

School Strategies in Developing Students' Character in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This study examines school strategies in shaping students' religious, disciplinary, and environmental care character in elementary education. Employing a qualitative descriptive research approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 012 Candirejo. The findings indicate that character education strategies are implemented through systematic planning, integration of character values into learning activities, consistent enforcement of school regulations, and daily habituation practices. Key activities such as religious routines, discipline enforcement, environmental care programs, and teacher role modeling significantly contribute to the internalization of character values among students. Supporting factors include strong school leadership, teacher consistency, and a supportive school culture, while inhibiting factors involve variations in students' behavioral readiness and limited external support. This study concludes that structured, school-based character education strategies are effective in fostering students' character development at the elementary level.

Keywords: School Strategies, Character Education, Religious Character

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi sekolah dalam membentuk karakter religius, disiplin, dan peduli lingkungan pada siswa sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan kepala sekolah, guru, dan siswa kelas V di SD Negeri 012 Candirejo. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi pendidikan karakter dilaksanakan melalui perencanaan yang sistematis, integrasi nilai-nilai karakter ke dalam kegiatan pembelajaran, penerapan tata tertib sekolah secara konsisten, serta pembiasaan dalam aktivitas sehari-hari. Kegiatan utama seperti rutinitas keagamaan, penegakan disiplin, program peduli lingkungan, dan keteladanan guru berkontribusi signifikan terhadap internalisasi nilai-nilai karakter pada siswa. Faktor pendukung meliputi kepemimpinan sekolah yang kuat, konsistensi guru, dan budaya sekolah yang kondusif, sedangkan faktor penghambat mencakup variasi kesiapan perilaku siswa dan keterbatasan dukungan eksternal. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi pendidikan karakter berbasis sekolah yang terstruktur efektif dalam mendukung pengembangan karakter siswa pada jenjang sekolah dasar.

Kata kunci: Strategi Sekolah, Pendidikan Karakter, Karakter Religius

INTRODUCTION

Education is a strategic process in shaping the quality of human resources who are not only cognitively competent but also possess strong character. However, in recent years, there has been a tendency toward a decline in the character quality of students, particularly at the elementary school level. This phenomenon is reflected in low levels of discipline, honesty, politeness, and environmental awareness. This condition has become a serious concern because education is essentially not only oriented toward academic achievement but also toward the holistic development of students' personalities. Therefore, character development from an early age is an essential part of the educational process to produce a generation that is intelligent, broad-minded, and grounded in moral values (Ulum & Slamet, 2025).

Research findings indicate that the implementation of character education in elementary schools still faces various challenges, such as the suboptimal internalization of values in students' daily lives, including a lack of politeness and environmental awareness (Saputri, Ardivanto, & Rofian, 2025). In addition, recent literature reviews emphasize that the moral crisis occurring within school environments further strengthens the urgency of character education as an integral part of the educational process (Ulfa, Nisa, & Suriani, 2024).

Conceptually, character education plays an important role in shaping the moral, social, and emotional development of students. It serves as a fundamental foundation for developing high-quality human resources in the modern era (Maulidia et al., 2026). Studies show that character education has a significant influence on the moral development of elementary school students, thereby becoming a crucial foundation for their social lives (Putri et al., 2024). This is further supported by findings that character education not only impacts ethical aspects but also enhances students' social skills and overall psychological well-being (Nurjanah, Juanita, & Patras, 2025).

Schools, as formal educational institutions, have a strategic role in instilling character values. The effective implementation of character education must be carried out comprehensively through integration into the curriculum, classroom instruction, and a positive school culture. Research indicates that such strategies include habituation, teacher role modeling, and extracurricular activities that support students' character development (Filiansi et al., 2024). Furthermore, school culture-based approaches have been proven to strengthen the internalization of character values among students in a sustainable manner (Juliani et al., 2024).

On the other hand, strengthening character education is also closely related to national education policies, such as the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes a balance between academic competence and character development. Strengthening Character Education is a national initiative launched by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kemendikdasmen), aimed at developing students who possess a balance between intellectual ability, emotional sensitivity, and morally sound behavior (Kamal et al., 2026). Recent studies show that

this curriculum contributes positively to students' character development through more contextual and student-centered learning approaches (Sumilat & Pangalo, 2024).

However, in practice, the implementation of character education still faces various obstacles, such as limited teacher competence, lack of parental involvement, and the increasingly complex influence of the environment and digital technology (Nurjanah, Juanita, & Patras, 2025). Therefore, systematic and sustainable strategies are needed to ensure that character education can be effectively implemented in elementary schools.

Based on the above explanation, it can be understood that character education is an urgent necessity that must be implemented in a planned and integrated manner across all school activities. In this context, it is important to examine the strategies employed by schools in developing students' character, particularly in the aspects of religiosity, discipline, and environmental awareness. This study focuses on SD Negeri 012 Candirejo, Pasir Penyu District, Indragiri Hulu Regency, with the aim of describing the strategies used in developing the character of fifth-grade students, as well as identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of character education at the elementary school level, particularly regarding school-based strategies. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, schools, and educational policymakers in designing and implementing effective, systematic, and sustainable character education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. The research was conducted at SDN 012 Candirejo, Pasir Penyu District, Indragiri Hulu Regency. The research subjects included the principal, teachers, and fifth-grade students, selected based on the objectives of the study. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to examine the implementation of character development activities in the school environment, interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth information from informants regarding the applied strategies, and documentation served as supporting data. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that the school's strategies in developing students' character have been well planned and implemented through a systematic and sustainable approach. This confirms that character development is not carried out spontaneously, but rather through careful planning and consistent implementation across various aspects of school life. According to Thomas Lickona (2012), effective character education must encompass three main components, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which can only be developed through continuous

habituation within a supportive environment. Thus, the strategies implemented by the school are aligned with the fundamental principles of character education.

The development of religious character is carried out through routine activities such as praying before and after lessons, reciting short Qur'anic verses, weekly infaq activities, and the commemoration of Islamic religious holidays. These activities function not only as ritual practices but also as a means of internalizing spiritual values in students' lives. From the perspective of Islamic education, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that moral formation must be carried out through habituation (*ta'dib*) and exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), so that religious values can be deeply embedded within learners. Through these routine activities, students are indirectly trained to develop spiritual awareness, sincerity, and moral responsibility in their daily lives.

Disciplinary character is developed through the enforcement of school rules, punctuality in attending and leaving classes, neat appearance, and the application of educational sanctions for rule violations. This approach demonstrates that the school not only emphasizes cognitive aspects but also shapes students' attitudes and behaviors through clear regulations. According to Emile Durkheim, discipline is an essential element in moral education because it enables individuals to learn self-control and respect for social norms. Furthermore, Hurlock (2011) states that effective discipline is educational in nature, meaning that it helps children understand the consequences of their actions rather than merely imposing punishment. Therefore, the implementation of educational sanctions in schools is an appropriate strategy for fostering students' disciplinary character.

Meanwhile, environmental care character is fostered through activities such as mutual cooperation, classroom cleaning schedules, the provision of adequate waste disposal facilities, and habituation of maintaining cleanliness within the school environment. These programs reflect the implementation of environmentally-based education that emphasizes students' ecological awareness. According to Tilbury (2013) in the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), environmental education should be conducted through direct experience so that learners develop awareness and responsibility toward environmental sustainability. By actively involving students in maintaining school cleanliness, they not only understand the importance of a healthy environment but also develop sustainable positive habits.

The findings also reveal that character development at SDN 012 Candirejo is implemented through a structured and continuous process rather than incidental activities. The school integrates character education into daily routines, learning activities, and school regulations, ensuring that character values are consistently reinforced. This approach is in line with Berkowitz and Bier (2014), who argue that effective character education must be implemented comprehensively through integration within the curriculum, school culture, and social interactions in the educational environment. This indicates that the school has successfully created an educational ecosystem that supports holistic character development.

Furthermore, the development of religious character through routine spiritual activities not only establishes worship habits but also enhances students' moral awareness. Activities such as collective prayers and Qur'anic recitation play a role in building spiritual discipline and strengthening faith-based values. According to Zubaedi (2015), religious-based character education has the strength to shape a holistic personality because it integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects simultaneously. The development of disciplinary character is also reinforced by the role of teachers as role models. Teachers function not only as instructors but also as behavioral models for students. In the social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura, individuals learn through observation and imitation of others' behavior. Therefore, the discipline demonstrated by teachers greatly influences students' character formation. This role modeling becomes a crucial factor in ensuring the successful implementation of character education in schools.

The development of environmental care character through various school programs also reflects a contextual learning approach. Students are not only provided with knowledge about the environment but are also directly involved in maintaining cleanliness. This is in line with Arends (2024), who states that effective learning connects instructional material with students' real-life experiences, thereby shaping sustainable attitudes and behaviors. Although the overall implementation of character development strategies has been effective, the study also identifies several challenges. Some students still exhibit a lack of discipline and environmental awareness, such as arriving late or disposing of waste improperly. This indicates that character formation is a long-term process that cannot be achieved instantly. According to Lickona (2012), one of the main challenges in character education is maintaining consistency in the application of values, both in school and at home.

Therefore, strong collaboration between schools, parents, and the community is necessary to support the success of character education. Epstein (2011) emphasizes that parental involvement in children's education has a significant influence on their character and behavior development. The synergy between school and family environments is key to ensuring that the character values taught in schools are consistently practiced in students' daily lives.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight that the success of character development largely depends on the integration of planning, implementation, and evaluation within school culture. The combination of routine activities, role modeling, and supportive school policies contributes significantly to students' character formation. However, to achieve optimal outcomes, schools need to continuously evaluate and innovate their strategies, as well as strengthen collaboration with families and the wider community in supporting sustainable character development.

CONCLUSION

The school has systematically planned and implemented strategies to develop religious, disciplined, and environmentally caring character among fifth-grade

students through integrated learning activities and the cultivation of a supportive school culture. These strategies are strengthened by the consistent habituation of religious practices, the enforcement of school regulations, and the implementation of environmental care programs, all of which play a crucial role in shaping students' character and daily behavior. Furthermore, the effectiveness of these character development efforts is largely supported by the active roles of teachers, school principals, and the overall school environment, even though several challenges and obstacles are still encountered in the process of implementation.

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