STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION AS A RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE TIMES

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Abstract

The importance of strengthening character education is in response to the challenges of an increasingly complex and dynamic era. The acceleration of technology, globalisation and rapid social change expose society to a range of complex issues that require individuals with well-rounded intellectual, moral and emotional capacities. A character-focused approach to education not only strengthens students' competitiveness in the future world of work, but also promotes social cohesion in an increasingly diverse society. This study utilised an in-depth literature review. The results revealed that the successful implementation of character education requires close collaboration between the government, educational institutions, families and communities. With innovative and integrative teaching strategies and a holistic approach, character education can be organised in a more effective and sustainable way. The conclusion of this study confirms that strengthening character education is a must in the face of a modern era filled with uncertainty. It provides an understanding that investing in character education not only produces morally and emotionally better individuals, but also creates a more stable and productive society.

Keywords: Character Education, Challenges of the Times.

Introduction

Character education has become one of the main priorities in the education system in various parts of the world. This is driven by the realisation that education is not only about developing students' cognitive competence, but also shaping their character for the better. Noble characters such as honesty, a sense of responsibility and empathy are considered increasingly important in a society that is undergoing change at an extraordinary speed.

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Character education is a learning process that aims to develop and strengthen moral values, ethics, and personality attitudes so that individuals can become individuals who uphold integrity, are full of responsibility, care for others, and are able to make good decisions based on solid moral principles (Sitopu et al., 2024); (Guna et al., 2024). Character education includes various efforts to instil positive habits such as honesty, respect for others, hard work, and empathy through the school curriculum as well as family and community environments. The goal is to create a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also has noble character to face all the challenges of life with integrity and high responsibility (Sholah & Mawaddah, 2023).

Character education is increasingly vital in modern times characterised by technological advances, rapid social and cultural changes. In the midst of globalisation and digitalisation, young people are often exposed to unlimited information and various influences that can blur or even lower their moral standards (Langdale, 2022). In this context, character education plays an important role in building a solid moral foundation, helping individuals distinguish between right and wrong, and guiding them in making ethical decisions. In addition, character education helps develop empathy, tolerance and cooperation, which are indispensable for living in an increasingly diverse and complex society (Merlin, 2023).

Not only that, character education also prepares a person to be a responsible leader in the future to come. Strong characters, such as integrity, fairness and responsibility, are highly valued and respected in the world of work and leadership (Metcalf & Heller, 2022). When a person is equipped with a good and pure character education, they tend to have a better ability to deal with pressures and challenges, and behave fairly and impartially in various situations encountered. In today's modern era full of dynamics and uncertainty, the ability to always hold on to noble values provides stability and becomes a life compass that guides actions and decisions, both in personal and professional life (Hudaidah et al., 2021). Thus, the importance of character education cannot be ignored in efforts to form a generation that is not only smart and intelligent, but also moral and noble ethics.

In today's modern era, we are faced with various challenges that have never been experienced before. Globalisation, digitalisation and socio-cultural changes bring new dynamics that affect all aspects of life, including education. The internet and social media have changed the way we interact and communicate, delivering unlimited information that can affect the character development and morality of children and young people. On the other hand, increased social and cultural mobility creates an increasingly diverse and complex society (Rana, 2020).

The challenges of this era require the education system to adapt and develop approaches that can prepare learners to face an ever-changing world. Character education has become one of the main focuses, as it is considered an important

foundation for building a generation that is able to adapt, compete, and stick to universal values (nurridawati, 2020).

Although the importance of character education has been recognised, its implementation still faces various obstacles and challenges. Many schools and educational institutions are still struggling to find effective methods and strategies to integrate character education into the curriculum. In addition, the role of parents and communities is often overlooked in efforts to strengthen quality character education (Leutscher, 2024).

This research aims to review the existing literature to identify effective strategies for strengthening character education in the modern era. By understanding the challenges and developing a comprehensive and diverse approach, it is hoped that character education can be further improved, making a significant impact on students and preparing them to navigate a dynamic future with strong character and mental resilience.

Research Methods

The study in this research uses a literature review, which is a research approach that focuses on the analysis and interpretation of existing written sources. The aim is to collect, evaluate, and summarise existing knowledge on a particular topic. (Sugiyono, 2010); (Nasution, 1996); (Sukmadinata, 2009).

Results and Discussion
Concept of Character Education

Character education is a long learning process that aims to develop moral and ethical values in each individual, so that they can become a person with integrity and responsibility. In this context, character education does not solely cover cognitive or knowledge aspects, but also embraces a person's emotional, social, and even spiritual development (Fadhila & Pandin, 2021). This process involves various activities that can enable individuals to understand, feel, and even practice positive life values in their daily lives (Purba, 2024).

The three core components that underpin character education are the cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. The cognitive aspect involves understanding and knowledge regarding moral values, ethics, as well as prevailing social norms (Karnjanapoomi, 2022). The affective aspect relates to an individual's feelings, attitudes, and even motivations towards these values. This includes how individuals can feel empathy, justice, and a sense of responsibility. Meanwhile, the behavioural aspect is related to real actions or behaviours that reflect the internalisation of moral values, such as honesty, discipline, and respect (Suardi, 2023).

The implementation of character education can be done through a variety of methods and strategies, whether in the family, school, or community. In the family, parents can be role models and provide moral education from an early age. In schools,

character education programmes can be integrated into the learning curriculum and extracurricular activities, such as developing social skills through group work or community service projects (Aslan, 2017). In addition, the community also plays a role in creating an environment that supports character development, for example through religious or social activities that emphasise the importance of moral values (Triyanto & Rejekiningsih, 2021). Thus, character education is a joint effort to form individuals who have high morality and are able to contribute positively to society.

Human character development does not only include aspects of knowledge of moral values. There are also aspects that involve emotions and real behaviour that contribute to the formation of a person's identity. The cognitive aspect includes a deep understanding of concepts such as honesty, justice, responsibility and respect that are universally applicable. At this stage, a person is invited to think critically and reflect on what should be done or not done, as well as the consequences of each action (Putra & Aslan, 2019). Thus, these values can become guidelines for thinking and acting.

Meanwhile, the affective aspect is closely related to feelings, attitudes, and internal motivation to live these values in real life. This includes the ability to understand other people's feelings (empathy), respect others, and be sensitive to the social environment (Hairiyanto et al., 2024). Feelings such as empathy will enable a person to be fair and respect others. Positive attitudes such as discipline, curiosity, and persistence are also developed, as they will encourage one to uphold moral values despite various obstacles (Fiteriadi et al., 2024).

Finally, the behavioural aspect focuses on concrete actions that reflect the internalisation of these values. In other words, a person not only understands and feels moral values but is also able to realise them in every step of life. For example, an honest attitude will be reflected in daily words and behaviour, as well as responsibility will be carried out optimally. The application of these good habits will form a solid identity over time (Fawait et al., 2024).

In addition, the development of human character is also inseparable from their interactions in society. In social interactions, humans share knowledge and skills, which requires the ability to cooperate, communicate well, and show respect for each other. The purpose of developing this social aspect is to build harmonious and constructive relationships in society (Lee, 2022). Through the exchange of shared life experiences with others, we can learn values such as trust, solidarity and teamwork. All aspects of character development complement each other to mould oneself into a whole person with integrity (Soedamah & Hsiao, 2023).

Spirituality also emphasises character development through understanding and practising universal values such as compassion, peace and devotion. Spirituality is not necessarily related to religion, but rather the search for the meaning of life and the belief in a greater power. It can motivate a person to do good based on noble values and build a strong soul. A person with high spirituality tends to have a responsibility to

make a positive contribution to others and the environment because they feel connected (Murwaningsih et al., 2022).

Commitment to values is also very important to build. This is not just knowing or understanding values, but also having a firm determination to uphold and apply them despite temptations. This commitment requires strong moral and mental courage to stay true to the right principles. With a high commitment to values, a person will be able to overcome various challenges and always uphold noble behaviour in every situation (Hasbi et al., 2023).

Thus, trait development is a comprehensive process that includes various important aspects, ranging from cognitive, affective, behavioural, social, spiritual to commitment to values. Each of these aspects is interrelated and together form a solid foundation for creating individuals with high integrity. The development of a balanced nature will not only help individuals in making the right decisions and acting in accordance with moral values, but will also enrich them to live harmoniously in a complex social life. Through deep understanding and application in daily life, this strong and positive trait will contribute significantly to the creation of a better and more ethical society.

The impact of the challenges of the times on education and character development

The digital age has a huge impact on education and character development. On the one hand, technology offers a wide range of tools and resources that can enrich the teaching and learning process. Quick and easy access to information allows students to learn independently and develop critical thinking skills through extensive exploration (Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024). However, on the other hand, challenges such as technology dependency, the spread of fake news, and a lack of direct social links can hinder socialisation and character development. Teachers and educators need to integrate digital literacy and ethical use of technology in the curriculum to equip students with the ability to distinguish valid information and develop self-control in their daily use of technology (Judijanto et al., 2024).

Rapid social and cultural changes also affect education and character development. Globalisation brings different lifestyles and values into society, which can be a dilemma in the character education process. On the one hand, this diversity can support tolerance and intercultural understanding, but on the other hand, it can also lead to confusion of values and identity. The education system must be adaptive and responsive to these changes, emphasising the importance of global understanding and the development of universal values such as empathy, respect and tolerance (Tubagus et al., 2023).

Competition in the world of work and the demands of the global economy have shifted the focus of education towards academic achievement and technical skills. This can reduce attention to character education, as both educational institutions and

parents often emphasise test results and academic achievement (Aslan & Shiong, 2023). High academic pressure can have a negative impact on students' mental health and hinder the development of healthy character. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance between academic achievement and a well-rounded education that emphasises students' character development, social skills and emotional health (Tabroni et al., 2021).

Environmental challenges such as climate change and ecosystem degradation also affect education and character building. Students need to be given an understanding and knowledge of the importance of protecting nature, while developing their sense of responsibility for the environment (Wijaya & Yusuf, 2021). Effective character education must include aspects of sustainability and environmental responsibility to prepare a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also caring and responsible for the preservation of the earth. This can be done through an activity-based curriculum that actively involves students in environmental conservation or community service programmes that focus on environmental issues (Miller, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on education and character development. During the pandemic, many schools and educational institutions have had to shift to online learning. This change has resulted in social distancing that can affect students' mental health and social interactions (Rumapea et al., 2022). Difficulties in accessing technology, changes in daily routines, and lack of social support can disrupt the learning process while causing emotional disturbances such as anxiety and stress. Therefore, the education system must address students' mental and emotional wellbeing by providing psychosocial support and implementing strategies to support mental health during online and face-to-face learning (Parker, 2020).

Pedagogical transformation is a must in responding to the challenges of the times in this modern era. Traditional teacher-centred learning approaches need to be replaced with more interactive and collaborative methods that empower students to become independent and critical learners. Curriculum innovation should integrate digital technology, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) approaches, as well as project-based and experiential learning. Thus, students can develop 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, which are essential for success in a dynamic and complex global environment (Nurdiana et al., 2023); (Muharrom et al., 2023).

Cooperation between educational institutions, families and communities is becoming increasingly important in shaping effective and sustainable character education. Parents or guardians play a central role in supporting and reinforcing the values taught at school. Local communities can also contribute through programmes and initiatives that enrich students' learning experiences (Sarmila et al., 2023). Education should be a shared responsibility, with various parties collaborating to create

an environment that supports learners' character and academic development. This includes building partnerships with organisations and agencies that can provide additional support in the form of resources, training and expanded learning opportunities (Parker, 2020).

Thus, in the midst of complex challenges, education must take a holistic approach that not only focuses on academic achievement but also on character development. The ultimate goal of education is to shape individuals who are competent, have integrity, and are ready to face global dynamics with intelligence and wisdom. Achieving this requires a synergy between technology utilisation, pedagogical innovation, institutional collaboration, and special attention to the mental and emotional well-being of learners. A well-rounded and sustainable education is the key to shaping a future generation that is not only academically successful, but also has a strong character and a high social spirit.

Strategies for Strengthening Character Education

The first strategy in strengthening character education is to integrate moral values directly into the school curriculum. Every subject can be a medium to instil principles such as truth, responsibility, discipline and sympathy. For example, in history lessons, teachers can teach about characters who demonstrate courage and a fondness for the truth. In science lessons, the values of rigour and environmental responsibility can be cultivated. This approach ensures that character education is not just an add-on, but an integral part of the teaching-learning process (Pratiwi, 2022).

Project-based and experiential learning is an effective way to strengthen character education. This method invites students to work in groups, solve real problems and create projects that benefit the community. During this process, students learn the principles of co-operation, innovation, responsibility and leadership. Hands-on experience in these projects allows students to witness the real impact of their actions, so that the character values are embedded more deeply and become part of their personality (Nabers, 2021).

Parental and community involvement is key in strengthening children's character education. Schools can conduct programmes that involve parents in the education process, such as parenting workshops, activities with children and discussion sessions on good parenting (Brown, 2021). In addition, collaboration with local communities, such as non-profit organisations, religious institutions and companies, can enrich students' learning experiences. These collaborations not only foster a positive learning environment but also show students the importance of character values in everyday life (Valiyappurakkal, 2021).

Character education basically focuses on instilling noble values in students so that they become individuals who are beneficial to themselves and others. To achieve

this, several things need to be done, including strengthening the competence of teachers to be able to become role models and the right companions for students (Frank, 2021). Therefore, periodic training and workshops on character education need to be organised to improve the skills and teaching methods used by teachers.

In addition, character education is also inseparable from the development of students' soft skills. Soft skills development programmes can be integrated into the school curriculum to help students practice critical thinking, communicate effectively, manage emotions and make wise decisions. Various methods such as mediation, simulation, and group discussion can train these skills (Hidayat, 2021).

Strong character building also requires strengthening work ethic and discipline. Clear rules regarding student responsibilities need to be implemented by schools along with an appropriate reward and sanction system to encourage active student participation. Extracurricular activities that demand high dedication such as sports and scouting can be used as a means of learning the value of discipline and hard work (Salmah & Wahyuni, 2023).

Strong leadership of educational institutions, including school principals and administrative staff, plays a vital role in strengthening character education. Leadership that demonstrates integrity, fair policies and concern for learners' welfare will serve as good role models (Yusriyah, 2022). School leaders should consistently display these values in their policies and interactions with students, teachers and parents. Learner leadership programs, such as student organisations and mentoring activities, can also provide positive role models for other learners in developing their character (Pike & Lickona, 2021).

A constructive learning environment is a critical factor in supporting character education. Schools should create a safe, inclusive and supportive atmosphere where every learner feels valued and accepted. Initiatives such as 'Child Friendly Schools' or anti-bullying programmes can help create an environment conducive to positive character development (Ardiansyah et al., 2024). The creation of discussion spaces, pressure-free zones, and the introduction of activities that promote co-operation can also support this goal. By ensuring that the learning environment supports learners' emotional and social well-being, schools help facilitate the formation of strong and balanced characters (Porter, 2023).

Character education is not only the responsibility of the school, but also needs to involve parents and the community. Schools can organise regular meetings with parents to share learners' progress and provide guidance on how to support character education at home (Micewski, 2022). Collaboration with the community, such as organising community service or the introduction of local values, can provide a broader context for learners to understand and apply the values they have learnt. By strengthening these relationships, character education can be delivered more fully and

effectively through a consistent environment between school, home and community (Ma'arif, 2022).

To ensure the effectiveness of character education programmes, it is important to have a thorough assessment and evaluation system. Assessment tools should include observations, questionnaires and self-assessment that allow teachers to assess students' character development holistically (Saputra, 2023). The results of these evaluations can be optimised to improve the curriculum and teaching strategies. In addition, satisfaction surveys from students and parents can also provide valuable feedback on how the character education programme is perceived and implemented. With integrated assessment, schools can continuously refine their character education programmes and ensure that the expected goals are achieved (Johnson & Seemiller, 2021).

Thus, character education is a core element that has a great influence on the overall development of individuals and society. Effective implementation of character education requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach, including integration in the syllabus, application of social-emotional learning methods, reinforcement of work ethic and discipline, exemplary leadership, enhancement of positive learning environments, and collaboration with parents and the community. With continuous evaluation as part of the process, character education programmes can be continuously improved to meet the challenges of the times and the needs of students. Ultimately, good character education will produce individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have integrity, responsibility and social care.

Implications of Strengthening Character Education

Strengthening character education has deep meaning in a social context. If character values such as integrity, empathy, responsibility and solid co-operation are taught and practised consistently, it can create a more harmonious and cohesive society. Individuals who receive character education tend to be members of society who contribute positively to their families, communities and on a broader scale. They will be better able to respect differences of opinion, avoid unnecessary conflicts and solve problems constructively (Aslan et al., 2019).

In terms of the economy, strict character education can be directly related to the quality of the workforce produced. Workers with character traits such as discipline, hard work and integrity are more likely to be productive and trustworthy in various industry sectors. This will attract investors and companies to operate in areas with high quality human resources. In addition, good work ethic and the ability to work in teams will also increase efficiency and innovation in the workplace, providing long-term economic benefits (Hakim, 2023); (Niyonizeye et al., 2024).

In the context of education, strengthening character education can change classroom dynamics and the overall school climate. Students who are educated with

good character values will show a more positive attitude in learning and interacting with teachers and peers. This not only improves academic performance, but also creates a more conducive and responsive learning environment. Teachers and school staff will also feel this positive impact through better relationships with students and parents, and higher morale in carrying out their educational duties.

Conclusion

Character education as an appropriate response to the challenges of the modern era shows that behavioural and moral education is essential to deal with the dynamics and complexities of today. The explosion of technological innovation, widespread globalisation, and rapid social change have created new tests that demand individuals who are not only academically smart, but also spiritually and emotionally strong. Character education helps nurture these qualities by instilling values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy and resilience. This not only supports students' personal development but also facilitates social harmonisation amidst an increasingly dynamic diversity of cultures and perspectives.

Moreover, effective character education requires collaboration from all parties, including the government, educational institutions, families and communities. With an integrated teaching strategy, a holistic approach, and the active involvement of all stakeholders, character education can be applied in a more comprehensive and sustainable manner. The result is a generation that has the ability to respond wisely to the challenges of the era, contribute positively to society, and bring constructive changes in various aspects of life. Therefore, strengthening character education is not just an option, but an urgent need to equip the younger generation to face an uncertain future.

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