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The Implementation of Classroom-Based Character Education in Elementary School Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of classroom-based character education in an elementary school setting. Using a qualitative exploratory case study design, the research was conducted at Muhammadiyah Karangkajen Elementary School in Yogyakarta. The participants included the principal, teachers, and students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, with the researchers serving as key instruments supported by interview and observation guides. Data were analyzed through coding, thematic categorization, and interpretative analysis. The findings reveal that classroom-based character education is implemented through four dimensions: integration of character values into curriculum and learning activities, structured classroom management practices, student-centered learning models such as PBL, CTL, inquiry, cooperative learning, and discovery learning, and the development of local content. The local content component is explicitly reflected in Javanese language instruction and batik-making activities, which foster manners, respect, responsibility, independence, and cooperation among students.

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Introduction

The downfall of a nation is caused by the collapse of values and character. A weak nation lacks personality and fundamental truth. Conversely, a developed nation is one with strong character and a society with robust character [1]. Indonesia has many values in life. The problem lies in how these values are implemented in daily life. One of the influential factors in forming the character of a nation is through education. Education holds a strategic position and plays an important role in preparing human resources with character [2],[3]. The importance of character education for elementary school students must be balanced with government regulations. To address this issue, the government issued Presidential Instruction No. 12 of 2016 on the National Movement for Mental Revolution. The purpose of this instruction is to improve and build the nation's character based on the values of Pancasila. This movement is implemented in schools through the Strengthening of Character Education (*Pendidikan Penguatan Karakter* or PPK) as stipulated in Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017. The strengthening of character education as an educational movement is under the responsibility of educational units to reinforce students' character through the cultivation of the heart, taste, thought, and physical activities, involving educational units, families, and communities (Article 1, paragraph 1 of Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017).

Elementary schools, as places where students interact with each other, naturally involve a variety of life characters that are individually born with various expressions in the form of thoughts, speech, and actions. Elementary schools play a significant role in character education for students. Character education is not just a special program taught through subjects, but encompasses the entire educational process. Character education aims to help students become aware of, experience, and internalize universally accepted values[4],[5]. The educational process in elementary schools is not only required to have competence related to mastery of material and skills, but teachers must also be able to recognize the characteristics of students. Teachers are required to have ethical and moral standards in the process of character formation [6],[7].

Character education in elementary schools involves the role of teachers in its implementation. Previous research findings indicate that the role of teachers as facilitators in implementing character education is key to the success of the educational process [8],[9]. Other research also states that character education is very important for students, with the role of teachers being crucial in building positive character in students [10]–[12]. These research findings illustrate the significant importance of the teacher's role in character education. This proves that the role of teachers in the educational process is not only focused on knowledge and skills, but also on the character of the students [13],[14].

The reality in schools is that not all teachers have the ability to develop students' character. The challenge teachers face in implementing character education is the lack of pedagogical competence. According to research conducted [15] Teachers' pedagogical competence significantly affects students' character. Among the 231 teachers studied, it was found that language, mathematics, and science teachers had lower abilities related to character education compared to social studies teachers. In addition to teachers' pedagogical competence, another factor is the lack of collaboration among teachers and with other parties [16],[17].

Another factor is students' competence (affective, cognitive, and psychomotor), which also greatly influences the implementation of character education in schools [8], [18]. The quality of students entering the school becomes one of the factors for success in character education. Students and teachers with good competence and backgrounds can easily implement character education.

One of the Muhammadiyah elementary schools in Yogyakarta that continuously strives to provide character education is Muhammadiyah Karangkajen Elementary School. Muhammadiyah Karangkajen Elementary School in Yogyakarta was established in 1918. This school was directly founded by KH. Ahmad Dahlan on November 12, 1918. This elementary school is one of the schools designated by the education office as a pilot project for the character education program. The principal is appointed as a regional facilitator for technical guidance to disseminate the character education strengthening program to other schools. The principal and teachers play a very important role in character education [19].

Material and Methods

The research approach is qualitative, using an exploratory case study. This research was conducted at Muhammadiyah Karangkajen Elementary School in Yogyakarta. The selection of this school as the research site was based on several considerations. Muhammadiyah Karangkajen Elementary School in Yogyakarta is one of the oldest Islamic-based schools in Indonesia The research location was selected purposively, namely Muhammadiyah Karangkajen Elementary School in Yogyakarta, with the following criteria:

- It has a reputation as a reference school for character education at the regional level,
- It has a value-based learning system that is integrated into the curriculum and school culture, and
- It demonstrates structured and sustainable local content practices.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling with clear inclusion criteria, namely the principal as the policy maker, classroom teachers who directly implement character-based learning, and students as the subjects receiving character education practices.

Data collection techniques in this research included interviews, observations, and document studies. This research used open-ended interviews and focused interviews. One of the most important sources of information in a case study is through interviews [20]. The research was conducted with direct observation. By conducting direct observation, the researcher could see firsthand the case situation in the field [21]. The documents used by the researcher to gather data on classroom-based character education in elementary schools included writings and images such as photos of activities, activity notes, policy regulations, and various other information supporting the research results.

The research instrument in this study is the researcher themselves. The researcher acts as the key instrument who collects data firsthand, including data from interviews, observations, and documents. The researcher in the field is assisted by interview guides, observation guides, and documents. To test the validity of the data, the researcher uses triangulation. Triangulation in testing credibility is understood as checking data from various sources using different methods and times. The triangulation used in this research includes source triangulation and technique triangulation. The researcher uses interactive data analysis and continues this process until the data is saturated [22]–[24].

Table 1. Methods guidelines

Stage		Description
1.	Research Approach	Qualitative research with an exploratory case study design.
2.	Research Site Selection	Muhammadiyah Karangkajen Elementary School, Yogyakarta, was chosen for its historical role and strong character education reputation.
3.	Sampling Technique	Purposive sampling: principal, teachers, and students selected as key informants.
4.	Data Collection	Interviews (open-ended, focused), observations, and document analysis (photos, policies, activity notes).
5.	Research Instrument	Researcher as the key instrument, supported by interview guides, observation guides, and document checklists.
6.	Data Validity (Triangulation)	Source triangulation (principal–teachers–students) and technique triangulation (interviews–observations–documents).
7.	Dana Analysis	Creswell's interactive model: organizing data, coding, categorizing, developing themes, interpreting findings, and saturation.

Results and Discussions

A. Integration of character values in the learning process

The integration of character values in the learning process begins with incorporating them into the curriculum. The curriculum is designed to highlight character values in line with the school's vision and mission, which focuses on character. This curriculum is implemented in the learning process through lesson plans. This is consistent with Prasetiyo et al. [25], who stated

that the integration of character values in the learning process is done by including them in the syllabus and lesson plans. This is also reinforced by Bajar et al. [26] research findings that the learning process can develop students' character values.

The learning process conducted at the school consistently integrates different character values. This is adjusted to the learning themes. There are five main values integrated into the learning process: religious, nationalist, independent, cooperation, and integrity. These values emerge in the learning process during the preliminary, core, and closing activities. This aligns with the research findings of Sukri et al. [1], Suyatno et al. [27], which states that the integration of character values is carried out in educational units through the learning process.

Teachers can foster good character through the learning process. As practiced by the school, the learning process always begins with praying, reciting (morning recitation/ Qur'an reading), and behaving politely. Each school, according to its vision and mission, consistently connects and cultivates good character. Singing national and regional songs is done every day to foster a nationalist character during the learning process. The purpose of the learning process is to develop students' character. This is in line with Indriani and Asfia [11], Al Hussaini et al. [28] research findings, which state that the learning process needs to develop character and foster students' moral awareness, understanding, and behavior.

B. Classroom management and the learning process

Classroom management and the learning process conducted by the school are inseparable from the roles of the principal and teachers. The principal plays an important role in classroom management. The principal's roles include being a motivator, supervisor, and facilitator, as well as budgeting for character education. To ensure that character education runs optimally, it is necessary to have monitoring, supervision, and evaluation in the management of the classroom and the learning process. This is certainly not easy for the principal to accomplish.

Classroom management is based on agreements made during teacher meetings and outlined in the school regulations. These agreements include starting with lining up outside, PPK clapping, PPK greetings, entering the classroom and praying, Muhammadiyah student pledge, singing the national anthem, literacy or recitation of the Qur'an (morning recitation), and then proceeding with the learning material. The formation of students' character in the learning process is influenced by classroom management through activities such as students praying before starting lessons, checking students' neatness, and attendance [29]–[31]. This research confirms that good classroom management can impact the development of students' character.

The implementation of classroom-based character education cannot be reduced to the integration of values into lesson plans or symbolic routines such as prayers, greetings, and

morning literacy, because its effectiveness is largely determined by the consistency of pedagogical practices and the professional capacity of teachers to facilitate the internalization of values reflectively and contextually [32]. Empirical studies show that the main obstacles to the implementation of character education in elementary schools include three main aspects: first, the reduction of character education to ceremonial activities without a meaningful reflective internalization process; second, the weakness of the monitoring and evaluation system based on measurable behavioral indicators; and third, inconsistencies in implementation among teachers in integrating character values into various learning contexts. Research by Zuchdi [33] shows that the internalization of social values is effective only when supported by structured habits, cross-curricular integration, and contextual reinforcement that allow students to experience and reflect on values directly in learning practices. Other findings also show a gap between character-based curriculum design and authentic assessment practices in the classroom, so that character education often stops at the conceptual level without being followed by indicators of behavioral change that can be observed empirically [34]. Therefore, the implementation of classroom-based character education requires a systematic academic supervision system, longitudinal assessment based on affective-operational indicators, and consistency in pedagogical practices to ensure that character values are truly internalized in student behavior [23], [35].

The learning process at the school is consistently conducted both inside and outside the classroom. Student involvement during the learning process can activate and make learning more enjoyable. To engage students, heterogeneous groups are formed, classroom seating is arranged in a U-shape, and students are trained to accept differences in opinions and work together. Below is an image related to outdoor learning conducted by the teacher, as shown in Fig. 1.



Source: personal documentation

Fig. 1. Outdoor learning

Based on the image, it can be explained that classroom management is not only carried out in the classroom but also outside of it. The learning process consistently involves students and provides comfort for them in their learning. This is in line with Suardin et al. [12] research findings, which state that teachers always involve students in the learning process. Teachers not only provide understanding about character education but also train students to appreciate differing opinions in discussions.

The contribution of local content, particularly the Javanese language and batik, needs to be positioned as a pedagogical mechanism for transmitting values through contextual practical experiences, rather than merely as an instrument of cultural preservation. Regional language learning has been shown to shape students' ethical awareness, linguistic politeness, and social sensitivity, especially when integrated into authentic interactions that allow students to practice respect, empathy, and responsibility in everyday communication. In addition, the integration of culture-based activities such as batik learning contributes to the formation of students' personal responsibility, independence, perseverance, and collaborative abilities, especially when implemented through reflective and participatory approaches [36]–[37].

Thus, the local content of the Javanese language and batik not only function as additional curricular content, but as a vehicle for the internalization of values that enables observable and measurable transformation of students' affective dispositions. Affirming this pedagogical function is important so that the contribution of local content does not stop at the descriptive level but has empirical legitimacy as an integral component in a classroom-based character education system.

C. Learning Model

The teaching models used at the school are always adjusted to the material to be taught. Field findings indicate that innovative teaching models are consistently used by teachers. The learning process involves students actively engaging them directly in discussions and learning activities. The models used include contextual learning, discovery learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry. Teachers select teaching models based on the theme or material being taught. Student involvement in the learning process is key to the success of education. Teachers consistently train students to be confident when presenting in front of the class. To produce students with character through the learning process, students should be able to understand (*ngerti*), feel (*ngroso*), and apply (*nglakoni*) in their daily lives [38]–[40].

The Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, Umar et al. [15], and Zhou [41] in research concluded that it can naturally foster students' thinking activities and address learning issues related to students' morality. This proves that teaching models that actively involve students can cultivate students' character. In the context of implementing learning in elementary

schools, which requires integration between mastery of concepts and character building, the learning model section needs to be deepened by elaborating on the theoretical foundations, operational syntax, and pedagogical mechanisms of each approach, rather than simply mentioning the terms.

PBL must be explained through the stages of authentic problem orientation, collaborative investigation, solution presentation, and reflection, and linked to social constructivism and the development of higher-order thinking skills. Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) needs to be elaborated based on its seven main components (constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning community, modeling, reflection, authentic assessment) and how real contexts are used as a basis for concept exploration, not merely as illustrations [42]. Inquiry Learning must be clearly distinguished between guided inquiry and open inquiry, including the requirements of scaffolding and cognitive load control at the elementary school level. Meanwhile, Discovery Learning needs to be explained through the phases of stimulation, problem identification, data collection, data processing, verification, and generalization, as well as its limitations in preventing misconceptions. Without an explanation of the syntax, theoretical rationale, and empirical evidence of its effectiveness, the description of the learning model will remain normative and not meet the standards of scientific argumentation [43].

D. Local Content

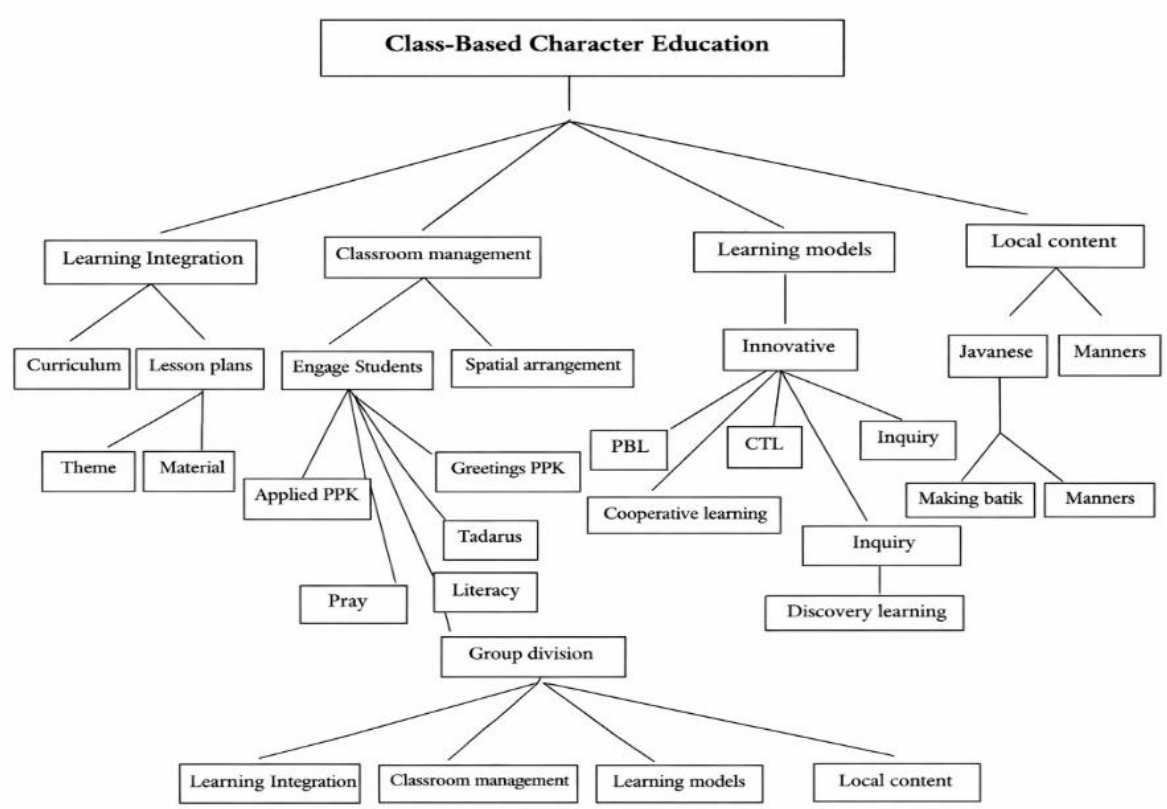
Local content in the school is developed through the learning of the Javanese language and batik. The Javanese language is a mandatory local content subject implemented from grade 1 to grade 6. Local content is developed to provide values about life, both in behavior and in speech. This aligns with Moeis and Febriani [44] research findings indicate that the local content curriculum is developed to impart existing cultural values that need to be passed on to future generations. This is consistent with the goals of character education, which is an effort made by both formal and non-formal institutions to instill good character values in students who will later become the next generation of the nation [45]–[46]. A fifth-grade student stated:

> "When speaking Javanese krama to teachers, we must be polite. If we make a mistake, the teacher corrects us so that we can be more polite."

This statement shows that Javanese language learning is not only oriented towards linguistic competence but also functions as a pedagogical mechanism to shape ethical awareness in everyday communication practices. The contextual use of krama trains social sensitivity, respect for authority, and self-control in interactions. This is consistent with the findings in the manuscript that local content should be positioned as a means of transmitting values through authentic experiences, not merely as an instrument of cultural preservation.

The Javanese language and batik local content train students in everyday life. Javanese language education instills manners and respect towards elders and peers. Batik education

trains students in responsibility, independence, and cooperation. This aligns with Komalasari [35] and Supramono [47] research, which emphasizes that education in elementary schools should consider traditions and local wisdom to support national culture. This is also a reinforced statement that education should be adapted to local values. This proves that local content is tailored to everyday life values to train students. Good speech and behavior should be practiced from an early age through the development of local content. Based on the explanation above, the findings from this research can be illustrated as shown in Fig. 2.



Source: Personal Design

Fig. 2. Class-based character education

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion outlined, it can be concluded that the implementation of classroom-based character education is carried out by integrating character values into the learning process. The principal directs all teachers to integrate character values by developing the curriculum, lesson plans, themes, and materials. Character values are highlighted according to the material and themes present at the school. Classroom management and the learning process are closely tied to the roles of the principal and teachers. Classroom management consistently involves students through activities such as praying, clapping for PPK, PPK greetings, recitation, literacy, and student involvement in group work. The classroom arrangement is organized to facilitate interaction among students and between

students and teachers by setting up a U-shape. The learning process consistently involves students both inside and outside the classroom. Teaching models are always student-centered, using innovative models such as PBL, CTL, inquiry, cooperative learning, and discovery learning. The development of local content in the school includes the Javanese language and batik. This local content aims to provide values about life, both in behavior and in proper speech. Additionally, it develops cultural values to be passed on to the next generation.

Based on the results and discussion presented, it can be concluded that classroom-based character education is implemented through the integration of values into the learning process, classroom management, teaching models, and local content.

Limitation and Suggestions

This study was limited to one elementary school, so the findings may not represent other educational settings. The qualitative approach and small number of participants may also restrict the generalizability of the results. Future research should involve more schools with diverse contexts and use mixed or longitudinal methods to obtain broader and deeper insights into the effectiveness of class-based character education.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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