

# The Impact of Elementary School Character Education Programs on Increased Students' Thinking Ability

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## ABSTRACT

The study is set back by curiosity about whether or not there is an impact of a student's learning method given by an educator in the development of student characteristics. The primary purpose of student characteristic research is to create an optimum learning environment for each student so that they can reach its maximum potential. To meet these demands we analyzed our curiosity by analyzing and observing some elementary school children and phasing information from various sources. From various sources and observations it is regained that teachers must provide instruction and methods consistent with the needs of learners.

## Keywords

System Characteristics, Education, Self Development, Morals, Attitudes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The characteristics of students encompass various aspects or qualities of the individual, including interests, attitudes, learning motivation, learning styles, thinking abilities, and prior knowledge. Students, often referred to as learners, are individuals who are influenced by an educator or a group of educators in the educational process. Learners play a crucial role in educational interactions, as they are the center of all learning activities. In this context, the characteristics of learners refer to the unique traits of individuals who are undergoing the learning process in an educational institution, which determine how the learning approach can be adjusted to support their development optimally (Hanifah et al., 2020).

These characteristics include physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and moral aspects that influence how we learn and interact in an educational environment. Students have varying levels of physical strength and health, which affect their ability to concentrate. At the emotional level, students may have varying degrees of motivation, self-confidence, or anxiety, which influence their engagement in the learning process (Bafirman, 2016). Intellectually, each student has different abilities, learning styles, and speeds in absorbing and processing information. A student's social characteristics are reflected in how they interact with peers, teachers, and their environment, while moral characteristics refer to the values and ethics they uphold in daily life. For educators, understanding students' characteristics is crucial in developing effective teaching strategies and supporting students' overall development (Amaliyah & Rahmat, 2021).

According to the content of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, it serves as the primary legal framework regulating all aspects of education in Indonesia. This law provides guidance for the government, schools, and society in implementing a quality and equitable education system. The main objective of this law is to enlighten the nation's life and develop the potential of learners to become competent, virtuous individuals with strong competitiveness. The goal of education is to shape a fully developed person, intellectually, spiritually, socially, and emotionally, while preparing individuals to face the challenges of life and improving the quality of life for both individuals and society (Rahman et al., 2021).

Basic education is the first level of formal education. It is a crucial foundation for every individual, providing essential knowledge, skills, and values needed to live in society. However, the goal and function of good education have not been fully achieved yet (Lestari et al, 2024). In reality, there are still many elementary school children who lack strong character and adequate moral values. This phenomenon can also be observed in various educational institutions, where the challenge of shaping a generation with strong character remains a primary concern.

Self-development is the effort we make to improve ourselves. It's like taking care of a garden, where we water, fertilize, and prune to help the plants grow. Similarly, we need to learn new things, develop our skills, and address our weaknesses to reach our full potential. Self-development can also be understood as the journey of discovering and becoming the best version of ourselves. It's like an exciting adventure where we learn many new things about ourselves and the world around us. Simply put, self-development is a lifelong process of learning and growing. We never stop learning, and self-development is the way we continue to evolve. Ultimately, self-development is important because it helps us feel more confident. When we believe in our abilities and competencies, we become more confident in facing challenges. It also makes us feel happier and more successful. Self-development can be pursued in various ways, such as: Learning new things like taking courses, reading books, or trying out new hobbies. Developing skills as like practicing writing, public speaking, or honing

technical abilities. Building relationships: Interacting with new people, strengthening bonds with family and friends. Maintaining health like exercising, eating healthy foods, and getting enough sleep.

Morality refers to a set of values, norms, or principles used as a guide to determine the right or wrong of actions in daily life (Hascan, 2021). It serves as an essential foundation for individuals to behave in ways that align with societal, cultural, or religious expectations in their environment. In education, morality plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's character and fostering a dignified society. Education's purpose is not only to sharpen academic abilities but also to instill values of ethics, integrity, and responsibility. By fostering good morals, young people can become individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also wise in decision-making, respectful of differences, and able to make positive contributions to their communities. In the context of education, morality functions as the foundation for building harmonious relationships between teachers, students, and the wider society. It also serves as a guide in facing increasingly complex global challenges. Morality in education is critical to ensuring that educational goals are achieved, which include shaping individuals who excel in knowledge and possess good character (Febrianti & Dewi, 2021).

Attitude is the way we think, feel, and act toward something or someone. It is shaped by our life experiences, the values we hold, and the influence of our surroundings. Attitude can also be defined as our tendency to respond to a situation in a particular way. For example, a person with a positive attitude tends to see things from a good perspective, while a pessimistic person tends to focus on the negative side. Attitude is a reflection of our personality. The attitude we display influences how others perceive and interact with us. In simple terms, attitude is the deepest reflection of ourselves, manifested in our actions and interactions with the world.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research, and the research method applied is the literature review or library research method. The study was conducted by collecting data or scholarly works relevant to the research object, which is of a literary nature. In this research, data were obtained from literature sources, with information drawn from online resources such as Google Scholar, including books, journals, and articles related to the focus of the discussion on early childhood character education. This includes the definition of early childhood character education, the character values developed in early childhood education, and the goals of character education for children in elementary school.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

From the research conducted on the topic "The Impact of Character Education Programs in Elementary Schools on Improving Students' Thinking Skills," it was found that the most important aspect of the learning process is how a teacher can teach students who have different levels of understanding, interests, hobbies, and achievements, using relevant methods. The strategy employed by a teacher should be tailored to the needs of the students, which will, in turn, help improve their performance and achievements. The strategies and methods used must be those that can guide the learners toward better and more beneficial outcomes.

From this, it can be understood that a teacher's role is not merely that of an educator who can master all aspects of teaching, but also one who must be able to adapt the lessons to

the diverse learning styles of their students. This is essential to make the lessons more meaningful. A child's character is formed from an early age. This is why it is essential for children to learn good character traits as they begin their early education (such as in Early Childhood Education, Kindergarten, or Elementary School). Children aged 6-10 years typically show differences in various areas, such as language skills, speech, or even cognitive abilities. During their time in elementary school, children need to develop their logical thinking skills. According to this statement, we can also understand that here, the teacher, as an educator, must be able to provide a clear understanding using methods that support the learning process.

The learning method that involves hands-on practice, in addition to book-based learning, aims to provide experiences and direct, meaningful learning actions for elementary school students. This approach allows students to understand concepts more concretely by actively engaging in the learning process and grasping real-world understanding. Through practice, students can develop skills in observation, analysis, and problem-solving directly, enabling them not only to comprehend theories but also to understand how to apply them in everyday life. Furthermore, hands-on learning helps enhance motor skills, creativity, and teamwork, as students are often involved in group activities. This method also stimulates students' interest in learning, reduces boredom, and helps them internalize knowledge more effectively through real-life experiences, something that cannot be fully achieved through book-based learning alone.

### **3.1. Learning Methods in Elementary Schools**

Character education in society emphasizes the integration of positive values into daily life through structured and intentional approaches. One effective strategy involves broadcasting educational programs that enhance knowledge, skills, and attitudes, fostering a foundation for individuals to navigate challenges. Beyond knowledge and skills, the cultivation of mental attitudes plays a crucial role in developing a focused and morally upright community (Gunawan et al., 2020). Embedding character values like honesty, discipline, and hard work into various activities allows these principles to be internalized through role models, while fostering environmental awareness, curiosity, and social empathy through experiential learning creates opportunities for practical application (Heidari et al., 2016). Character education requires the collective involvement of stakeholders, including parents, educators, and administrators. Consistency and synergy among family, school, community, and government are essential for success. Without harmony between these elements, character education risks failing to achieve its goals (McGrath, 2018). Teachers play a pivotal role by embedding moral lessons into the learning process, either explicitly through curriculum design or implicitly via hidden curricula. By using accessible language and contextually relevant teaching methods, educators help students internalize character values not just cognitively (moral knowing) but also emotionally (moral feeling), making them more sensitive to practicing these values in real-life situations (Setiawati, 2016).

Interactive learning models, such as Jigsaw cooperative learning, have been shown to positively influence cooperation, critical thinking, and academic outcomes compared to traditional models like STAD. These methods allow students to collaboratively engage with material while simultaneously fostering character traits such as cooperation, independence, and creativity (Khalistyawati, 2018). Additionally, aligning character education with moral development, defined as the process through which individuals discern right from wrong and regulate behavior accordingly, further solidifies its impact (Prosic-santovac et al., 2018). Policy and implementation must align to ensure that educational practices reflect societal aspirations

for moral and civic responsibility. According to Novianti (2017), comprehensive educational policies promoting moral instruction in classrooms should guide all stakeholders in nurturing children's ability to embody positive values. Character education, thus, becomes a long-term, phased process requiring robust teamwork from all sectors. The effectiveness of these initiatives is amplified when tailored lesson plans and teaching methodologies are applied consistently, emphasizing character values such as honesty, discipline, creativity, and patriotism in learning activities (Zulela et al., 2022).

### **3.2. Examples of Character Education Values**

Character education for the general public can be implemented by developing values through habituation, such as regularly broadcasting programs aimed at ensuring that society has the knowledge and skills to apply positive character values. In addition to knowledge and skills, which are important abilities, instilling attitudes to shape the public's mindset also plays a crucial role. This aims to ensure that the attitudes and actions of individuals in daily life are guided by the knowledge and skills they possess, leading to a more directed future. In the learning process within society, the development of values or character can be applied through an integrated approach across all programs (embedded approach). Speakers can serve as role models in instilling certain values, such as honesty, discipline, hard work, tolerance, independence, nationalism, and a love of reading. Meanwhile, to develop other values such as environmental awareness, curiosity, social concern, and creativity, situations and conditions are needed that allow learners to practice behaviors reflecting these values, making character development more effective.

According to Zulela et al. (2022), schools implement character education through various techniques, including exemplary behavior, habituation, school atmosphere conditioning, integration into learning topics, and extracurricular activities. These strategies align with arguments from Fathurrohman (2013) and Fitri (2012) regarding practical approaches to character education. Exemplary behavior serves as a foundation, as demonstrated by Goodman-Scott et al. (2018), who found that providing examples of appropriate conduct positively influences students' attitudes. Similarly, Trivette's (2021) research highlights the impact of modeling positive behavior on classroom dynamics. The role of school leaders, teachers, and staff as cultural ambassadors responsible for instilling values like discipline and honesty through their actions.

Habituation is another essential strategy in character education, focusing on cultivating positive behaviors through repeated actions, such as praying before class, maintaining cleanliness, and respecting school facilities (Attaran, 2015). This process can occur within or outside the classroom, fostering habits that become automatic over time. Integrating character education into all subjects is also crucial, as noted by Hilyana and Hakim (2018). Teachers incorporate moral values into lessons and activities, enabling students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications in their lives. Contextual learning approaches further support this integration, as they enhance cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills, producing well-rounded outcomes (Purba et al., 2020).

School climate conditioning is another pivotal component of character education. Schools serve as second homes for students, providing safe, clean, and motivating environments conducive to learning and personal growth (Gee, 2018). Werang (2018) underscores the collective influence of routine behaviors on attitudes. School climate as reflecting norms, values, and interpersonal relationships. Positive school climates are fostered through motivational slogans, adequate facilities, and inclusive policies, aligning students' experiences

with organizational goals (Hollowell, 2019). By combining these strategies, character education becomes a holistic process that supports the moral and personal development of learners.

### **3.3. Strategies for Developing Elementary School Children**

Learning to develop children should begin at an early age. This is because, at this stage, the most dominant affective factors are still influenced by parents and teachers. The control over behavior and conduct is still fully under the supervision of parents and teachers. The factors and conditions that influence affective development can still be managed or shaped by parents and teachers. It is also hoped that the values and character instilled in children will leave a lasting impression and be carried over into their further education and society. There are strategies for student to self-development: (1) Schools can conduct interest and talent assessments for each student through interest tests. This will allow teachers to understand the students' interests, talents, and characteristics at the elementary school level; (2) Teachers should also create a conducive and enjoyable learning environment to encourage students to engage in positive activities within the school; (3) Schools should provide training for teachers and staff related to student self-development, to help instill values such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance among students; (4) Involve students in extracurricular activities to help them develop a sense of responsibility; (5) Additionally, encourage parents to participate in activities aimed at supporting their children's self-development. By consistently implementing the strategy mentioned above, it is hoped that students will grow into independent individuals with strong character.

In reality, implementing character education derived from local wisdom encounters obstacles. Alam and Mohanty (2023) identifies four key challenges in elementary school are lack of professional capacity among teacher in the moral domain, limited parental involvement, students' academic pressures that prioritize cognitive achievement, and difficulties in sustaining character education. Hidayati et al (2021) highlights additional challenges, including limited teaching materials and strategies for character education. These issues underline the importance of aligning character education with local wisdom. Using local wisdom in teaching character fosters youth development while preserving cultural heritage (Agus et al., 2021). The values promoted in Indonesia's character education system are rooted in religion, Pancasila, culture, and national education goals, which include honesty, tolerance, discipline, creativity, and environmental care (Wahyuni, 2024). Character education in higher education is implemented through the Three Pillars of Higher Education, organizational culture, student activities, and daily routines. Communities embody these values, making them valuable sources for character education models (Abdullah et al., 2019).

According to Halim and Wardana (2017), character education in Indonesia often faces implementation challenges, necessitating a review of strategies to enhance university students' characters and assess their impacts. Effective habituation of character values requires role models, as demonstrated by Ulavere and Veisson (2015), who emphasize the significant role of lecturers in character education. Additionally, Anam et al (2019) argues that character education should focus not only on introducing norms and values but also on internalizing and practicing them in daily life.

### **3.4. How to Instill Moral Values in Early Childhood**

Instilling character education should begin at an early age so that children will become accustomed to it as they grow older. In this regard, the role of parents and educators or

teachers at school is crucial because children spend a significant amount of time with them. Teaching moral values from an early age is essential for shaping a child's good character.

In today's modern era, it is well-known that childhood is a time for play, so teaching or instilling values in children can be done through play. One way to do this is by introducing traditional Indonesian games to children. These traditional games can foster values such as honesty, obedience, and help children remain unaffected by the influence of social media on smartphones or television. Children can play independently, without becoming addicted. This helps develop a sense of care for others in their environment (Hidayati et al, 2020). In addition to traditional games, students can engage in activities like reading books about moral values in life. Young children can also be taught to participate in donation activities to help those in need. These practices can help shape a child's character from an early age, which can then be developed and applied in daily life as the child grows up.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The characteristics of students encompass physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and moral aspects, all of which greatly influence the learning process. Each student has numerous differences, whether in terms of interests, abilities, or development, which must be understood by teachers or educators in order to help foster their students' enthusiasm for learning through more effective teaching strategies. Character education for students, which teaches moral values such as honesty, hard work, and tolerance, plays a crucial role in shaping students into individuals who are more competent and morally upright.

A teaching method that considers students' characteristics and integrates practical learning can significantly help improve student engagement, social skills, and problem-solving abilities. On the other hand, fostering students' personal development from an early age is crucial for building independence and positive character. Instilling moral values through various means, including traditional games and social activities, provides an essential foundation for the development of strong character, alongside the influence of parents. This will later play a key role in supporting students' success in both their academic and social lives.

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