior high schools in Indonesia and developed a sustainable school program, but its implementation has not been consistent and depends heavily on individual commitment. From previous studies, there is progress, namely qualitative research involving the process of internalization of character at the micro level in the context of Indonesian secondary schools. There is still a lack of analysis on the influence of school culture, development practices, and family support as determinants of sustainable programs, and no focus has been established on moral quality indicators through a combination of observation, interview, and documentation instruments, which is the focus of this study.

The flow of this research is structured through several stages. This research is an effort to identify problems related to research, develop instruments, and carry out literature studies to develop theories. After that, data were collected through classroom and school environment observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and school document collection. The Data is further decoded, encoded, and analyzed thematically to find the main themes. The triangulation process is done by comparing various data sources and verifying the information so that the research results are more valid. The final stage is the achievement of research results, discussions, as well as practical recommendations that can be applied at school. Research instruments through structured observation with student risk indicators such as discipline, responsibility, empathy, and honesty, as well as indicators of teacher practice such as exemplary consistency and value integration in learning. In-depth interviews are conducted on teachers and students to refine perspectives, understandings, and real possibilities of character education practice. Schools, such as programs, modules, activity reports, and daily notes, become a source of support. In addition, group discussions were also conducted to gain a collective perspective on the challenges and challenges in the implementation of character education. The location of the study is one of the State junior high schools in Indonesia, which was chosen based on considerations of access and institutional preparedness. The study was conducted in the first semester of the academic year, which lasted about six weeks, including preparation, data collection, and verification of results.

Data collection techniques conducted through structured observations on various school activities, semi-structured interviews that are flexible but still focused, and analysis of documentation of school activities and activities. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques within the framework of quantitative case studies. The stages of analysis include interview transcription, repeated pronunciation, code pronunciation, grouping of themes, and interpretation of the relationship between themes. Validation of findings is done by triangulation of sources and confirmation to informants. This study utilizes primary data in the form of interviews with teachers and students, direct observation, and internal school documentation. Data collected in the form of curriculum, character education modules, school reports, as well as relevant national science and knowledge literacy.

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<sup>11</sup> Agustinus Hermino, "Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Perspektif Psikologis Siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama Di Era Globalisasi Dan Multikultural," *Jurnal PERADABAN* 8, no. 1 (October 23, 2015): 19–40, <https://doi.org/10.22452/PERADABAN.vol8no1.2>.

The results of this study involve implications on practical, theoretical, and methodological aspects. In practical terms, this study can be a recommendation for schools to design systematic value development and become the basis for teacher training in the integration of character values. Theoretically, this study improves the understanding of the internalization of character education in the context of secondary schools in Indonesia. Methodologically, this study is based on a combination of observation instruments, interviews, and documentation with clear operating indicators as guidelines that can be applied. However, this study has limitations, including only conducted in one school so that the findings can not be analyzed widely, but the potential for social bias in interviews, as well as time constraints that do not allow long-term changes. Therefore, follow-up research is structured in the form of multi-school comparative studies, longitudinal research, and the development of more reliable moral behavior research instruments. Thus, this study paves the way for further exploration of the effectiveness of character education in secondary schools in Indonesia.

Through this study, it is expected to find patterns of success and obstacles in the implementation of character education in schools, which can then be material for evaluation and policy recommendations.<sup>12</sup> Thus, character education is not only a discourse, but is really able to form a young generation that is moral, responsible, and ready to face the challenges of the Times. The importance of character education in the national education system is also in line with the vision of superior and competitive Indonesian human development. Strong character is the main foundation for building a just, harmonious, and high integrity society. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to make a real contribution to the development of character education strategies that are more effective and applicable in the school environment. Against this background, this study tries to answer a fundamental question: to what extent can character education programs have a significant impact on the moral formation of students? The answer to this question will provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of character education programs and open up opportunities for strengthening value-based educational practices in the future.

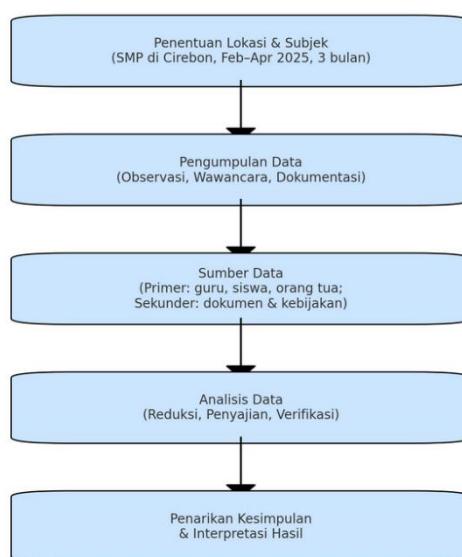
## **METHODS**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim to understand in depth how character education programs are implemented and their impact on the moral formation of students. This approach is chosen because it is able to describe social phenomena in a naturalistic manner and highlight the meaning behind the behavior and experiences of individuals involved in character education programs. The type of research used is a case study, with the object of research focused on one of the junior high schools (SMP) in Indonesia that has implemented a systematic character education program. Case studies allow researchers to explore various aspects in a more specific and in-depth context, as well as examine the relationship between character education programs and changes in student attitudes or behavior.

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<sup>12</sup> Stovika Eva Darmayanti and Udk Budi Wibowo, "Evaluasi Program Pendidikan Karakter Di Sekolah Dasar Kabupaten Kulon Progo," *Jurnal Prima Edukasia* 2, no. 2 (2014): 223, <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpe.v2i2.2721>.

The research was conducted at one of the junior high schools (SMP) in Cirebon, West Java, which has consistently implemented a character education program for several years. The study took place from February to April 2025, with a total duration of three months. During this period, researchers carried out field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis to capture a comprehensive picture of how character education is implemented and experienced by various stakeholders at the school.



**Gambar 1. Alur Metode Penelitian**

The data collection techniques used in this research consisted of observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine the implementation of character education in the school environment, such as during classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and school ceremonies. In-depth interviews were carried out with principals, teachers, students, and parents to obtain more detailed perspectives and experiences related to character education. Meanwhile, documentation in the form of school policies, activity reports, and relevant archives was used to strengthen the validity of the findings.

The data analysis technique applied in this study was interactive analysis consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, simplifying, and focusing on important information obtained from the field. Data display was presented in the form of narrative descriptions and thematic categorizations to make it easier to interpret the data. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, which was done continuously to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations based on the evidence obtained.

The sources of data in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data came from direct observations, interviews with principals, teachers, students, and parents, while secondary data were obtained from school documents, regulations, educational policies, and other

literature relevant to character education. The combination of these two sources allowed the researcher to obtain more complete, valid, and contextual findings.

The data analysis technique used in this research emphasized thematic analysis, where the findings from observations, interviews, and documentation were coded, categorized, and then linked to the main research questions. This approach allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and differences in the implementation of character education programs. The themes were then interpreted and connected to existing theories, providing a holistic understanding of the impact of character education on students' moral development.

## Theoretical Studies

Theoretical studies in this study depart from the understanding that character education is an integral part of the education system that aims not only to print intellectually intelligent learners, but also have a strong personality, good morals, and behavior that reflects the noble values of the nation. Character education is seen as a conscious and planned effort to instill moral values through the process of learning, habituation, and example in the educational environment. In this context, character includes various values such as honesty, responsibility, hard work, empathy, as well as respect for others. Character education does not stand alone as a subject, but must be integrated thoroughly in all aspects of education, both inside and outside the classroom. In educational literature, character education is often associated with theories of moral development developed by figures such as Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Piaget stated that the moral development of children is influenced by social interactions and concrete experiences in everyday life. Meanwhile, Kohlberg developed stages of moral development that show that a person's moral understanding develops with age and his social experience. He divided moral development into three main levels, namely pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. These three levels explain how one understands moral rules ranging from obedience out of fear of punishment, to moral actions based on universal ethical principles. This understanding is important in education because it underlines that morals are not something static, but rather grow and develop along with the learning process and the influence of the environment.

Character education becomes very relevant in shaping students' morals because through this program, moral values are not only taught cognitively, but also emotionally lived and applied in real actions. In other words, character education creates a bridge between moral theory and students' daily practice. When values such as honesty and responsibility are taught consistently through learning and habituation, then students will not only know what is good, but also be encouraged to do so in their lives. This process reinforces the internalization of values and gradually forms positive habits that become part of the student's character. The school as a formal educational environment has a very strategic role in this process. School culture, policies implemented, relationships between school personnel, and examples shown by teachers and education personnel will affect the extent to which character education can run effectively. The example of the teacher, as a central figure in the educational process, is one of the important elements in shaping the character of students. Students learn not only from what the teacher teaches, but also from how the teacher behaves, speaks, and interacts. When teachers are able to

show fairness, honesty, discipline, and respect for others, then these values will be more easily captured and imitated by students in their daily lives.

Nevertheless, the process of moral formation of students through character education depends not only on the school environment. The family and community environment also play an important role in shaping and reinforcing the values instilled in schools. Consistency between the values taught in school and those practiced at home and the surrounding environment will make it easier for students to build a full and stable moral understanding. Conversely, when there is a conflict of values between the school environment and the family, students will experience moral confusion that can hinder the character building process. Therefore, effective character education requires synergy between schools, families, and communities as part of the educational ecosystem. In this theoretical framework, character education is not just an additional project in the world of education, but an important part of efforts to form a generation that is not only academically competent, but also has an ethical awareness and social responsibility. The values formed through character education are the foundation in creating a civilized and harmonious society. Therefore, this study is important to determine the extent to which character education programs implemented in schools are able to have an impact on the moral formation of students in real terms. With reference to theories of education and moral development, an analysis of their implementation and impact can be carried out in a more systematic and in-depth manner, and produce findings that are beneficial to the development of character education in the future.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results obtained through a series of direct observations in the field, in-depth interviews with principals,<sup>13</sup> teachers, and students, as well as an examination of supporting documents such as school work programs, lesson plans, and documentation of activities, it was found that the character education program has been thoroughly embedded in the school system and culture. Schools not only include character education in formal curriculum documents, but also implement it in real life in daily activities. For example, in the flag ceremony activities conducted every Monday, ceremonial coaches often convey moral and motivational messages related to character values such as nationalism, responsibility, and discipline. Similarly, religious activities such as congregational prayers, reading of prayers before and after lessons, and commemoration of religious holidays are routinely carried out and become an important part of fostering students' spiritual character.<sup>14</sup>

Interaction between teachers and students took place in an atmosphere that supports the formation of character. Teachers seek to instill values such as good manners, empathy, and tolerance, both explicitly and through concrete examples in everyday life. Teachers greet students kindly, reprimand wisely, and respect differences of opinion, thus forming a learning environment

<sup>13</sup> Aslihatul Rahmawati et al., "Optimalisasi Teknik Wawancara Dalam Penelitian Field Research Melalui Pelatihan Berbasis Participatory Action Research Pada Mahasiswa Lapas Pemuda Kelas IIA Tangerang," *Jurnal Abdimas Prakasa Dakara* 4, no. 2 (October 31, 2024): 135–42, <https://doi.org/10.37640/japd.v4i2.2100>.

<sup>14</sup> Rahmat Tawakkal Sobari et al., "Penanaman Karakter Religius Mahasiswa Baru Melalui Kegiatan Keagamaan Di Ma ' Had Al - Jami ' Ah IAIN Palangka Raya JURNAL MEDIA INFORMATIKA [ JUMIN ]," *Jurnal Media Informatika [Jumin]* 6, no. 2 (2025): 1529–33.

conducive to the moral development of students. Schools also have certain policies, such as the selection of class leaders based on integrity and responsibility, not solely academic intelligence. This shows that character education is not only a slogan, but is actually carried out as a basic principle in the educational process. Furthermore, teachers demonstrate a fairly good understanding of the essence of character education and realize that the moral formation of students is part of their professional responsibility as educators. From the interviews, some teachers stated that character values such as honesty, discipline, and cooperation are routinely inserted in the learning process, not only in religious subjects or PPKn, but also in other subjects such as mathematics, Indonesian, and social studies. For example, in math lessons, teachers emphasize the importance of honesty when working on exam questions or independent assignments. In social studies lessons, teachers often give examples of Social Responsibility and Ethics in society. The integration of these values is carried out not in a patronizing way, but through discussions, case studies and reflections that relate the subject matter to the student's daily life.

Interestingly, most teachers do not see character education as an additional burdensome task, but rather as an inherent part of the educational goals themselves. They consider that the responsibility to shape the character of students not only belongs to religious teachers, counseling guidance, or homeroom teachers, but is the duty of all teachers involved in the learning process. This thinking reflects the existence of a collective understanding among educators that academic success without being offset by character building will produce graduates who may be intellectually intelligent, but morally and socially weak. However, in practice there are still variations between teachers in terms of understanding and implementation. Some teachers have been very active and creative in applying character values, while others are still normative and have not fully internalized the concept of character education in their teaching methods. This shows that although there is a strong commitment at the institutional level, strengthening the capacity of teachers and equalizing perceptions is still needed so that character education can be run optimally and consistently in all classes.

Students who participated in this study showed an understanding of the values of character, especially in aspects of honesty, responsibility, and discipline.<sup>15</sup> They are able to explain concrete examples of behavior that reflect these values, both those they have experienced themselves and those they have seen in the school environment. For example, some students mention that they are used to taking out the trash in its place, arriving on time, and helping friends who have difficulty in studying. In addition to classroom learning, character values are also strengthened through extracurricular activities. Activities such as scouting, student council, and religious activities provide space for students to learn leadership, cooperation, and empathy. Habits such as praying before and after lessons, as well as clean Friday and religious Friday activities, are also a means of consistently internalizing moral values. Teachers and school staff also supervise and guide students during the activities, so that the strengthening of character values is carried out on an ongoing basis. Principals play an important role in directing the vision of character education in schools. In an interview, the principal explained that his party had drawn up an annual Work program that included character education as a priority. He also encouraged all teachers and

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<sup>15</sup> Dellia Mila Vernia Agus Supandi, "Peran\_Pendidikan\_Anti\_Korupsi\_Dalam\_Rang" 3, no. 7 (2015).

education personnel to be role models for students in behaving and acting. Regular monitoring and evaluation is carried out through teacher board meetings and communication forums with parents.

However, not all teachers have the same level of understanding and commitment in implementing character education.<sup>16</sup> In some observations, it was found that there are still teachers who have not consistently integrated the value of character in learning, or still see character education as an additional burdensome task. This difference is a challenge in ensuring that all students gain consistent experience in character building.<sup>17</sup> In terms of students, although they generally showed positive behavior, there were still some cases that showed a weak internalization of certain values, especially in the aspects of responsibility and empathy. Some students are still less concerned about the cleanliness of the classroom, show indifference to friends who have difficulty, and have not been consistent in obeying school rules. This shows that character building is a long-term process that requires continuous reinforcement. One of the factors that also affect the effectiveness of character education in this school is the involvement of parents. Based on the results of interviews, some parents have not been actively involved in activities related to character education. In fact, there are differences in parenting at home with the values taught in school. This leads some students to confusion or grade conflict, especially when they receive conflicting messages between home and school. School documentation shows that there is a conformity between the planning of character education programs and their implementation in the field. However, the evaluation of the impact of such programs on changes in student behavior has not been carried out systematically. Schools do not yet have measurable instruments to assess the extent to which students experience moral development over time. Observations of behavior change are still qualitative and not formally documented, making it difficult to quantify the impact.

Overall, the results showed that character education programs have a positive influence on the moral formation of students, especially in the aspects of honesty, discipline, and responsibility. Nevertheless, the success of the program largely depends on the involvement of all parties, including teachers, principals, students, and parents. Limitations in teacher training, differences in commitment in implementation, and lack of synergy between school and home are factors that need to be considered to increase the effectiveness of the program in the future.<sup>18</sup>

The findings of this study carry significant implications for practical, theoretical, and methodological aspects of character education. Practically, the results highlight that structured and consistent character education programs are able to shape students' moral awareness and behavioral discipline, which can serve as a model for other schools in Indonesia seeking to implement similar programs. Theoretically, this research contributes to the enrichment of the discourse on character education by providing empirical evidence of how school culture, teacher

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<sup>16</sup> Dewi Emiasih, "PENGARUH PEMAHAMAN GURU TENTANG PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER TERHADAP PELAKSANAAN PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER PADA MATA PELAJARAN SOSIOLOGI," *Komunitas* 3, no. 2 (September 2, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.15294/komunitas.v3i2.2318>.

<sup>17</sup> Uswatun Qoyyimah, "Inculcating Character Education through EFL Teaching in Indonesian State Schools," *Pedagogies: An International Journal* 11, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 109–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2016.1165618>.

<sup>18</sup> Lynn Revell and James Arthur, "Character Education in Schools and the Education of Teachers," *Journal of Moral Education* 36, no. 1 (March 2007): 79–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240701194738>.

involvement, and parental support synergize in strengthening students' moral development. Methodologically, the use of a qualitative case study approach offers a comprehensive perspective on the complex interactions between educational policies and individual behavior, thereby opening opportunities for future studies to adopt comparative or longitudinal designs. Overall, these implications suggest that character education not only has the potential to transform students at the individual level but also to influence the broader conceptual understanding of education as a holistic process that integrates cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions.<sup>19</sup>

## DISCUSSION

### Character Education as an Instrument of Moral Formation

Character education has proven to be an important tool in the process of moral formation of students.<sup>20</sup> The moral values instilled through character education are not only part of the cognitive knowledge of students, but also shape attitudes, emotions and habits in everyday life. In the context of the school studied, values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and social care are actively integrated into the teaching and learning activities and daily activities of students. The results showed that students understood the meaning of the various values of these characters and were able to explain them verbally. Not only that, they also began to display behaviors that reflect those values, such as being honest in doing assignments, being responsible for maintaining classroom cleanliness, and being disciplined to be present on time at school. This shows that character education not only forms morals theoretically, but also leads to the formation of practical morals.

Character education in this case acts as a bridge between moral theory and real action. This process is not instantaneous, but is formed through constant repetition, example and learning experience. Students learn from routine school activities, observation of teachers, and social interactions they live every day. Character education becomes a kind of foundation that forms the way students think and act in various situations. In addition, the existence of a curriculum that contains character education explicitly provides a clear direction and structure for schools and teachers. Character values become part of the learning implementation plan (RPP), so moral formation does not only depend on non-formal or informal activities. This helps strengthen the integration of character values into academic learning. Interestingly, character education has also been shown to have a positive correlation with a healthy school climate. Schools that emphasize moral values in their policies and practices tend to have a more conducive atmosphere for learning. Relations between students became more harmonious, cases of violation of discipline decreased, and the atmosphere of mutual respect grew stronger. Student morale becomes not only an individual quality, but also affects the collective mood. In the long run, the success of character education in shaping the morals of students will have an impact on the formation of young people

<sup>19</sup> Mehmet Ülger, Süleyman Yiğittir, and Orhan Ercan, "Secondary School Teachers' Beliefs on Character Education Competency," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 131 (May 2014): 442-49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.145>.

<sup>20</sup> Ni Nengah Sri Armini, "Pelaksanaan Pendidikan Karakter Di Lingkungan Sekolah Sebagai Upaya Membentuk Pondasi Moral Generasi Penerus Bangsa," *Metta : Jurnal Ilmu Multidisiplin* 4, no. 1 (February 10, 2024): 113-25, <https://doi.org/10.37329/metta.v4i1.3005>.

who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have ethical awareness, social care, and responsibility as citizens. School has become a very important starting point in shaping the character of the nation.

However, to realize this optimally, character education must be done thoroughly, not partially, and not merely symbolic.<sup>21</sup> All aspects of school life, including learning, discipline, and relationships between school personnel should be a means of character formation. Only then does character education really become an effective instrument for shaping students' morals. Character education should be seen as an ongoing process and cannot be assessed in a short period of time. Regular evaluations of its impact need to be further developed so that the program is not just a formality, but really has a real impact on the development of the student's personality.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Role of Teachers as Role Models and Value Facilitators**

Teachers have a strategic position as the main actor in the process of character education. Their role is not only as teachers who deliver the subject matter, but also as role models in demonstrating the expected moral values. From the results of the study, teachers become one of the most influential factors in the successful implementation of character education in schools. Students absorb values not only from the subject matter, but also from the way teachers behave, speak, make decisions, and treat others. When teachers show discipline, assertiveness, empathy, and fairness in everyday life, students will find it easier to understand and imitate these behaviors. Example becomes the most effective method of shaping morals, because students learn through observation and direct experience. In interviews with teachers, most of them stated that they were aware of how great moral responsibility they bear. The teacher must not only teach values, but also live them. Therefore, many teachers try to maintain consistency between the values they teach and the behaviors they demonstrate inside and outside the classroom.

However, not all teachers have the same perception and competence in implementing character education. There are those who consider character education as a separate addition to core learning, making it less optimal in its application. This shows the need for training and strengthening the capacity of teachers so that all educators have adequate understanding and skills in integrating character values in the learning process. In effective implementation, teachers act as facilitators of values, that is, they design learning strategies that encourage students to reflect on moral values and apply them in real life. For example, teachers may use discussion methods, case studies, drama, and personal reflection that emphasize aspects of moral decision-making and ethical problem-solving. Teachers also need to build positive relationships with students in order to become respected and trusted figures. A good relationship will open up a healthy communication space and allow teachers to provide effective character guidance. In this relationship, empathy, patience and openness are key. It should be emphasized that teachers do not work alone in the process of character education. It requires support from principals, supervisors,

<sup>21</sup> David I. Walker, Michael P. Roberts, and Kristján Kristjánsson, "Towards a New Era of Character Education in Theory and in Practice," *Educational Review* 67, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 79–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.827631>.

<sup>22</sup> Geert Kelchtermans, "Teacher Vulnerability: Understanding Its Moral and Political Roots," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 26, no. 3 (November 6, 1996): 307–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764960260302>.

and education policies that allow teachers to have enough space, time, and facilities to run Character Education optimally. When all these elements synergize, it will be easier for the teacher to carry out his role as a character educator. Finally, strengthening the capacity of teachers should be part of the overall Education Quality Improvement program. Character education will not be successful without teachers who are prepared competently and personality. Therefore, investing in training, self-development and mentoring for teachers is a very important and strategic step.

### School Environment as a Character-Forming Ecosystem

The school environment acts as a social ecosystem that shapes and strengthens the character of students.<sup>23</sup> From the results of the study, it was found that the physical and social atmosphere of the school strongly supports the successful implementation of character education. Schools that are the object of study show a positive culture that grows collectively among school residents, ranging from teachers, students, to educational personnel. This school culture can be seen from the good habits that are routinely implemented, such as greeting teachers and friends politely, throwing garbage in its place, lining up in an orderly manner, and showing respect for others. This habit is not formed instantly, but is built through consistent habituation and responsible supervision from the school. School facilities also support the formation of student character. There are character values reminder boards in strategic corners of the school, such as the classroom hallway, teacher's room, and canteen. This helps to visually instill values and reinforce moral messages. In addition, the existence of worship rooms, school gardens, and discussion rooms are supporting facilities that encourage students to form positive habits independently.<sup>24</sup>

The school consciously creates an inclusive environment and supports character development. For example, in extracurricular activities and student organizations, schools encourage the value of cooperation, leadership, and responsibility. In this case, character learning not only takes place in the classroom, but also outside of class hours through activities that foster real social experiences. Healthy relationships between students are also an important indicator in an environment that supports character building. From the observations made, it can be seen that students appreciate each other and foster solidarity among friends. When there is a small conflict, the school has a fair and educational resolution mechanism, not merely punishment. It helps students learn to solve problems in a moral way.

The role of the principal as a moral leader is also very significant. The principal actively initiates and supervises character programs, as well as being an example in daily behavior. Leadership that prioritizes values and ethics is a strong foundation for the formation of a character school environment. This conducive school environment not only supports the internalization of moral values in students, but also provides a sense of security and comfort that is very important for their psychological growth. Students feel valued, listened to, and cared for personally, which

<sup>23</sup> Stacey K. Waters, Donna S. Cross, and Kevin Runions, "Social and Ecological Structures Supporting Adolescent Connectedness to School: A Theoretical Model," *Journal of School Health* 79, no. 11 (November 12, 2009): 516–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2009.00443.x>.

<sup>24</sup> and Kevin Runions. Waters, Stacey K., Donna S. Cross, "Social and Ecological Structures Supporting Adolescent Connectedness to School: A Theoretical Model," *Journal of School Health* 79.11, 2009, 516–24.

ultimately strengthens their confidence and self-awareness of moral values. Thus, the school environment is not just a place where the learning process takes place, but also a means of value transformation. When all elements of the school work in a system that supports each other, then Character Education will be more effective in shaping the morale of students as a whole.

### **Challenges of Implementing Character Education in Schools**

Although the character education program has been widely implemented, the results of the study revealed that there are still many challenges faced by schools in running it. These challenges arise from both internal and external aspects, and have an impact on the effectiveness of the moral formation of students. One of the main challenges is the teacher's understanding that has not been uniform about the concept and purpose of character education. Some teachers still consider it an additional duty or responsibility of religious teachers only, rather than an integral part of all subjects. This causes character education is not implemented evenly and consistently throughout the learning process. In addition, the limited time in the curriculum makes it difficult for teachers to insert character education in depth. In the target pressure of material completion and academic assessment, character values are often only touched upon at a glance without sufficient space for reflection or internalization. This becomes a serious obstacle in the process of moral formation that requires time, process, and emotional involvement.

The social condition of students outside of school, especially the influence of the family environment and the media, is also a challenge that cannot be ignored. Some students come from a family environment that pays little attention to moral formation, even showing attitudes or behaviors contrary to the values taught at school. Social Media and popular culture also often present content that is not educational, causing dissonance in values in students. The lack of systematic evaluation of the implementation of character education is also an obstacle. Many schools do not yet have the right instruments to assess the success of these programs quantitatively or qualitatively. As a result, the achievement of character building is difficult to measure objectively and is only assessed based on general perception. In addition, the challenges also come from the lack of training and mentoring of teachers in the field of character education. Many teachers have not received special training related to character-based learning approaches, strategies, and techniques. In fact, without strengthening this capacity, teachers will have difficulty implementing programs in an innovative and contextual way.<sup>25</sup>

Policy support that has not been maximized is also an inhibiting factor. Although character education is already listed in the National Curriculum, its implementation at the education unit level still depends on local school initiatives. The absence of continuous supervision and assistance from the Education Office makes this program less consistent and not integrated nationally. On the other hand, low student participation in some character programs is also a challenge. There are students who still behave passively or only participate in activities out of obligation, not because of the value awareness that grows from within. This shows that the process

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<sup>25</sup> Lily Orland-Barak and Jian Wang, "Teacher Mentoring in Service of Preservice Teachers' Learning to Teach: Conceptual Bases, Characteristics, and Challenges for Teacher Education Reform," *Journal of Teacher Education* 72, no. 1 (January 6, 2021): 86–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119894230>.

of value internalization has not been fully successful. Therefore, these challenges need to be addressed immediately through a systematic and collaborative approach. It takes synergy between teachers, principals, supervisors, governments, and families and communities to overcome these obstacles so that character education can truly shape students' morals effectively and thoroughly.

### Synergy Between School, Family, and Society in Moral Formation

Character education cannot rely solely on schools. The role of family and community is very important as part of an intact educational ecosystem. The results showed that when schools, families and communities have common values and goals, the moral formation of students will be much stronger and more effective. The family is the first and Main environment in which students learn moral values.<sup>26</sup> Parents who are role models in terms of responsibility, honesty, and empathy will instill these values indirectly in children. However, in many cases, it was found that the lack of communication and awareness of parents towards character education programs in schools became an obstacle. Some parents leave the child's education entirely to the school, not realizing that moral values require constant strengthening at home. When the values taught in school are not reinforced at home, students experience moral confusion and lack of consistency in behavior. Therefore, communication between teachers and parents needs to be strengthened through parenting activities and discussion forums.<sup>27</sup>

The community also plays a major role in shaping a conducive social environment for Character Education. The example of community leaders, local culture, and social values that develop in the environment where students live will be part of the moral internalization process. Schools need to cooperate with community institutions, religious leaders, and Related Agencies to strengthen character building networks. Programs such as Counseling, Social Services, Joint religious activities, or character-based entrepreneurship training can bring schools and communities together productively. This kind of collaboration expands students' learning spaces and helps them apply moral values in real social contexts. In this context, the school can act as a catalyst that drives synergies between different elements. There needs to be a forum for continuous communication and cooperation so that there is no gap between what is taught in schools and what applies in the day-to-day environment of students.<sup>28</sup>

The results also showed that students who come from families and environments that support character values tend to show better moral development.<sup>29</sup> They are more disciplined, responsible, and able to adjust in a variety of social situations.<sup>30</sup> This reinforces the evidence that

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<sup>26</sup> I. January, "Character Education Author (s): H. B. Wilson Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42835505>" 103, no. 1 (1926): 14–15.

<sup>27</sup> Debby Lierman, "Character Education and Christian Education: Is It Really Happening?," *Heritage Christian School*, 1999, 1–23.

<sup>28</sup> K. A. Strike, "Community, the Missing Element of School Reform: Why Schools Should Be More like Congregations than Banks.," *American Journal of Education*, 110(3), 2004, 215–32.

<sup>29</sup> Hasbullah Mat Daud, Ahmad Yussuf, and Fakhrul Adabi Abdul Kadir, "Influence of The Social Environment on Development of Students' Morals and Characters: Future Issues and Challenges," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 12, no. 2 (2023): 1245–57, <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v12-i2/17540>.

<sup>30</sup> N. Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. (teachers college press., 2015).

moral formation is the result of the interaction of different educational systems, not just the responsibility of the school. Therefore, the synergy between schools, families, and communities is not only an ideal, but a necessity in realizing comprehensive character education and long-term impact. The active role of all parties is a determining factor in forming a generation that is moral, resilient, and with integrity.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion that has been done, it can be concluded that the character education program has a significant impact on the moral formation of students in the school environment. The implementation of this program not only takes place in the classroom through formal learning activities, but is also reflected in school culture, social interaction between school members, as well as various extracurricular activities and routine habits. Character education has become an integral part of the educational process that fosters values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, discipline, and empathy in students. Teachers play a central role in the success of character education. They serve not only as teachers, but also as moral guides and role models for students. A good teacher's understanding of character values as well as the ability to integrate them into the subject matter contribute greatly to the effectiveness of the program. However, this success still faces a number of challenges, such as inconsistency in teacher understanding, limited time, the influence of the outside school environment, and the lack of systematic evaluation of the success of the program.

Conducive school environment proved to be a major supporting factor in the process of internalization of moral values. Schools that have a positive culture, fair discipline, and inspiring leadership tend to be more successful in forming students with good morals. In this case, the school environment serves as an ecosystem of values that shape the character of students through role models, habits and social experiences. In addition to the role of schools, synergy with families and communities is also an important element in the success of character education. When these three elements work harmoniously and consistently instill the same moral values, the formation of student character will be stronger, sustainable, and contextual. Therefore, character education should be seen as a shared responsibility, not just the task of educational institutions. Overall, this study shows that character education has a positive impact on the moral formation of students, but still requires improvement and strengthening efforts in various aspects. This Program must be continuously evaluated, developed, and adapted to the social dynamics and needs of students in order to provide optimal results in creating a generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also morally strong.

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. The research was conducted only in one junior high school with a case study approach, which means the findings cannot be generalized to all schools in Indonesia. In addition, the data were collected within a limited time span of three months, so the long-term impact of character education programs could not be fully captured. The reliance on interviews and observations also makes the findings dependent on the subjective perspectives of participants. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the scope by involving multiple schools with different socio-cultural contexts, using comparative or longitudinal approaches to better capture changes over time.

Further studies could also integrate quantitative methods to measure the effectiveness of character education more systematically, as well as explore the role of external factors such as family, community, and digital media in shaping students' character. By addressing these aspects, future research can deepen the understanding of character education and provide a more comprehensive foundation for strengthening its implementation in diverse educational settings.

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