

Implementation of Character Education in the Independent Curriculum

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Abstract

This study analyzes the importance of character education within the framework of an independent curriculum, with a focus on the integration of moral values in learning, the role of school leadership, and collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community. The method in this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach through literature studies from journals, books, and official documents. The results of the study show that the independent curriculum supports project-based learning, the flexibility of a holistic approach, and the role of transformational leadership in creating a school culture that supports character education. Challenges faced include limited teacher training, gaps in students' backgrounds, and lack of program evaluation. The implication is the need to improve teacher training, strengthen the role of school principals, and integrate local values and digital technology to strengthen the effectiveness of character education. This research provides strategic recommendations for policy makers and educators in building a generation with character in the modern era.

Keywords: *Character Education, Independent Curriculum, School Leadership, Program Evaluation.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis pentingnya pendidikan karakter dalam kerangka kurikulum mandiri dengan fokus pada integrasi nilai-nilai moral dalam pembelajaran, peran pimpinan sekolah, dan kolaborasi antara guru, orang tua, dan masyarakat. Metode dalam penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui studi pustaka dari jurnal, buku, dan dokumen resmi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kurikulum mandiri mendukung pembelajaran berbasis proyek, fleksibilitas pendekatan holistik, dan peran kepemimpinan transformasional dalam menciptakan budaya sekolah yang mendukung pendidikan karakter. Tantangan yang dihadapi antara lain terbatasnya pelatihan guru, kesenjangan latar belakang siswa, dan kurangnya evaluasi program. Implikasinya adalah perlunya peningkatan pelatihan guru, penguatan peran kepala sekolah, dan integrasi nilai-nilai lokal dan teknologi digital untuk memperkuat efektivitas pendidikan karakter. Penelitian ini memberikan rekomendasi strategis bagi pembuat kebijakan dan pendidik dalam membangun generasi berkarakter di era modern.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Karakter, Kurikulum Mandiri, Kepemimpinan Sekolah, Evaluasi Program.

1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of character education within the framework of the independent curriculum is a complex effort and requires a deep understanding of education policies, teacher training, and the integration of character values in various subjects. Character education aims to instill moral values and ethical behavior in students, so that they can prepare themselves for challenges in an increasingly complex society (Maisyaroh et al., 2023). The importance of character education has been widely recognized, especially in the context of building cohesive and responsible citizens in an ever-globalizing world (Maisyaroh et al., 2023)

To implement character education effectively, it is critical to adopt an integrated approach that integrates character values into the overall curriculum. Suherman emphasized that character education should be incorporated into all subjects, thus ensuring that character education is not treated as a separate component, but rather as an integral part of the educational experience (Suherman, 2018). This view is supported by Agboola and Tsai, who argue that schools should serve as a place for students to practice values that go beyond just academic learning (Agboola & Tsai, 2012). The integration of character education into various subjects not only enhances students' moral development, but also encourages the creation of a holistic educational experience, which prepares them to face real-world challenges.

Teacher understanding and training play an important role in the successful implementation of character education. Shah emphasized that teachers' understanding of character education significantly affects the learning process, including in the design of the syllabus and the selection of appropriate teaching methods (Shah, 2017). The success of character education programs depends heavily on teachers' readiness to integrate character values into their teaching practices. This is also supported by Kamil et al., who note that teachers have a crucial role in managing classroom dynamics and creating an environment that supports character development (Kamil et al., 2022). Without adequate training and understanding, the potential for character education to bring about significant change in students can be hampered.

In addition, the role of school leadership is very important in building a culture that prioritizes character education. Policies and practices implemented by school administrators can facilitate or hinder the integration of character education into the curriculum. Hasnadi and Santi emphasized that the success of character education management is highly dependent on strong leadership that is able to

model the values taught (Hasnadi & Santi, 2021). This view is reinforced by the findings of Riyadi et al., which emphasize the importance of habituation in character education, which shows that consistently reinforcing values through school activities is essential to cultivate a culture of character among students (Riyadi et al., 2023).

The challenges in the implementation of character education are multifaceted and require collaborative efforts from all stakeholders involved in the educational process. Schools often face difficulties in ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds can internalize and implement character values in their social interactions. This highlights the need for character education that goes beyond the classroom and engages the community more broadly. The integration of character education into extracurricular activities, as expressed by Julia and Supriyadi, can provide opportunities for students to practice and internalize these values in various contexts of daily life (Julia & Supriyadi, 2018).

Evaluation of character education programs is essential to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Peterson argues that empirical evidence is needed to assess the impact of character education initiatives (Peterson, 2020). The evaluation should include not only academic results, but also changes in behavior and overall character development of students. This comprehensive evaluation approach will provide valuable information for future practice and ensure that character education remains relevant and impactful in the ever-evolving educational landscape.

In the context of the independent curriculum, the alignment of character education with the goals of national education is very important. The Ministry of Education and Culture's initiative to strengthen character education reflects its commitment to fostering a generation of students who are not only academically superior, but also morally grounded (Marzuki & Samsuri, 2022). The integration of character education into the curriculum must be supported by adequate resources, appropriate training, and active community involvement to create sustainable impact.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a literature study approach to analyze the importance of character education within the framework of the independent curriculum. This method was chosen because it is relevant to explore theoretical and empirical data from various literature sources related to the implementation of character education, such as academic journals, books, official documents, and related publications. The descriptive approach in this study is used to understand the phenomenon in depth and describe various important elements, such as an integrated approach in character education, school leadership roles,

implementation challenges, and evaluation strategies. Literature studies allow researchers to explore data from a broad and diverse perspective.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Importance of Character Education in the Independent Curriculum

The importance of character education within the framework of the independent curriculum is very significant, especially in the context of the Indonesian educational landscape. Character education serves as a fundamental element that shapes the moral and ethical development of students, as well as fostering responsible and independent individuals to be able to navigate the complexities of modern society. The independent curriculum, which was introduced as a flexible educational framework, emphasizes the integration of character education into various learning experiences, thereby improving the overall quality of the educational process (Adhiyatna & Assidik, 2023).

Character education is very important in fostering a sense of responsibility among students. As highlighted by Adhiyatna, self-reliant character instilled through education encourages students to engage in tasks independently, while also developing problem-solving skills and confidence (Adhiyatna & Assidik, 2023). This aspect of character education is vital, as it prepares students to face challenges without relying too much on external help. In the context of the independent curriculum, this approach is in line with the aim of fostering independent learners who can take initiative in their educational journey (Rahayu et al., 2023).

In addition, the role of character education in promoting inclusivity cannot be underestimated. Mubarak and Syamsi emphasized that character education plays an important role in facilitating social interaction among students, including those with special needs (Mubarak & Syamsi, 2019). By fostering an environment of acceptance and understanding, character education helps bridge the gap between diverse student populations, promoting social cohesion and mutual respect. This is particularly relevant in independent curricula, where an emphasis on holistic development allows for the integration of multiple perspectives and experiences (Iqbal et al., 2022).

The integration of character education in the independent curriculum is also in line with a broader goal, namely the nation's identity and cultural values. The Pancasila Student Profile, which is a reference framework for character education in Indonesia, contains essential values such as faith, cooperation, and global diversity (Julia & Supriyadi, 2018). By instilling these values into the curriculum, educators can cultivate a generation of students who are not only academically capable, but also socially responsible and culturally aware. This holistic approach to education is very important in preparing students to make a positive contribution to society and the nation at large (Sutrisno et al., 2023).

The challenges associated with the implementation of character education in independent curricula must also be acknowledged. Rahayu discussed the complexities involved in aligning character education initiatives with the diverse needs of students and broader education policies (Rahayu et al., 2023). Educators must address these challenges while ensuring that character education remains a priority in their teaching practices. This requires professional development and ongoing support for teachers, which allows them to effectively integrate character education into their curriculum (Sucita Mova Lestari, 2023).

In addition, the evaluation of character education programs is essential to assess their effectiveness and impact on students. As Sutrisno highlights, a systematic evaluation process can provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of character education initiatives, informing future practices and policies (Sutrisno et al., 2023). This evaluative approach is critical to ensuring that character education remains relevant and impactful in the ever-evolving educational landscape. The importance of character education in an independent curriculum cannot be overstated. By fostering responsibility, inclusivity, and cultural awareness, character education plays an important role in shaping students into insightful individuals who can contribute positively to society. The flexibility of the independent curriculum allows for a personalized approach to character education, allowing educators to tailor their initiatives to meet the diverse needs of their students. However, ongoing support and evaluation are essential to ensure the effectiveness of character education programs. As Indonesia continues to navigate

the complexities of modern education, the integration of character education in an independent curriculum will remain the cornerstone of its educational philosophy.

Integrated Approach in the Implementation of Character Education

An integrated approach in implementing character education is essential to encourage holistic development in students, especially in the context of an independent curriculum. Character education, which emphasizes moral values, ethical behavior, and social responsibility, must be woven into the interweaving of all subjects to reach its full potential. This integration not only enhances students' academic experience but also prepares them to become responsible citizens in a diverse and complex society (Suherman, 2018).

One of the basic principles of character education is its integration in various subjects. Suherman emphasized that character education should not be limited to just one subject but must be embedded in all curriculum areas (Suherman, 2018). Civic education plays an important role in character education by instilling values that prevent school-based violence and promote social harmony. By embedding character education into subjects such as civics, math, and science, educators can create a cohesive learning environment that reinforces these values consistently.

The role of teachers is very important in the successful implementation of character education. Teachers must have a deep understanding of character education principles and strategies to effectively integrate them into their teaching practices. Syah emphasized that teachers' understanding of character education significantly affects the learning process, including the design of the syllabus and the selection of appropriate teaching methods (Shah, 2017). Furthermore, Tuhuteru et al. highlight the importance of teachers as facilitators who can plan, implement, and assess character education projects, so as to actively engage students in their moral development (Tuhuteru et al., 2023). The active role of these teachers is very important, because they act as role models for students, showing the values they want to inculcate.

In addition to collaboration, the use of diverse teaching strategies is essential to effectively integrate character education. A variety of methods, such as project-

based learning, experiential learning, and service-based learning, can be used to actively engage students in their character development (Ratnaningsih, 2017). For example, project-based learning allows students to work on real-world problems that require them to apply character values such as teamwork, empathy, and responsibility. This experiential approach not only enhances students' understanding of character education, but also gives them the opportunity to put these values into practice in a meaningful context.

Evaluation of character education initiatives is essential to assess their effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. As highlighted by Ratnaningsih, schools must continuously evaluate their character education programs to ensure that they meet the needs of students and an ever-evolving society (Ratnaningsih, 2017). This evaluative process should include both qualitative and quantitative measures, including student feedback, behavioral assessments, and academic performance. By systematically evaluating character education initiatives, educators can identify best practices and areas for improvement, ultimately improving the overall impact of character education on students.

The independent curriculum provides a unique opportunity for schools to implement character education flexibly and responsively. As Sarkity notes, the independent curriculum emphasizes essential material and character development, which allows educators to tailor their approach to meet the specific needs of their students (Sarkity & Fernando, 2023). This adaptability is essential in today's rapidly changing educational landscape, where students face a variety of challenges and opportunities. By embracing the principles of an independent curriculum, educators can create a dynamic learning environment that fosters character development alongside academic achievement.

An integrated approach to implementing character education is essential to nurturing insightful individuals who can make a positive contribution to society. By embedding character education across subjects, empowering teachers as facilitators, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, using diverse teaching strategies, and continuously evaluating initiatives, schools can create a comprehensive framework for character development. Independent curricula serve

as a valuable platform for these efforts, enabling educators to cultivate a generation of responsible, ethical, and engaged citizens.

School Leadership That Supports Character Education

School leadership that supports character education is an important aspect in creating a conducive and productive educational environment. In the context of education, leadership focuses not only on administrative management, but also on developing students' character through various approaches and strategies. Research shows that effective leadership can shape the character of learners in a sustainable and integrated way in the educational curriculum(Weeke Alfulana et al., 2021).

Transformational leadership has been shown to be effective in improving student motivation and performance. Leaders who apply this leadership style are not only task-oriented, but also on the development of positive interpersonal relationships with students and staff. This leadership style includes ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention to the needs of team members(Yanuar Patra Komala, 2023). Thus, school leaders who are able to apply a transformational leadership style can create a learning atmosphere that supports the development of students' character.

The leadership of the principal also plays a role in creating a positive school culture. A school culture that supports character education will create a safe and comfortable atmosphere for students to learn and develop. Research shows that principals who are able to build an inclusive and supportive school culture can improve student motivation and performance(AJEPRI, 2016). In this case, the principal must have good communication skills to establish harmonious relationships with all members of the school.(Idham et al., 2023)

The importance of strengthening character education in elementary schools cannot be ignored. Character education applied from an early age will form a strong foundation for the development of students' character in the future. Research shows that effective character education at the elementary school level can help students develop noble values and positive attitudes that will guide them throughout life(Rachmadyanti, 2017). Therefore, principals and teachers must work together to design character education programs that suit the needs and development of students.

In the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, the challenges in character education are increasingly complex. School principals are required to adapt to changes and utilize technology to support character education. Research shows that the use of technology in education can increase student engagement and facilitate more interactive and engaging learning(Fitriyah & Santosa, 2020). Therefore, the

principal must have a clear vision of how technology can be used to support character education in schools.

4. Conclusion

Character education in the independent curriculum has a very important role in shaping students to become individuals with integrity, responsibility, and awareness of moral and cultural values. Through an integrated approach, character education can be integrated in all aspects of learning, creating a generation that is not only academically superior but also has high social sensitivity. With the involvement of teachers, principals, and the community, character education is expected to be able to have a sustainable impact and create a positive school culture. The flexibility of the independent curriculum also allows for a more personalized approach, tailored to each student's unique needs to create relevant and meaningful learning experiences.

However, challenges in the implementation of character education should not be ignored. Ongoing support for teacher professional development, visionary leadership, and systematic evaluation are indispensable to ensure the effectiveness of the program. Through solid cooperation between various parties, character education can continue to be relevant in facing the challenges of the times and forming a generation that is able to make a positive contribution to society and the nation.

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