

Beyond Program Implementation: Character Education Management for the Deep Internalization of Values in Islamic Elementary Schools

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the management of character education program development at Muhammadiyah Plus Elementary School Semarang, particularly in the aspects of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the program, as well as its implications for the internalization of character values in students. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Informants were selected through a purposive sampling technique involving the principal, vice principal, class teachers, Islamic Education teachers, extracurricular instructors, parents, and students. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies, and then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model through the processes of coding, categorization, theme development, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study revealed four main themes: institutional commitment as the foundation of character education, the implementation of a whole school approach in program development, teachers as the main agents of value internalization, and the challenges of character internalization in students. The research findings revealed that the success of the program was determined not only by the completeness of management functions and the existence of a strong school culture, but also by the school's ability to build intrinsic awareness in students. Some students still participated in the program due to compliance with the rules, while the administrative burden of teachers limited the intensity of character mentoring. The study concluded that the effectiveness of character education depends on the synergy between school management, school culture, the role of teachers, and the ongoing process of internalizing values.

Keywords: Educational Management, Character Education, Program Development.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengelolaan pengembangan program pendidikan karakter di SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang, khususnya dalam aspek perencanaan, pengorganisasian, pelaksanaan, dan evaluasi program serta implikasinya terhadap internalisasi nilai-nilai karakter siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Informan dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling yang melibatkan kepala sekolah, wakil kepala sekolah, guru kelas, guru Pendidikan Agama Islam, pembimbing ekstrakurikuler, orang tua, dan siswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman melalui pengkodean, kategorisasi, pengembangan tema, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat tema utama, yaitu komitmen kelembagaan sebagai landasan pendidikan karakter, penerapan pendekatan seluruh sekolah dalam pengembangan program, guru sebagai agen

utama internalisasi nilai, serta tantangan internalisasi karakter pada siswa. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan program tidak hanya ditentukan oleh kelengkapan fungsi manajemen dan adanya budaya sekolah yang kuat, tetapi juga oleh kemampuan sekolah dalam menumbuhkan kesadaran intrinsik siswa. Sebagian siswa masih mengikuti program ini semata-mata karena kepatuhan terhadap aturan, sementara beban administratif guru membatasi intensitas pembinaan karakter. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa efektivitas pendidikan karakter bergantung pada sinergi antara manajemen sekolah, budaya sekolah, peran guru, dan proses internalisasi nilai-nilai yang berkelanjutan.

Keywords: Manajemen Pendidikan, Pendidikan Karakter, Pengembangan Program.

INTRODUCTION

Character education has a very important role in shaping students who not only excel academically but also have integrity, responsibility, discipline, empathy, and the ability to interact positively in community life. Rasyid et al show that character education functions as a foundation for personality formation, a prevention of various social problems for adolescents, a support for academic achievement, and a means to prepare a generation that is able to face the challenges of the digital era with a strong moral attitude.¹ Character education also helps students develop the ability to make ethical decisions, respect differences, and take responsibility for actions taken.² On the other hand, when character education does not receive adequate attention, various negative impacts can arise, such as increased undisciplined behavior, low sense of responsibility, cheating habits, lack of respect for teachers and parents, the emergence of individualistic attitudes, low social concern, and increased juvenile delinquency and social conflicts.³ Khairunisa et al also showed that weak character education can cause inconsistency in students' behavior in dealing with various negative influences from the environment and digital media, so that they are more vulnerable to deviant behavior and have difficulty internalizing moral values in daily life.⁴

¹ Ramli Rasyid et al., "The Importance of Character Education in the World of Education," *Basicedu Journal* 8, no. 2 (2024): 1278–85.

² Octavia Ramadhani et al., "The Importance of Character Education in Elementary Schools to Build a Quality Generation," *MARAS : Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 3, no. 1 (2025): 151–60, <https://doi.org/10.60126/maras.v3i1.659>.

³ Nuraini Tumangger, "Character education plays an important role in the formation of students' personalities, especially in developing independent nature and a sense of responsibility. Along with the increasingly complex demands of the world of education, students are not only required to master," *JKP: Journal of Education Quality* 2, no. 2 (2024): 409–14.

⁴ Adinda Khairunisa, Cut Kumala, and Fitri Rahmadani, "The Importance of Character Education in Building a Generation with Integrity in the Era of Globalization of the PGSD Study Program, Samudra University Students to Have Traits and Behaviors in Accordance with the Character Stated in It," *Journal of Aerospace Education Volume* 2, no. 2 (2025): 194.

If character education is very minimal, neglected, or even degraded in the educational process, students have the potential to lose the moral foundation that functions as a behavioral control and guideline in interacting with society.⁵ This condition can give rise to various social problems that are increasingly real, such as increasing cases of *bullying* and *cyberbullying*, low empathy, decreased respect for teachers and parents, intolerant behavior, academic dishonesty, and the tendency to commit actions that are contrary to social norms. Parisu, in his paper, shows that the weak internalization of character values correlates with the increase in aggressive behavior and bullying in the school environment because students do not have adequate abilities to control emotions, appreciate differences, and understand the moral consequences of their actions.⁶ Maryani et al also found that character education has proven to play an important role in building empathy, responsibility, discipline, and mutual respect, which are the main bulwarks in preventing deviant behavior.⁷ Phenomena that are currently widely found in Indonesia, such as the rampant cases of bullying in schools, the spread of hate speech on social media, violence between students, the culture of cheating, and low integrity in daily life, can be understood as one of the consequences of the lack of optimal strengthening of character education in the younger generation. Zhao et al also showed that victims of bullying have a much higher risk of experiencing psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, behavioral disorders, and internet addiction, so that these problems not only have an impact on social aspects, but also on the mental health of students.⁸

The problem of character degradation, which is characterized by increased bullying, low discipline, decreased respect for teachers, rampant abuse of digital media, and weakening of students' social responsibility, shows that character education is not enough to be taught as learning material, but must be managed systematically through the management of character education program development.⁹ In this context, character education program

⁵ Lilis Ferawati Maria Magdalena Silitonga Lilis Ferawati Maria Magdalena Silitonga, "The Role of Character Education in Overcoming Bullying in Elementary Schools," *EDUCATION* 13, no. 2 (November 2025): 442–53, <https://doi.org/10.61672/judek.v13i2.3029>.

⁶ Chairan Zibar L Parisu, "Effective Strategies for Bullying Prevention in Elementary Schools through a Character Education Approach," *Journal of Education Studies and Learning Horizons* 1, no. 1 (2025): 36–45.

⁷ Maryani Maryani, Rina Inayah, and Reza Mauldy Raharja, "Character Education as a Strategy in the Prevention of Bullying Behavior in Junior High School," in *Proceedings of the National Seminar on Education*, vol. 1, 2024, 193–204.

⁸ Na Zhao et al., "School Bullying Results in Poor Psychological Conditions: Evidence from a Survey of 95,545 Subjects," June 2023.

⁹ Riski Tasijawa, Krislina Pattipeiluhu, and Elisabeth Yaas, "Character Education Program Management in the Formation of Student Morals," *EDUCATIONAL : Journal of*

management is a strategic instrument that ensures that character values are planned, organized, implemented, and evaluated in an ongoing manner so that they can be internalized in the school culture. Laila et al emphasized that the success of character education is highly dependent on the quality of its management, starting from the preparation of a vision and mission oriented to character formation, the integration of character values into the curriculum and learning process, the development of a school culture that supports the habituation of positive behavior, the involvement of teachers as role models, to collaboration with parents and the community.¹⁰ Good management also allows schools to conduct regular supervision and evaluation of the effectiveness of the program so that various character problems can be detected and addressed early.¹¹ In contrast, without planned and sustainable management, character education tends to be ceremonial, inconsistent, and fails to produce real behavioral changes in students. Ula et al. show that schools that implement character education management in a structured manner are able to create a learning environment that supports the development of positive attitudes, increases discipline, responsibility, and social concern, and forms a school culture that is conducive to learning.¹²

Tasijawa et al. and Ula et al. show that the success of character education is not only determined by the material taught, but also by the quality of program management, which includes planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating that are carried out systematically and supported by a conducive school culture.¹³ In addition, Aspar and Ula also emphasized that schools that are able to integrate character education into all academic and non-academic activities tend to produce students who are more disciplined, responsible, have a good social attitude, and are able to face the challenges of the digital era and

Education & Teaching Innovation 4, no. 2 (July 2024): 93–103, <https://doi.org/10.51878/educational.v4i2.3015>.

¹⁰ Uswatun Qoyyimah Laila, Mujianto Solichin, and Dhikrul Hakim Mukhlisin, "Management of Student Character Education Programs Based on Islamic Boarding School," *At-Ta'akkki: Journal of the Study of Islamic Education and Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2024): 179–94.

¹¹ Rina Aspar, "Implementation of Character Education Management in Developing Students' Interests, Attitudes, and Positive Behaviors at SDN 2 Sukajawa Kec Tanjung Karang Barat Bandar Lampung for the 2023/2024 Academic Year," *UNISAN JOURNAL: Journal of Management and Education* 3, no. 4 (2024): 853–67.

¹² Hamidatul Ula, Muchamad Suradji, and Mukhlās Mukhlās, "Character Education Program Management in Improving Students' Social Attitudes in the Era of Information Disruption," *TA'LIM: Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 7, no. 2 (2024): 349–62.

¹³ Tasijawa, Pattipeiluhu, and Yaas, "Character Education Program Management in the Formation of Student Morals"; Ula, Suradji, and Mukhlās, "Character Education Program Management in Improving Students' Social Attitudes in the Era of Information Disruption."

information disruption.¹⁴ In this context, the city of Semarang, as one of the educational centers in Central Java, has an educational dynamic that continues to develop, so it is an interesting context to examine the implementation of character education management. The selection of SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang is based on an Islamic-based school and has characteristics that have the claim of integration between Islamic values, school culture, student habituation, and sustainable management of character education programs. The existence of various habituation, exemplary, religious character strengthening, and involvement of school residents makes this institution worthy of being studied as a research location to understand how the management of character education program development is designed, implemented, and evaluated in an effort to form students with character.

Based on various problems of character degradation that occur in students and the findings of previous research that show that the success of character education is greatly influenced by the quality of program management which includes continuous planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation, it can be assumed that schools that can develop character education programs systematically will be more successful in forming students who are disciplined, responsible, religious, with integrity, and have high social concern.¹⁵ On the other hand, the weak management of character education programs has the potential to cause character values to only stop at the conceptual level without being able to be internalized into the culture and behavior of students in daily life. Based on this, SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang is suspected to have a distinctive character education program development management pattern through the integration of Islamic values, school culture, example, habituation, and involvement of all school residents, which allows the creation of a more effective and sustainable character formation process. Departing from these assumptions, this research was carried out to reveal in depth how the management of character education program development is designed, implemented, and evaluated at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang, as well as

¹⁴ Aspar, "Implementation of Character Education Management in Developing Students' Interests, Attitudes, and Positive Behaviors at SDN 2 Sukajawa Tanjung Karang Barat District, Bandar Lampung for the 2023/2024 Academic Year"; Ula, Suradji, and Mukhlis, "Character Education Program Management in Improving Students' Social Attitudes in the Era of Information Disruption."

¹⁵ Aspar, "Implementation of Character Education Management in Developing Students' Interests, Attitudes, and Positive Behaviors at SDN 2 Sukajawa Tanjung Karang Barat District, Bandar Lampung for the 2023/2024 Academic Year"; Ula, Suradji, and Mukhlis, "Character Education Program Management in Improving Students' Social Attitudes in the Era of Information Disruption"; Tasijawa, Pattipeiluhu, and Yaas, "Character Education Program Management in the Formation of Student Morals."

the extent to which the managerial process contributes to the formation of students' character in the midst of various moral and social challenges in the current era of information disruption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sudirman et al., who wrote about character education, show that character is no longer understood as just the result of the moral learning process in the classroom, but as a product of an integrated and comprehensively managed education system.¹⁶ Sabila emphasized that effective character education requires strong school management support, the development of a conducive organizational culture, the involvement of all school residents, and a continuous evaluation mechanism.¹⁷ From the perspective of education management, management *functions* that include planning, organizing, leading, and supervising are the main foundation in ensuring that character values are not only contained in curriculum documents but also embodied in daily educational practices. Hadi et al. in their paper show that schools that systematically implement management functions tend to have character education programs that are more directed, sustainable, and able to produce more real behavioral changes than schools that carry out character education sporadically or only administratively.¹⁸

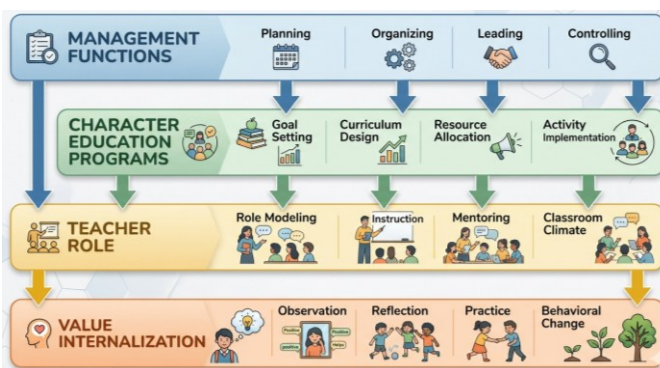


Image 1. Frame of Mind

¹⁶ Sudirman Sudirman, Hefniy Hefniy, and Ainol Yaqin, "Character Education in Elementary Schools: The Role of School Management in Responding to Children's Social and Moral Issues in the Modern Era," in *Proceeding of International Conference on Education, Society and Humanity*, vol. 2, 2024, 292–305.

¹⁷ Hidayatis Sabila, "Managing Character Education for Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Elementary Schools," *Journal of Educational Management Research* 5, no. 1 (2026): 1068–82.

¹⁸ Yulianto Hadi et al., "A Systematic Literature Review on Character Education Strategies in Primary and Secondary Schools," *Journal of Educational Research and Practice* 3, no. 2 (2025): 321–40.

Within this framework, the management function is then translated into various *character education programs*, which become concrete means to instill character values in students. Hadi et al explained that successful character education programs generally do not stand as separate subjects but are integrated into the curriculum, co-curricular activities, extracurriculars, school culture, daily habits, and social interaction between school residents.¹⁹ The programs are designed to build values such as integrity, responsibility, discipline, social care, tolerance, and religiosity through authentic learning experiences. Andayanie et al²⁰. and Sakkir et al²¹. show that the success of character education programs is greatly influenced by the school's ability to develop program designs that are relevant to the needs of students and social challenges that develop in the digital era. Based on this, the character education program cannot be understood only as a collection of activities but as a strategic instrument that connects the goals of character education with real and sustainable educational practices.²²

The existence of the next character education program cannot be separated from the role of the teacher as the main actor who connects school policies with the learning experience of students. Putri and Utama²³ and Syarif²⁴ emphasized that teachers have a central position as educators, guides, facilitators, motivators, as well as moral role models that affect the success of character education. The character values designed in the school program will only become a normative concept if they are not translated by the teacher through real actions in the learning process and daily interactions. Hidayat et al show that students tend to absorb character values more easily through example

¹⁹ Hadi et al.

²⁰ Lukie Masayu Andayanie, Sigit Hartanto, and S Sutama, "The Role of Character Education in Shaping The Personality of Generation Z Students," in *Proceedings International Conference on Education Innovation and Social Science*, 2025, 292–98.

²¹ Geminastiti Sakkir, Karta Jayadi, and Rini Isnaeni Sakkir, "Implementation of Character Education in Higher Education," *EduLine: Journal of Education and Learning Innovation* 5, no. 2 (2025): 246–55.

²² Farizan Fahmi, "The Role of Education in Building Student Character," *Global Education Journal* 3, no. 1 (2025): 2808–5094, <https://doi.org/10.59525/gej.v3i1.1192>.

²³ Feranie Azizah Putri and Candra Utama, "Fostering Integrity In Teachers Through Character Education: A Literature Review," *Proceedings Series of Educational Studies* 2, no. 1 (2025): 196–203.

²⁴ Naufal Qadri Syarif, "The Role of Teachers in Developing Character Education in Elementary Schools: Literature Review," *Journal of Teaching and Education for Scholars* 2, no. 2 (2025): 82–87.

than through verbal instruction alone.²⁵ Based on this, the quality of character education is greatly influenced by the ability of teachers to integrate character values into learning, build positive interpersonal relationships with students, and create a learning environment that supports moral and social development. In fact, Nurzehan et al place teachers as the most determining factor in the success of character education compared to curriculum aspects or other supporting facilities.²⁶

The role of the teacher ultimately boils down to the process of *value internalization*, which is the main goal of character education. Hidayat et al explained that value internalization is a process in which values that were initially outside the individual turn into part of consciousness, beliefs, and behaviors that are carried out voluntarily.²⁷ This process takes place through habituation, strengthening, reflection, social experience, and examples that students receive continuously. Thahir et al. show that the internalization of values successfully produces students who not only understand moral concepts cognitively but are also able to apply them in daily life.²⁸ In contrast, failure in the internalization process causes character values to only stop at the level of knowledge without producing a noticeable change in behavior.²⁹ Based on this, the success of character education is not measured by the number of programs implemented, but by the extent to which these values are truly alive in the actions of students in the school environment and society.

Various previous studies, such as Siruwa et al. and Hadi et al³⁰, generally discuss one of the components in the chain separately, both focusing on

²⁵ Mupid Hidayat et al., "Character Education in Indonesia: How Is It Internalized and Implemented in Virtual Learning?," *Journal of Education Horizon* 41, no. 1 (February 2021): 186–98, <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v41i1.45920>.

²⁶ Alifya Nurzehan, Endang Herawan, and Diding Nurdin, "Character Education Management: A Case Study of the Role of Teachers in High Schools," *Didactic: Journal of Education* 13, no. 4 November (2024): 4649–5656.

²⁷ Hidayat et al., "Character Education in Indonesia: How Is It Internalized and Implemented in Virtual Learning?"

²⁸ Muthahharah Thahir et al., "The Impact of Character Education Value Internalization on Students' Life Skills: The Moderating Role of Parental Involvement," *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 9, no. 10 (March 2026): 2026448, <https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2026448>.

²⁹ Kusnul Khotimah, "Internalization of Character Education in Social Studies Learning at Junior High School," *Journal of Social Studies Learning Theory and Praxis* 10, no. 2 (November 2025): 246–59, <https://doi.org/10.17977/um022v10i22025p246-259>.

³⁰ Wahira Siruwa, Sumarlin Mus, and Abd Hamid, "The Need for A Character Education Management Model to Increase Students' Adversity Quotient in Elementary Schools," *Journal of Innovation in Educational and Cultural Research* 4, no. 4 (October 2023): 654–62, <https://doi.org/10.46843/jiecr.v4i4.1029>; Hadi et al., "A Systematic Literature Review on

character education management, the implementation of character education programs, the role of teachers, and the process of internalizing values. These studies make an important contribution in explaining the effectiveness of each component, but most still place these elements as stand-alone variables. On the other hand, the development of the paper began to show that character education is a systemic and interconnected process, so that the effectiveness of value internalization is greatly influenced by the relationship between the function of school management, the development of character education programs, and the role of teachers as the main implementers in the field. This view shows that the success of character education cannot be explained only through one specific aspect, but must be understood as a series of processes that take place continuously from the managerial level to the level of student behavior.

Based on the development of the literature, the study of the management of character education program development at the elementary school level is increasingly important, considering that the primary education phase is the most strategic period in the formation of students' character. In this context, SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang is an interesting space to understand how management functions are translated into character education programs, how teachers carry out their role as agents of character formation, and how the whole process contributes to the internalization of values in students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach to examine the management of character education program development at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand in depth the process of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating character education programs in the real context of schools. The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques with the criterion that the informant has direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and acceptance of character education programs. The research informants consisted of school principals, vice principals, classroom teachers, Islamic Religious Education teachers, extracurricular coaches, parents of students, and students. SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang was chosen as the research location because it has various habituation and character-strengthening programs that are integrated into the

school culture, such as the 3S culture (smile, greeting, greetings), congregational Dhuha prayers, religious activities, and extracurricular programs that support the formation of students' character. The research was carried out for two months, namely from September 29 to November 12, 2025. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner using interview guidelines consisting of several main questions developed according to the informant's response, with a duration of between 30 and 60 minutes per session. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the informant and then transcribed verbatim to facilitate the data analysis process.

The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation by comparing information from various informants, triangulation techniques by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, and member checking to ensure the suitability of the researcher's interpretation with the information provided by the informant. In addition, *peer debriefing* is carried out with fellow researchers or academics to reduce interpretation bias. Data analysis uses Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions drawn. At the data reduction stage, the researcher conducts an open coding process of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents that have been collected to identify units of meaning that are relevant to the focus of the research. Codes that have similar meanings are then grouped into several categories through the category generation process, which is then developed into theme *development* that describes the management practices of character education program development in schools. The data that has been organized is then presented in a narrative and systematic manner to facilitate the understanding of the relationship between themes before drawing inductive conclusions to produce comprehensive findings on the management of character education program development at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Institutional Commitment as a Foundation for Character Education Development

Institutional commitment is the main foundation in the development of character education programs at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang. The results of the study show that character education is not positioned as an additional program, but as an integral part of all educational activities organized by schools. This commitment is reflected in various policies that are consistently directed to support the formation of students' character through the integration of Islamic values into academic, non-academic, and school cultural activities.

The principal emphasized that every program that is prepared must have an orientation towards the formation of students' character. As stated, *"We want every activity at school to have character values, so that students not only gain knowledge but also get used to practicing good values in daily life"* (KS, Interview, 2025). The statement shows that character education is the main direction in the implementation of education in schools.

This commitment is realized through a planning process involving various elements of the school, ranging from principals, teachers, to education staff. All programs are designed with reference to the school's vision and mission, which emphasize the formation of students who are religious, disciplined, responsible, and of noble character. A teacher said that *"Every program that is made is always asked again whether the activity supports the formation of students' character or not. If it has nothing to do with character, it will usually be reconsidered"* (Classroom Teacher, Interview, 2025). These findings show that character education has become a key consideration in every decision-making in the school environment.

Institutional commitment is also seen through the school's efforts to build a school culture with Islamic nuances. Based on the results of observations, various activities such as 3S culture (smiles, greetings), congregational Dhuha prayers, prayer readings before and after learning, and habits of maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment were carried out consistently by all school residents. Interestingly, these activities are not positioned as separate programs but have become part of the daily routine that shapes the overall school climate. Thus, students constantly interact with character values in daily life.

In addition to through school culture, institutional commitment is also strengthened through the example shown by teachers and school leaders. The results of the observation show that teachers not only direct students to carry out habituation programs, but also directly participate in each activity. One student stated, *"If the teacher comes early and participates in the Dhuha prayer together, we feel that we have to join because everyone does it"* (Grade V Student, Interview, 2025). These findings show that character culture in schools develops through a collective exemplary process that is carried out consistently by all school residents.

It was also found that strong institutional commitment does not fully guarantee the internalization of deep values in all students. Some teachers revealed that there are still students who participate in various activities because of compliance with school rules, not because of the awareness that grows from within them. As expressed by a teacher, *"Some students are used to running the*

program, but there are also those who still need to be reminded to follow the activities well" (PAI Teacher, Interview, 2025). These findings show that there is a gap between the success of schools in building a character education system and the success of students in living the values taught.

The results of the study show that institutional commitment is the main force that supports the development of character education programs at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang. This commitment is reflected in the school's character-oriented leadership, the involvement of all school residents, the integration of Islamic values into the school culture, and the example shown in daily life. However, this study also found that the success of building a strong school system and culture has not fully resulted in the deep internalization of values in all students. These findings indicate that strengthening institutional commitment needs to be balanced with a more personal and reflective strategy so that students are not only compliant with the program, but also able to understand and appreciate the character values instilled.

The institutional commitment shown by SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang is in line with various cutting-edge research studies that place school leadership as a key factor in the success of character education. Character education will be more effective when it is not treated as an incidental program but becomes part of the school's overall vision, mission, and policies. Teachers and school leaders play the role of the main agents who ensure that every learning activity and school program contains a character-strengthening dimension. Maulana, in his writing, emphasized that the successful implementation of character education is characterized by the integration of character values in the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating learning so that character becomes part of daily educational practices, not just administrative documents.³¹ Similar findings were also put forward by Nurjana, who explained that the success of character education in elementary schools is greatly influenced by institutional commitment manifested through school policies, leadership support, and the active involvement of all teachers in integrating character values into teaching and learning activities.³² Thus, the strong character orientation in every decision-making at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang shows that there is an alignment between school practices and

³¹ Mochammad Ircham Maulana, "Teachers' Enactments of Character Education: A Case Study from Indonesia," *Journal of Character Education* 13, no. 2 (October 2022): 123–32, <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpka.v13i2.50224>.

³² Nurjana, "The Role of Teachers in Integrating Character Education in Elementary Schools," *JPT : Journal of Thematic Education* 5, no. 2 (August 2024): 280–85, <https://doi.org/10.62159/jpt.v5i2.1566>.

the principles of character education recommended in various contemporary studies.

A religious and consistent school culture is also an important factor in the formation of students' character. Yarid and Purwandari emphasized that the internalization of character values takes place more effectively when students experience direct interaction with the school environment that supports the habituation of positive behavior.³³ Studies on school culture-based character education show that daily routines, school traditions, and social climates that are built in a sustainable manner are able to shape students' behaviors and habits more deeply than learning that is only cognitive. Habituation practices such as greetings, joint prayers, religious activities, and maintaining environmental cleanliness are concrete forms of school culture that allow students to learn through real experiences. Sari et al. found that a strong school culture creates an environment conducive to the development of students' values of discipline, responsibility, and religiosity.³⁴ In the context of Muhammadiyah schools, the integration of Islamic values into all school activities strengthens the habituation process so that character education is not only taught but also experienced directly by students in daily life.

Research findings that show that there are students who are still running the program because of compliance with school rules indicate that the process of internalizing values has not fully reached the stage of intrinsic awareness. This condition is also found in the writings by Yani, who emphasized that the success of building a character education system is not always directly proportional to the success of students in living the values taught.³⁵ Hidayat et al explained that the internalization of character values requires a process of personal reflection, emotional involvement, and meaningful relationships between teachers and students so that the values taught can be part of individual beliefs.³⁶ On the other hand, Sidik shows that consistent teacher behavior is a very influential factor in helping students turn external compliance into internal awareness.³⁷ When students see teachers and school leaders practicing the values taught in

³³ Hatta Yarid and Septiyati Purwandari, "Building Character Education Based on School Culture in Elementary Schools: A Qualitative Study," in *International Conference on Teaching and Learning*, vol. 1, 2023, 24–36.

³⁴ Kurnia Putri Maila Sari et al., "The Role of Education in Shaping the Character of Elementary School Children," *Pendas: Scientific Journal of Basic Education* 10, no. 04 (2025): 1–11.

³⁵ Ahmad Yani, "Character Education in PAI Learning in Elementary Schools: The Role of Teachers as Role Models," *Journal of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training* 2, no. 2 (2024): 369–74.

³⁶ Hidayat et al., "Character Education in Indonesia: How Is It Internalized and Implemented in Virtual Learning?"

³⁷ Purnama Sidik, "Character Education and The Crisis of National Role Models," *Journal of Character Education* 15, no. 2 (December 2024), <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpka.v15i2.73676>.

real life, they are more likely to develop the intrinsic motivation to apply those values in their daily lives.

Character Education as a *Whole School Program (Whole School Approach)*

The results of the study show that character education at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang is not carried out through a special program, but is applied through a *whole-school approach* that involves all school activities and components. Character education is not only present in the learning process in the classroom but is also integrated into school culture, religious activities, habituation programs, and various extracurricular activities. The principal explained that "*Character is not taught in one particular subject, but we include it in all school activities so that students get used to running it every day*" (KS, Interview, 2025). The statement shows that schools view character formation as a process that must sustainably take place through the real experiences that students experience in daily life.

This approach can be seen from various habituation activities that are carried out regularly and consistently. Based on the results of observations, students are accustomed to implementing the 3S culture (smile, greeting), carrying out Dhuha prayers in congregation, maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment, and showing discipline in various daily activities. Interestingly, these activities have become routines that are carried out without always having to receive instructions from teachers. A teacher said that "*Most students already understand the habits that must be done every day because the activity is constantly repeated and becomes the culture of the school*" (Classroom Teacher, Interview, 2025). These findings show that habituation strategies are the main instrument of schools in building students' character gradually and sustainably.

In addition to daily habits, character education is also strengthened through various extracurricular activities designed to develop aspects of leadership, responsibility, cooperation, and independence in students. Activities such as scouting and tambourine not only function as a means of talent development, but also as a space for character learning that complements the educational process in the classroom. An extracurricular coach explained that "*In scouting activities, students learn discipline, cooperation, and responsibility for the tasks given. We instill these values through direct activities, not just through explanations*" (Extracurricular Coaches, Interview, 2025). This shows that character education in schools is carried out through real experiences that allow students to practice the values learned.

The involvement of various parties in the implementation of the program is also an important characteristic of the *whole school approach* applied by

the school. Teachers, principals, education staff, extracurricular coaches, and parents have their own roles in supporting the formation of students' character. One parent said that "*School often reminds us to continue the habit that children have already done at school so that it does not stop when they are at home*" (Parents, Interview, 2025). These findings show that schools strive to build a continuity of character education between the school environment and the family environment so that the process of internalizing values can take place more optimally.

Although character education programs have been integrated into various aspects of school life, the results of the study found that the effectiveness of the program is still influenced by the level of involvement and awareness of students. The results of observations show that some students carry out various habituation activities because they have become a school routine, but have not fully understood the meaning contained in these activities. One teacher stated, "*There are students who follow the activity well because they are used to it, but when asked why the activity is important, they have not been able to explain in depth*" (PAI Teacher, Interview, 2025). These findings show that the success of the program structurally has not always been followed by the success of substantive internalization of values.

The results of the study show that character education at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang has been developed through a *whole school approach* that involves school culture, daily habits, extracurricular activities, and collaboration between schools and families. This approach allows learners to gain character experience in the various situations and interactions they experience daily. However, the research also found that the success of the implementation of the program as a whole still faces challenges in terms of meaning and internalization of values by students. Therefore, in addition to maintaining the integration of programs that have been running well, schools need to strengthen reflection and mentoring strategies that are able to help students understand the meaning behind each activity so that character education not only results in behavioral compliance but also deeper and sustainable value awareness.

The implementation of character education in SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang through *the whole school approach* is in line with various studies that affirm that the formation of students' character will be more effective if it is carried out comprehensively and integrated in all aspects of school life. Character education is not enough to be realized through certain subjects, but needs to be presented in school culture, learning processes, social relationships,

extracurricular activities, and institutional policies. Insani and Basuki³⁸ and Zulela et al.³⁹ show that the implementation of character education in elementary schools is carried out through example, habituation, school climate conditioning, integration in all subjects, and extracurricular activities. This approach allows students to gain character experiences repeatedly in various situations so that the values taught are not only understood cognitively but also practiced in daily life.

The habituation strategy, which is the main part of the implementation of character education in schools, also receives strong support from various recent research studies. Habituation that is carried out consistently through religious activities, discipline, cleanliness, and social interaction has been proven to be able to shape the character of students gradually because the values instilled continue to be repeated in daily life. Sholihah and Robiyansyah found that school culture functions as a medium for internalizing values through habituation, example, and environmental conditioning that supports the development of students' character.⁴⁰ Maratussholihah and Wibowo⁴¹, as well as Insani and Basuki⁴² show that the strategy of example and habituation is an effective approach in instilling character values in elementary school students because students learn through real experiences that they see and do directly. Other findings also show that habitual religious activities routinely are able to develop students' religious character, responsibility, discipline, independence, and social concern. Based on this, the success of SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang in building a 3S culture, congregational Dhuha prayers, and various other positive habits shows the importance of school culture as the main means of strengthening character education.

The research findings regarding the suboptimal interpretation of values by some students are also in line with the results of contemporary research, which emphasizes that the success of the program structurally is not always

³⁸ Listriasa Jihad Insani and Agus Basuki, "Character Education Based on School Cultural Values: Literature Studies," *EDUCATIONAL : Journal of Education* 6, no. 1 (February 28, 2024): 899–910, <https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v6i1.6401>.

³⁹ M S Zulela et al., "How Is the Education Character Implemented? The Case Study in Indonesian Elementary School," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2022): 371.

⁴⁰ Ely Sholihah and Firman Robiyansyah, "Internalization of Character Education through the Asmaul Husna Reading Habituation Program in Elementary Schools," in *Didactic Procedure: National Seminar on Basic Education*, vol. 7, 2022, 439–53.

⁴¹ Awalul Maratussholihah and Ari Wibowo, "Character Education Strategy Through Example and Habituation," *Basic Education Profession* 9, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 206–17, <https://doi.org/10.23917/ppd.v9i2.19510>.

⁴² Insani and Basuki, "Character Education Based on School Cultural Values: A Literature Study."

directly proportional to the success of deep internalization of values. Habits that are done regularly can indeed form positive behavior, but without a process of reflection, dialogue, and understanding of meaning, students have the potential to carry out activities only as a routine or a form of compliance with school rules.⁴³ Insani and Basuki⁴⁴, as well as Sholihah and Robiyansyah,⁴⁵ emphasized that the internalization of values requires the involvement of cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects simultaneously so that students can understand the reasons behind an action and make it part of personal beliefs. Based on this, collaboration between schools, families, and the social environment is very important to strengthen the process of meaning. In the context of SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang, the involvement of parents who support the sustainability of habituation at home is a very strategic capital to deepen the internalization of values.

Teachers as the Main Agent of Internalizing Character Values

The results of the study show that teachers play a very strategic role in the process of internalizing character values in SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang. Although schools already have a variety of habituation and school culture programs that support character education, the success of these programs is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to translate the school's designed values into daily interactions with students. Teachers not only play the role of program implementers, but also as figures who directly guide, direct, and provide examples of behavior that are in accordance with the character values that are to be instilled. One teacher said that "*Children are usually quicker to imitate what they see than what they hear. We must therefore try to show behavior that is in accordance with what we teach*" (Classroom Teacher, Interview, 2025). The statement shows that the process of character education in schools is highly dependent on the quality of interaction between teachers and students.

One of the most prominent forms of teacher roles is as a *role model* for students. Based on the results of observations, teachers are consistently involved in various habituation activities such as 3S culture, congregational prayers, maintaining environmental cleanliness, and time discipline. This example is the most easily observed character learning medium for students. One student revealed that "*If the teacher comes on time and participates in all the activities, we also feel*

⁴³ Ni Nyoman Putri Hartayani and I Gusti Agung Ayu Wulandari, "Improving the Creative Character of Elementary School Students Through Tri Hita Karana Habituation," *Indonesian Values And Character Education Journal* 5, no. 2 (2022): 67–76.

⁴⁴ Insani and Basuki, "Character Education Based on School Cultural Values: A Literature Study."

⁴⁵ Sholihah and Robiyansyah, "Internalization of Character Education through the Asmaul Husna Reading Habituation Program in Elementary School."

that we have to do the same" (Grade V Students, Interview, 2025). These findings show that the internalization of character values occurs more through the process of observation and imitation of teachers' behavior than through the verbal delivery of material or advice.

Apart from being an example, teachers also play the role of facilitators who help students understand the meaning behind various character education programs run by schools. The teacher not only directs students to participate in activities, but also tries to explain the goals and values contained in each activity. An Islamic Religious Education teacher explained that *"We not only tell students to carry out activities, but also explain why they are important and how they can be beneficial in daily life"* (PAI Teachers, Interview, 2025). These findings show that the success of internalizing values is not only determined by student involvement in activities but also by teachers' ability to build students' understanding and awareness of the values being learned.

However, research has found that the process of internalizing character values has not always run optimally. Some teachers revealed that some students still participate in activities because of external encouragement, such as school rules or teacher supervision, rather than because of an awareness that grows from within. One teacher stated that *"If there is a teacher, students usually follow the activity well, but when supervision is reduced; there are still those who need to be reminded again"* (Classroom Teacher, Interview, 2025). These findings show that the main challenge faced by teachers is no longer to invite students to participate in programs, but to encourage students to be able to live and make these values part of daily behavior.

Other interesting findings show that there is a dilemma faced by teachers in carrying out the function of character education. On the one hand, teachers are required to provide intensive and personalized assistance to students, but on the other hand, they also have to complete a large number of administrative tasks. Some teachers admit that the administrative burden often reduces the time that could have been used to do character development in more depth. One teacher revealed, *"Sometimes we want to have more discussions or accompany students personally, but there is a lot of administration that also needs to be completed"* (Classroom Teacher, Interview, 2025). These findings show that the effectiveness of character education is not only influenced by teacher competence but also by organizational conditions that support teachers in carrying out their roles optimally.

The results of the study show that teachers are the main agents of internalizing character values in SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang. This role is realized through example, mentoring, facilitation of value learning, and active

involvement in various habituation programs implemented by schools. However, this study also found that the success of teachers in shaping the character of students still faces challenges in the form of low intrinsic awareness of some students and time constraints due to administrative burdens that must be resolved. These findings show that the success of character education depends not only on the existence of good programs but also on the ability of schools to create conditions that allow teachers to carry out character development roles more intensively, personally, and sustainably.

The example shown by teachers through daily behavior has proven to be the most effective means in the process of internalizing character values in students. Sidik shows that the success of instilling character values cannot be separated from the quality of teachers' examples, because students tend to learn through the process of observation and imitation of figures they respect⁴⁶. This strengthens the findings at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang that teachers' involvement in 3S culture, discipline, congregational worship, and various habituation activities has a stronger influence than verbal delivery of material. In line with that, Hafbi et al emphasized that character education requires consistent role models so that the values taught do not stop at the cognitive level, but can be realized in the real behavior of students.⁴⁷ Thus, teachers not only function as teachers, but also as a representation of values that are the main learning source for students.

In addition to acting as role models, teachers also have a strategic function as facilitators who help students understand the meaning and purpose of each character education activity. The results of this study show that teachers try to explain the values contained in various habituation programs so that students not only carry out activities mechanically, but also understand their relevance in daily life. The findings are supported by Zaini⁴⁸'s research and research by Safitri⁴⁹, who explain that the internalization of character values will be more effective when teachers connect these values with students' real

⁴⁶ Sidik, "Character Education and The Crisis of National Role Models."

⁴⁷ Najwa Hafbi et al., "The Impact of Changes in Teacher Attitudes and Learning Methods on Student Performance," *Ta'dib: Journal of Islamic Education and Social Issues* 22, no. 2 (2024): 187–95.

⁴⁸ Abdul Wahid Zaini, "Beyond the Curriculum: Exploring the Influence of Islamic Values and Teacher Role Models on Student Character Formation," *AFKARINA: Journal of Islamic Religious Education* 9, no. 1 (October 30, 2023): 23–34, <https://doi.org/10.33650/afkarina.v8i2.9389>.

⁴⁹ Sevia Diana Safitri, "Strategies for Strengthening Character Education Through the Integration of Islamic Values: The Role of Teachers as Role Models in the Context of Contextual Learning," *AFKARINA: Journal of Islamic Religious Education* 9, no. 1 (June 29, 2024): 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.33650/afkarina.v9i1.9395>.

experiences through contextual learning. This approach allows students to develop a reflective awareness of the values learned so that character is not just a rule to be followed but rather a part of their beliefs and behaviors. Based on this, the success of character education is greatly influenced by the teacher's ability to create meaningful learning interactions and encourage students to understand the reasons behind every action taken.

The findings regarding the still strong dependence of some students on teacher supervision and the existence of administrative burden constraints also received support from previous research. Marauleng et al's research shows that one of the main challenges in internalizing character values is to turn external obedience into an intrinsic awareness that grows from students.⁵⁰ Farid and Aziz emphasized that character development requires intensive interaction, continuous mentoring, and active involvement of teachers in the classroom.⁵¹ This condition can be hampered if teachers have to face a high administrative burden, so that the time to carry out personal coaching is limited. These findings indicate that the success of character education is not only determined by the quality of school programs and teacher competence, but also by the support of an organizational system that provides space for teachers to focus more on the process of mentoring students.

The Challenge of Internalizing Character Values in Character Education

The results of the study show that the main challenge in the development of character education in SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang does not lie in the availability of programs or institutional commitments, but in the process of internalizing character values in students. The school has had a variety of habituation programs implemented consistently, supported by a strong school culture and active involvement of teachers in every activity. However, the results of observations and interviews show that not all students can live the values contained in the program in depth. One teacher revealed that *"In general, students follow the activity well, but not all of them understand why it should be done. Some carry it out because it has become a school rule"* (Class Teacher, Interview, 2025). These findings show that the success of the program structurally has not always been followed by the success of the transformation of values at the individual level of the learners.

⁵⁰ Andi Marauleng et al., "The Role of Teachers in Internalizing Character Values in Students," *Education and Learning Journal* 5, no. 1 (2024): 33–47.

⁵¹ Faisal Farid and Rahmat Aziz, "Character Development of Student Responsibility through Strengthening Teacher Activities in the Classroom," *Journal of Character Education* 14, no. 2 (2023): 114–21.

One of the challenges found is the tendency of some students to run character education programs as a form of compliance with rules, not as an awareness born from understanding values. Based on the results of observations, some students participated in habituation activities such as congregational prayers, 3S culture, and cleanliness activities due to supervision from teachers or school rules that must be obeyed. One student said that *"If I don't participate, I am usually reprimanded by the teacher, so I participate so that I don't get reprimanded"* (Grade IV Student, Interview, 2025). The statement shows that some of the positive behaviors that emerge are still driven by external motivations. This condition is a challenge because the main goal of character education is not just to create obedience, but to build awareness that is able to survive even though there is no direct supervision from the school.

The next challenge relates to the differences in the social environment that students face inside and outside the school. The results of interviews with parents show that positive habits that have been built in school cannot always be maintained when students are in a family environment or society that has different habituation patterns. One parent revealed that *"At school the child looks disciplined, but at home he still has to be reminded often to do the same things"* (Parents, Interview, 2025). These findings show that the process of internalizing character values is not only influenced by school programs but also by the consistency of the social environment that supports the application of those values in daily life.

In addition to the factors of students and the family environment, the study also found challenges that originated from institutional aspects, especially related to teachers' workloads. Teachers have a central role in guiding and accompanying students in the process of internalizing values, but the various administrative tasks that must be completed often reduce their opportunities to provide more personalized assistance. One teacher stated that *"We try to accompany students as much as possible, but sometimes more time is taken up to complete the learning administration and school reports"* (PAI Teacher, Interview, 2025). These findings show that the character formation process requires intensive interaction between teachers and students, so that the limited time of mentoring can affect the effectiveness of value internalization.

This study found that the biggest challenge does not lie in the low participation of students in the program, but in the depth of meaning of the values taught. Most students have been able to participate in various activities that are part of the character education program, but their ability to explain the meaning, purpose, and relevance of these values in daily life still varies. This condition shows a gap between visible behavior (*behavioral compliance*) and value *internalization*. In other words, students have shown behavior that is in

accordance with school expectations, but have not entirely made these values part of their personal awareness and beliefs.

The results of the study show that the challenges of internalizing character values in SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang stem from various interrelated factors, ranging from the dominance of students' external motivations, inconsistencies in the environment outside the school, limited mentoring due to teachers' workloads, to the lack of optimal interpretation of values by students. These findings show that the success of character education is not enough to be measured by the implementation of the program or the high level of student participation, but must be seen from the extent to which the values taught are able to be part of the awareness and behavior of students in a sustainable manner.

The findings of this study show that the main challenge of character education does not lie in the existence of the program, but in the process of internalizing values in students. These results are in line with Sri Prasetyo, who shows that the success of school programs cannot be measured only by the level of implementation of activities or students' compliance with the rules, but by the extent to which the values taught are able to become part of the students' personal awareness.⁵² Albet et al explain that one of the biggest challenges in character education is to change disciplinary behaviors that initially arise due to external control to behaviors based on individual awareness and responsibility.⁵³ Thus, the conditions found at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang, where some students participated in activities due to school rules or teacher supervision, show that the process of internalizing values is still at the stage of behavioral compliance and has not fully reached the stage of deep value appreciation. These findings confirm that character education requires an ongoing process so that learners not only engage in positive behavior but also understand and believe in underlying values.

In addition to the internal factors of students, this study also shows the importance of the consistency of the social environment in supporting the success of internalizing character values. The finding that positive habits built in schools do not necessarily continue in the family environment is in line with Insani and Basuki, who place the family as the main foundation for the

⁵² Angga Sri Prasetyo, "Internalizing Values in Zi Gui – Character Education through Positive Discipline in the Learning Process," *Journal of Teacher Training and Education (JKIP)* 1, no. 3 (August 25, 2023): 118–30, <https://doi.org/10.61116/jkip.v1i3.148>.

⁵³ Muhammad Sakin Albet, Nasikhin, and Fihris, "Implementation and Challenges of Discipline Character Education," *Journal of Character Education* 15, no. 2 (December 11, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpka.v15i2.77799>.

formation of children's character.⁵⁴ Yudhoyono et al emphasized that the internalization of character values will be more effective if there is continuity between the education provided in schools and the habituation patterns applied in the family.⁵⁵ The incompatibility of values and habits received by children in various social environments has the potential to cause confusion in the process of character formation and hinder the formation of consistent awareness. The results of a study by Cardenal et al on school culture-based character education also show that the success of character formation is greatly influenced by the synergy between schools, families, and communities as a mutually supportive educational ecosystem.⁵⁶ Based on this, character education cannot be fully imposed on schools, but requires the active involvement of parents and the social environment so that the values learned by students can continue to be strengthened in daily life.

The quality of intensive, participatory, and sustainable interaction contributes greatly to the development of attitudes, involvement, and appreciation of values by students. When teachers' time is taken up by administrative tasks, the opportunity to conduct personal character development is reduced, so that the process of internalizing values cannot take place optimally. On the other hand, character building requires consistent mentoring through dialogue, reflection, and constant habituation. Based on this, the gap between visible behavior (*behavioral compliance*) and *value internalization* found in this study can be understood as a consequence of the limited interaction space that allows students to reflect on the meaning of each value learned.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the management of the development of character education programs at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang shows that the success of character education is supported by strong institutional commitment, the application of *a whole school approach*, and the role of teachers as the main agents of internalizing values. Institutional commitment is reflected through the integration of character values into the vision, mission, policies, and culture of the school, which is realized through various religious and social

⁵⁴ Insani and Basuki, "Character Education Based on School Cultural Values: A Literature Study."

⁵⁵ Dinova Satrio Yudhoyono, Fajar Lumintang, and Endang Sri Maruti, "Representation of Character Education in the Family and School Environment in the Era of Globalization," *Proceedings of the Basic Scientific Conference 5* (2024), <http://prosiding.unipma.ac.id/index.php/KID>.

⁵⁶ Maria-Eugenia Cardenal, Octavio-David Diaz-Santana, and Sara-Maria Gonzalez-Betancor, "Teacher-Student Relationship and Teaching Styles in Primary Education. A Model of Analysis," September 10, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-09-2022-0053>.

habituation programs. Character education is not carried out as a stand-alone program, but becomes part of all school activities involving principals, teachers, education staff, students, and parents. In addition, teachers play a role not only as program implementers but also as role models, facilitators, and companions who help students understand and appreciate character values in daily life. These findings show that the development of effective character education requires synergy between school leadership, a conducive school culture, the involvement of all school residents, and consistent exemplars.

Although various character education programs have been running systematically and continuously, this study found that the main challenge lies in the process of internalizing character values in students. Some students are still carrying out various character activities due to the encouragement of external rules and supervision, so they have not fully reached the stage of intrinsic awareness. In addition, the inconsistency of the environment outside the school and the limited time of mentoring due to the administrative burden of teachers also affect the effectiveness of internalization of values. These findings show that the success of character education is not enough to be measured by the implementation of the program or the level of student participation, but by the extent to which the values taught are able to be part of students' awareness, beliefs, and behavior in a sustainable manner. Therefore, strengthening value reflection, increasing collaboration between schools and families, and optimizing the role of teachers in providing more personalized and meaningful assistance are strategic steps that need to be taken to deepen the process of internalizing character in SD Muhammadiyah Plus Semarang.

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