

TEACHERS AS MORAL AGENTS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Character education is one of the main focuses in developing human resources in the 21st century. Amid the challenges of globalization, moral degradation, and technological disruption, teachers are seen as key actors who play a role in transferring knowledge and internalizing ethical values to students. This study aims to review the literature related to the role of teachers in the development of character education in schools. The method used is a qualitative literature study that reviews scientific articles, books, and relevant policy documents, both national and international. Thematic analysis is used to identify the roles, strategies, challenges, and implications of the role of teachers in character education. The study results show that teachers' role in character education is divided into three main dimensions, namely as value educators, role models, and facilitators of the learning environment. The strategies used include the integration of character values in the curriculum, habituation of positive behavior, moral reflection, and creating a supportive school culture. The challenges include limited conceptual understanding of teachers, administrative burden, limited time, and lack of support from parents and the community. This literature review also emphasizes that successful teachers in developing character education consistently show examples, have pedagogical competence, and receive policy and institutional support. These findings align with various theories of moral education, which place teachers as the main role models in shaping students' character. Conceptually, this research strengthens teacher capacity through training, supervision, and collaboration with parents and the community. Practically, the study results can be a reference for schools, policymakers, and educational institutions in designing strategies to strengthen character education that are more effective and contextual. Thus, it can be concluded that the teachers' role is crucial in character education development. Systematic efforts through exemplary learning integration and support of the education ecosystem are key to producing a generation that is intellectually intelligent and has strong moral integrity.

Keywords: Teacher, Moral Agent, Critical Review, Reinforcement, Education, Character

Introduction

Character education is a strategic issue in developing human resources in the 21st century. Amid the challenges of globalization, moral degradation, and technological

disruption, educational institutions are required to transfer knowledge and form personalities with integrity. Teachers, as the leading actors in the educational process, play an essential role in internalizing character values in students.

In the Indonesian context, the urgency of character education is increasingly strengthened through national policies such as *Strengthening Character Education (PPK)*. This program emphasizes integrating religious, nationalist, independent, cooperative, and integrity values into learning. However, the success of its implementation is greatly influenced by the capacity, strategy, and commitment of teachers as facilitators and role models.

Teachers function not only as teachers (transfer of knowledge) but also as educators who instill moral values (*transfer of value*). This dual role requires teachers to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in learning, so that students are academically intelligent and well-rounded.

Several studies have shown that character education practices are effective through an exemplary approach, habituation, integrating values in the curriculum, and social interaction in schools. Therefore, teachers need to design pedagogical strategies that are in harmony with the needs of students' character, both in and outside the classroom.

Based on this background, this study aims to review the literature on teachers' roles in character education development. Through a literature review, this study seeks to identify patterns, challenges, and best practices that can be used as a reference in strengthening the implementation of character education in schools.

Literature Review

Character education systematically shapes students' personalities by internalizing universal values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and empathy. Lickona (1991) called character education moral education integrated into students' daily lives.

In Indonesia, character education is defined in Permendikbud No. 20 of 2018 as a conscious and planned effort to instill national and humanitarian values through learning, habituation, and school culture. Teachers have a significant role because they interact directly and continuously with students.

The literature shows that the approaches used by teachers in character education are diverse, ranging from *integrated curriculum* models, exemplary methods, behavioral habituation, to *service learning*. Various international and national studies agree that teachers are the dominant factor in determining the success of character education programs.

However, challenges also arise. Studies reported limited teachers' understanding of character education, high administrative burden, and lack of relevant training. This often makes the practice of character education only a formality, without a deep appreciation from students.

Thus, the literature review confirms that the role of teachers is very central in building students' character. Teachers are not only the presenters of academic materials, but also role models in real life. Therefore, the literature emphasizes the importance of strengthening teachers' capacity in the pedagogic, psychological, and moral dimensions so that character education can run optimally.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative literature review approach. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is to explore the role of teachers in character education based on the results of previous research. Data sources were obtained from national and international journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and regulatory documents related to character education. Literature selection criteria include topic relevance, novelty (last 10 years), and publisher credibility. The data analysis technique used is thematic analysis. Each literature is reviewed to identify key themes, such as teacher strategies, implementation challenges, and the impact of character education. The analysis process is carried out iteratively: reading literature, coding, grouping themes, and compiling conceptual narratives. This aims to comprehensively provide an overview of teachers' roles in character education development. The validity of the research is maintained through *the triangulation of sources, namely, by comparing findings from various pieces of literature*, both national and international. Thus, the research results are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding and can be used to develop educational policies and practices.

Results and Discussion

The literature review results show that teachers' role in character education is divided into three main dimensions: value educator, role model, and facilitator of the learning environment. Teachers play a direct role in instilling values through teaching, setting examples for daily behavior, and creating a school ecosystem conducive to character building.

Strategies commonly used by teachers include the integration of character values in the curriculum, habituating positive behavior, using moral discussion methods, and strengthening school culture. Teachers also use reflective approaches, such as *journaling* and group discussions, to help students reflect on real-life moral values.

The literature also highlights teachers' challenges, such as limited learning time, dominance of academic orientation, and differences in students' backgrounds. In addition, the lack of support from parents and the community is an external factor that can weaken the effectiveness of character education in schools.

The discussion shows that teachers who succeed in developing character education usually have high integrity, master innovative pedagogical strategies, and receive institutional support. This emphasizes that character education cannot run only with formal instruction, but must go through real practice and consistency of teacher behavior.

These findings align with the theories of Lickona (1991) and Narvaez (2006), which emphasize the role of teachers as the main role models in moral education. In the Indonesian context, strengthening teacher capacity through training, supervision, and policy support is key to ensuring that character education runs effectively.

Discussion

Character education is a fundamental need in the modern education system. Amid the phenomenon of globalization, students are required to have not only intellectual intelligence but also moral integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. In this context, teachers play a strategic role as the main agents who shape students' personalities through learning practices, exemplary, and social interaction in the school environment. The literature reviewed shows that teachers are seen as key figures who can influence students' moral development through formal teaching and daily attitudes.

The role of teachers in the development of character education can be mapped into three main dimensions: as a value educator, a role model, and a facilitator of the learning environment. As value educators, teachers transfer moral principles such as honesty, discipline, and cooperation through integrated learning materials. For example, teachers show these values in real life in daily interactions, so that students learn through imitation. As facilitators, teachers create a school climate conducive to developing a positive character culture.

Teachers widely use strategies in character education, including integrating values into the curriculum, habituating positive behaviors, using methods of moral discussion, and using reflective approaches such as *journaling* and *self-assessment*. Several studies also emphasize the importance of using *service learning* methods that link academic learning with social activities in the community. This provides students with the opportunity to internalize character values through hands-on experience.

Nevertheless, the literature also highlights several challenges faced by teachers. First, the limitations of conceptual understanding of character education often cause implementation to be only a formality. Second, the administrative burden and pressure of the academic curriculum reduce the space for teachers to focus on character development. Third, the lack of support from parents and the community environment makes character education inconsistent between school and home.

In addition to internal factors, the role of teachers is also greatly influenced by institutional support. Teachers who receive special training, supervision, and facilities from schools are proven to be more effective in integrating character values into learning. National policies such as *Strengthening Character Education (PPK)* also provide a regulatory framework. However, their implementation is still highly dependent on the readiness and commitment of teachers at the school level.

The literature findings align with the moral theory and character education put forward by Lickona (1991) and Narvaez (2006), which emphasize the importance of teachers as *role models*. Teachers who can show consistency between words and deeds

will be more respected and followed by students. In other words, the effectiveness of character education is determined more by the teacher's behavior than simply the teaching methods used.

In general, this discussion of literature strengthens the understanding that character education is a collective responsibility, but the position of teachers still occupies a central role. Successful implementation requires not only pedagogical competence but also personal integrity of teachers and support from schools, parents, and the community. Therefore, efforts to strengthen character education must be carried out comprehensively by paying attention to individual, institutional, and policy dimensions to produce a strong character and competitiveness generation.

Conclusion

Character education is an essential foundation for nation-building. Teachers play a central role because they interact directly with students in the learning process and daily life. A literature review confirms that teachers are valued educators, role models, and facilitators of the learning environment. These three dimensions complement each other in forming students' character. The strategies teachers use include curriculum integration, habituation, moral reflection, and creating a conducive school culture. However, implementation success is greatly influenced by pedagogical capacity, policy support, and parental involvement. Teachers' challenges include time constraints, administrative burdens, and a lack of relevant training. Therefore, strengthening teacher capacity is essential to ensure that character education runs consistently and effectively. Overall, this study concludes that the success of character education is highly dependent on the role of teachers. Efforts to strengthen teachers' capacity and role models must be prioritized in national education policies to create a generation that is not only intelligent but also has character.

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