Jurnal Praktik Baik Pembelajaran Sekolah dan Pesantren
Vol. 4, No. 03, pp. 139-147
journal.iistr.org/index.php/PBSBP
DOI: 10.56741/pbpsp.v4i03.633

Implementing Character Education for Students with Behavioral Challenges

A Case Study at Yappen Rays Maritime Vocational School, Maumere

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received 12 June 2025
Revised 31 August 2025
Accepted 3 September 2022

Keywords
Behavioral Challenges
Character Education
Disciplinary Violations
Maritime Vocational School

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of character education for students with behavioral challenges at Yappen Rays Maritime Vocational School, Maumere. The primary objectives are to examine how educators apply character education to address disciplinary issues and to identify the inhibiting factors in its implementation. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study involved the school principal, duty teachers, the vice principal for student affairs, guidance and counseling teachers, security officers, civic education teachers, and students as research subjects. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed through data presentation and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the school's efforts through religious education, habituation practices, written warnings, and sanctions for latecomers have been relatively effective in reducing disciplinary violations, particularly tardiness. However, challenges remain due to external factors, including family background, residential environment, and internal factors, such as students' personal attitudes and family income.

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Introduction

Education is recognized as a continuous and structured process, as emphasized in Law No. 2 of 1989, which defines schools as organized educational institutions facilitating systematic teaching and learning activities [1]. In line with this, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System further underscores that education is a conscious and planned effort to create an environment where students can actively develop their potential. This includes fostering spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills essential for themselves, society, the nation, and the state [2].

Despite these mandates, schools in Indonesia continue to face behavioral challenges among students, such as tardiness, failure to complete assignments, restlessness during lessons, bullying, and absenteeism. Such issues hinder students' capacity to absorb knowledge and reduce the overall effectiveness of the learning process. At Yappen Rays Maritime Vocational School, Maumere, habitual lateness is one of the most common disciplinary problems observed. This recurring issue requires serious attention from school leaders, educators, and parents to ensure that character development is not neglected.

According to Dalyono and Lestariningsih [3], character education instills values into school members, encompassing knowledge, awareness, willingness, and actions to practice those values in daily life. Schools are thus expected to strategically embed character education into the learning process, shaping students' behavior, mindset, and mental resilience [4]. Since each student possesses distinct traits, behaviors, and dispositions, schools must adopt consistent reinforcement strategies to cultivate positive character development.

Although previous studies highlight the importance of character education in addressing student misbehavior, there remains a gap in understanding how such programs are implemented explicitly in vocational schools with unique disciplinary environments, such as maritime schools. Furthermore, limited research has addressed the internal and external factors hindering character education initiatives' success in these contexts.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the implementation of character education for students with behavioral challenges at Yappen Rays Maritime Vocational School, Maumere. Specifically, it seeks to examine how educators apply character education in addressing student misbehavior and to identify the inhibiting factors affecting the implementation of character education at the school.

Materials and Methods

A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, appropriate for exploring phenomena in natural settings and emphasizing meaning rather than generalization.

According to Safarudin et al. [5], qualitative research is conducted in natural conditions with the researcher as the key instrument, using combined data collection techniques and inductive analysis. This research aimed to investigate the implementation of character education for students with behavioral challenges at Yappen Rays Maritime Vocational School, Maumere.

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained directly from participants through interviews, while secondary data were collected from documents and supporting materials [6]. Research subjects included the school principal, duty teachers, the vice principal for student affairs, guidance and counseling teachers, security personnel, civic education teachers, students, and parents.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted using three techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were non-participatory, enabling the researcher to record events and activities related to student discipline without direct involvement. Structured questions initially guided interviews and later expanded with probing techniques to gain deeper insights [7]. Documentation, including school records and disciplinary reports, complemented observational and interview data.

Data analysis followed the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification [6]. This process allowed the researcher to systematically organize data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, leading to meaningful interpretations of how character education was implemented and what factors hindered its effectiveness.

Results and Discussion

A. How educators apply character education in addressing student misbehavior

1. Spiritual Guidance and Religious Activities

One of the central approaches in applying character education at SMK Pelayaran Yappen Rays Maumere is through spiritual development programs or *Bimbingan Iman dan Taqwa (Imtaq)*. These activities include social services in places of worship, school environments, and coastal areas. Students are also allowed to practice prayer and worship according to their beliefs, such as a designated time for prayer at noon. This spiritual guidance fosters values of religiosity, responsibility, and social care, aligning with the national values embedded in Pancasila [8], [9]. By instilling these practices, educators aim to internalize core values that help reduce misbehavior, particularly in promoting discipline and mutual respect.

Fig. 1 illustrates the character-building process of maritime students through field training, emphasizing discipline, courage, and mental readiness in facing challenges.



Fig. 1. Discipline and Courage Reinforcement Activities for Maritime Students (https://kembaroginews.com/)

2. Habit Formation and Daily Practices

Character education is also implemented through habitual practices and routines, reinforcing positive behavior. These include greetings, courtesy, punctuality, collective prayer, classroom cleaning, watering plants, and regular flag ceremonies at 6:45 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Such routines foster discipline and social responsibility, reflecting the maritime vocational school's emphasis on cadet discipline (*disiplin ketarunaan*). As Anies Baswedan emphasized, character education is about habitual practice rather than theoretical knowledge [8]. These practices gradually shape student behavior, reducing tendencies such as tardiness and indiscipline.

Fig. 2 illustrates character-building practices in schools, where the preparation for the handover of discipline officers (a) and the implementation of the flag ceremony (b) both serve as platforms to strengthen students' discipline, leadership, patriotism, and sense of responsibility.



a b

Fig. 2. Preparation for the Handover of School Discipline Officers (a) and Flag Ceremony (b)

3. School-Based Warnings and Sanctions

Different stakeholders apply a structured disciplinary system in the school. The principal issues are written warnings and sanctions for habitual lateness or improper dress. Duty teachers assign physical sanctions such as cleaning the schoolyard, watering

plants, running laps, or doing push-ups. Security personnel monitor student tardiness and absenteeism while contributing to character-building activities like marching drills, drum bands, and arts. The vice principal for student affairs plays a significant role in counseling and organizing physical and extracurricular activities to reinforce discipline and teamwork. In addition, homeroom teachers provide continuous mentoring, while guidance and counseling teachers deliver advice grounded in values of honesty, responsibility, and respect [4], [10]-[13]. This structured yet collaborative system of warnings and sanctions ensures that character education is consistently applied to address behavioral issues.

4. Civic and Value-Based Education in the Curriculum

Beyond disciplinary actions, subject teachers, particularly those teaching Civic Education (*Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan*), integrate national values into classroom learning. Lessons highlight tolerance, respect for diversity, discipline, and civic responsibility as embedded in Pancasila. This integration supports the holistic development of students' moral reasoning and behavior. According to Koesoema, character education represents fundamental values that enable a society to live and cooperate peacefully [14]. Thus, civic education serves as a curricular channel to internalize values of unity, tolerance, and responsibility, complementing the extra-curricular and disciplinary measures applied by the school.

B. Challenges in Implementation

Despite systematic efforts in implementing character education, several internal and external challenges remain.

1. Internal factors (inherent to students)

One of the main barriers comes from the students themselves as individuals. Students often struggle with self-awareness in fulfilling their primary role as learners. Some exhibit low motivation, come late to school due to helping parents at home, or display attitudes that undermine their academic and moral responsibilities. As Prabandari explains, character is closely tied to morality, truth, goodness, strength, and the attitudes individuals show through actions [15]. When students fail to uphold these principles, their morality tends to decline, affecting their discipline and receptiveness to character education. Another internal constraint is linked to students' intellectual engagement. Although they possess specific vocational skills, some neglect their expertise's professional and moral dimensions, leading to misbehavior and reduced learning absorption.

2. Parental income and economic background

The economic condition of families also becomes a significant constraint. Many parents rely on agricultural products such as coconuts, which can only be harvested every three

months, resulting in unstable income [16]. Consequently, families struggle to meet the educational demands of the school, such as providing smartphones or textbooks that are now considered essential for learning. According to behaviorist perspectives, problems arise when the responses required to achieve specific goals are weaker than competing responses, or when students cannot consistently display the necessary behaviors [17]. In this context, economic limitations hinder students from completing school tasks, create feelings of insecurity, and even lead some to arrive late as a way to deliberately avoid lessons. Thus, low family income becomes a direct barrier to the practical application of character education in addressing student misbehavior.

3. External factors.

These include limited parental involvement, environmental influences, and the long commuting distances that lead to tardiness and fatigue. Parents often delegate responsibility for character development entirely to schools, while variations in family backgrounds make it difficult to achieve uniform discipline levels among students. Environmental influences, particularly peer groups, also affect student behavior and can undermine the values promoted by educators [13], [18].

In sum, challenges to character education stem from a combination of individual student attitudes, family economic capacity, and broader environmental conditions [19]. These interrelated obstacles indicate that successful implementation requires school-based interventions and strong collaboration with families and the wider community.

Table 1 presents a concise overview of the key factors that contribute to students' character formation, including individual, social, cultural, and educational aspects. It highlights the multifaceted and interconnected factors that shape and influence students' character formation in Islamic education. Internal factors are often the most immediate and visible, such as low learning motivation, habitual tardiness, declining morality, and neglect of intellectual engagement. These internal weaknesses directly undermine the effectiveness of character-building initiatives within schools and hinder students' ability to internalize moral and religious values in a sustainable way [19]. For example, students who consistently lack motivation may struggle to appreciate the relevance of religious teachings in their daily lives, while persistent tardiness or absenteeism disrupts their exposure to structured moral guidance and communal practices within the school setting. Similarly, moral decline and limited intellectual curiosity not only weaken personal development but also erode the foundation upon which character education seeks to cultivate discipline, empathy, and responsibility.

Beyond these internal issues, socioeconomic conditions present another layer of challenges that significantly influence character education outcomes. Low and unstable

parental income often restricts students' access to basic learning resources, extracurricular opportunities, and supportive home environments that reinforce school-based efforts [20]. In many cases, financial instability contributes to educational inequalities, creating gaps in students' ability to engage fully in character education programs. The strain of economic hardship may also divert parents' attention from active involvement in their children's moral development, thereby leaving a vacuum that schools alone cannot fill [21]. In addition, external factors such as limited parental involvement, negative peer influences, and long commuting distances to school further complicate the reinforcement of moral values. Students with minimal parental supervision or guidance are more vulnerable to external pressures, particularly from peers whose values may conflict with Islamic teachings. Likewise, long travel times can exhaust students, decreasing their focus, discipline, and willingness to engage in school activities. Together, these external challenges reduce the effectiveness of school-based character education, often resulting in diminished discipline, decreased engagement, and weaker integration of moral values in students' daily behavior [22].

Table 1. Summary of Factors Influencing Character Formation

Category	Specific Factors	Implications for Character Education
Internal Factors	• Low student motivation and awareness of learning duties • Habitual tardiness due to household responsibilities • Decline in morality and discipline • Neglect of vocational skills and intellectual engagement	• Reduced effectiveness of character-building activities • Students fail to internalize moral values • Learning outcomes weakened
Parental Income	• Low and unstable income (dependent on agriculture/harvest cycles) • Limited ability to provide learning resources (e.g., smartphones, books)	• Students face difficulties in task completion • Increased absenteeism or lateness • Creates inequality in access to character education
External Factors	• Limited parental involvement in supporting character education • Negative peer influence • Long commuting distances cause fatigue and tardiness	• School efforts not fully reinforced at home • Peer groups undermine character values • Students become less disciplined and less engaged

Conclusion

This study found that character education at SMK Pelayaran Yappen Rays Maumere helps reduce student misbehavior, particularly tardiness, through religious instruction, discipline, and sanctions. While effective, its impact is limited by internal factors such as low student motivation and weak moral awareness, and external factors like family income and limited parental support. Strengthening collaboration between schools, families, and

communities is essential to make character education more sustainable in guiding students toward disciplined and responsible behavior.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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