STRATEGY FOR STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT LEARNING CURRICULUM

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Abstract

This research aims to examine various strategies for strengthening character education in schools through the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. Character education is an urgent need amidst the challenges of globalization, technological advances, and moral degradation that occurs among students. The Merdeka Curriculum is presented as an educational policy that offers a more holistic, flexible and contextual learning approach, thus providing great opportunities for building student character. The method used in this research is a literature review (library research) by analyzing various sources such as scientific journal articles, academic books, government regulations, and previous research reports. Data analysis techniques were carried out through content analysis and thematic synthesis. The results of the study show that the character strengthening strategy in the Merdeka Curriculum can be carried out through several approaches, including implementing the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), integrating character values in cross-disciplinary learning, implementing differentiated learning, and using authentic assessment that emphasizes processes and attitudes. Factors supporting the success of this strategy include teacher readiness, availability of resources and training, as well as parent and community support. On the other hand, lack of teacher understanding, limited facilities, and minimal parental involvement are obstacles that need to be overcome. This study concludes that strengthening character education through the Independent Curriculum requires synergy of all educational elements so that implementation can be effective and sustainable.

Keywords: Strengthening Strategy, Character Education, Independent Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Character education is an important aspect of the national education system, especially in facing the challenges of increasingly complex times (Huda et al., 2024). In the era of globalization and rapid advances in information technology, there has been a shift in social values among the

younger generation. The fast and unstoppable flow of information has both positive and negative impacts (Sulastra et al., 2024). On the one hand, technology provides easy access to knowledge, but on the other hand, the nation's cultural and moral values are starting to be eroded by foreign culture which is not necessarily in line with the identity of the Indonesian nation.

This condition is worsened by the emergence of various cases of moral degradation, such as bullying, intolerance, lack of empathy, and even acts of violence involving students. This is a serious reminder that education is not only about mastering knowledge and skills, but also the formation of strong character and integrity (Mahdiyah et al., 2024). Character education is no longer an option, but rather an urgent need to ensure the continuity of a generation that is both intellectually intelligent and socially moral (Santika et al., 2024).

Schools as formal institutions have a strategic role in instilling character values in students. Through various learning activities and school life, values such as responsibility, honesty, discipline and a spirit of togetherness can be instilled and familiarized (Kholiq, 2022). Not only teachers as teachers, but the entire school ecosystem, principals, education staff, and parents play an important role in creating an environment that supports character strengthening.

Responding to the challenges of the times and the need for character education, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) launched the Independent Curriculum policy as part of the transformation of the national education system. This curriculum is designed to provide space for students to develop according to their individual interests, talents and potential, while building moral and social values through a more contextual and flexible approach (Astuti et al., 2023).

One of the key elements in the Merdeka Curriculum is the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) which explicitly aims to shape student character based on Pancasila values (Nofrita et al., 2023). Through contextual projects that involve active participation of students, it is hoped that religious, nationalist, independent, mutual cooperation, creative and critical reasoning attitudes will be formed. This is a real manifestation of the integration between character strengthening and learning in one unified curriculum.

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum does not go without challenges. Appropriate and planned strategies are needed so that the goal of strengthening character education is truly achieved. There are still

many schools and teachers who do not fully understand how to integrate character values into the learning process in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum (Meutia et al., 2024). This shows the need for a more in-depth study of strategies that schools can use to optimize the role of the Independent Curriculum as a means of character formation.

Literature studies have an important role in exploring various theories, good practices and previous research results related to character education and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. With this approach, various strategies that are relevant and applicable in the educational context in Indonesia can be formulated. This strategy will include aspects of learning planning, developing a conducive school environment, the role of teachers as role models, and community involvement in supporting character values.

Therefore, this research aims to examine strategies for strengthening character education through the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum based on relevant literary sources. By identifying successful approaches and practices, it is hoped that we can make a contribution to the world of education, especially in creating a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also superior in character and morality.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a literature review approach (library research), namely a research method carried out by examining, studying and analyzing various library sources that are relevant to the research topic. The literature review was chosen because the main aim of this research is to explore and formulate strategies for strengthening character education through the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum based on existing theoretical and empirical findings. By using this approach, researchers can develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between curriculum policies, the learning process in schools, and the formation of student character.

Data sources in this research include scientific journal articles, academic books, official policy documents such as Permendikbudristek, Merdeka Curriculum modules, as well as reports of relevant previous research results. The analysis technique used is content analysis, which aims to identify themes, patterns and main ideas from each literature studied. Next, a thematic synthesis was carried out, namely the process of grouping information and findings into several strategic themes that can be used to strengthen character education in schools through the Independent

Curriculum. Through this technique, it is hoped that practical and contextual strategies can be formulated based on proven literature evidence (Earley, M.A. 2014; Snyder, H. 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

General Strategy for Strengthening Character Education in Schools

Strengthening character education in schools must basically start from a values-based approach. Basic values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, cooperation and empathy need to be used as the basis for all educational activities in schools (Muid et al., 2024). This approach is not just taught through subject matter, but must also be internalized in students' daily lives. Schools need to instill these values consistently in school culture so that they become habits and part of students' identity.

School culture has an important role as a forum for instilling character values. A positive culture that is reflected in the behavior of the school community, a conducive environmental atmosphere, and fair and consistent rules and regulations will strengthen the process of student character formation. Schools need to create a learning environment that not only emphasizes academic aspects, but also provides space for character growth through activities that involve social interaction, care and responsibility (Jamaludin et al., 2022).

The school principal plays a central role in directing and overseeing the implementation of character strengthening strategies. As an educational leader, the principal is tasked with creating a school vision and culture that supports character values. Value-oriented and exemplary leadership will create a school climate that encourages all elements of the school to behave positively. School principals must also be able to encourage collaboration and open communication between teachers, students and parents (Hasibuan & Nasution, 2024).

The teacher is the main figure in the character education process because he interacts directly with students every day. The teacher's role is not only as a teacher, but also as a guide, coach and role model. Character values can be integrated into the learning process through active, reflective and experience-based teaching methods. The teacher's example in daily attitudes and behavior is the most effective means of teaching character to students (Andayani, 2023).

Apart from that, character education will be stronger if it is supported by parental involvement. Collaboration between schools and families is very

important in maintaining consistency in the character values taught at home and at school. Effective communication between teachers and parents can strengthen a shared understanding of the values that need to be instilled in children. Parenting programs and regular meetings can also be used as a means to equalize perceptions and character education strategies (Kusumawati et al., 2024).

Strategies to strengthen character education can also be carried out through extracurricular activities, flag ceremonies, religious activities and social services. This kind of activity provides a real space for students to practice values such as cooperation, responsibility, leadership and social care (Hidayati et al., 2023). Through direct experience, students learn that character is not just theory, but real attitudes and actions in everyday life.

Thus, the general strategy of strengthening character education in schools requires comprehensive involvement from all parties—school principals, teachers, students and parents in building a living and developing culture of values. Example, consistency and a supportive environment will be a strong foundation for the formation of positive character in students. This strategy is an important stepping stone before character education is further integrated through policies such as the Independent Learning Curriculum.

Character Strengthening Strategy Through the Independent Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is present as an effort to provide learning that is more meaningful and relevant to the needs of students. One of the main strategies in strengthening character through this curriculum is the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). This project is designed to form students who believe and are devoted to God Almighty, have global diversity, work together, be independent, reason critically and are creative (Wahidah & Maristyawati, 2023). Through contextual and collaborative project activities, students are invited to develop character values directly in real situations related to their lives.

P5 allows students to experience a learning process that is not only cognitive, but also affective and psychomotor. For example, projects with a diversity theme can encourage students to understand the importance of tolerance and mutual respect for differences (Silfanny & Mustika, 2024). On the other hand, projects with the theme of local wisdom or environmental sustainability can form awareness of the surrounding culture and nature. In this way, students not only "know" character values, but also "experience" and "internalize" them through direct practice.

Apart from P5, character strengthening strategies are also carried out through the integration of character values in thematic and cross-disciplinary learning. In the Independent Curriculum, teachers have the flexibility to relate lesson material to real life contexts and moral values. For example, in science subjects, teachers can raise environmental issues and instill the value of responsibility towards nature (Lestari & Dahnial, 2024). In Indonesian language lessons, students can be invited to read stories that are full of the values of honesty and empathy. This integration makes learning more holistic and touches the students' affective domain.

Differentiated learning is also an important element in the Independent Curriculum which supports character strengthening. By recognizing the needs, interests and learning styles of each student, teachers can design learning that is appropriate and humanizes students. This approach encourages the growth of self-confidence, independence and appreciation for differences. Students learn that each individual is unique and valuable, which is the basis of healthy social and emotional character (Azizah & Kurniawan, 2022).

Authentic assessment in the Independent Curriculum also plays a role in supporting character formation. Not only measuring learning outcomes from cognitive aspects, authentic assessment emphasizes the processes, attitudes and skills that students have during learning. Teachers can conduct observations, reflective journals, portfolios, and interviews to assess the extent to which students demonstrate values such as responsibility, cooperation, and perseverance (Hidayati et al., 2023). This assessment is formative and encourages students to carry out continuous self-improvement.

Furthermore, these strategies will only be effective if they are supported by the active role of teachers as facilitators, motivators and role models. Teachers need to be given adequate training and assistance to be able to design learning that is oriented towards strengthening character. Schools also need to provide time, space and policies that support the continuity of character-based activities in the curriculum (Hidayat, 2024).

Thus, the Independent Curriculum provides a great opportunity for schools to integrate character education into the entire learning process. Through P5, cross-disciplinary learning, differentiated approaches, and authentic assessment, student character is not only formed through theory, but also through concrete and meaningful experiences. This strategy makes character education an inseparable part of daily learning at school.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The success of strengthening character education through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is very dependent on the readiness of teachers and schools. Teachers as the main implementers of the curriculum have an important role in integrating character values into the learning process. Schools that have a collaborative work culture, visionary leadership, and a supportive organizational structure will be better able to implement the Independent Curriculum effectively (Setiawati et al., 2023). However, if teachers do not understand the essence of the character approach in this curriculum, then character building efforts may not be optimal.

Teacher readiness does not only involve understanding the concept of the Independent Curriculum, but also includes skills in designing differentiated learning, conducting authentic assessments, and facilitating the Pancasila Student Profile project. Many teachers are still used to conventional learning approaches so they need time and a process to adapt (Rohman & Mentari, 2024). On the other hand, schools also need to be institutionally prepared, starting from preparing the educational unit operational curriculum (KOSP) to forming a solid P5 facilitator team.

Another very determining factor is the availability of adequate resources and training. Implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires the provision of teaching materials, learning media, and project modules that are appropriate to the local context (Nurhaliza et al., 2024). Apart from that, teachers need to receive ongoing training so they can understand and apply character learning strategies effectively. Without sufficient training support and resources, the implementation of this curriculum risks becoming just a formality without substantive meaning.

Training and technical assistance from the government and related parties is an urgent need. Programs such as learning communities, workshops and real practice-based training can help teachers increase their capacity (Qurtubi, 2024). Apart from that, the use of technology and digital platforms can also be utilized to facilitate access to relevant learning resources. Schools in underdeveloped areas or with limited infrastructure are a group that needs special attention in this regard (Laiv, 2022).

Support from the community and parents is also an important factor in strengthening character education. When parents are actively involved in school activities and are in line with the values taught, the character formation of students will be more consistent and stronger. Parents can strengthen character values through parenting at home, while local communities can be

involved in P5 projects as learning resources and collaboration partners (Masulah & Wahyuni, 2023). Support from the outside school environment expands students' learning space and makes character values more real and contextual.

However, challenges remain. Not all parents have a high understanding or commitment to the importance of character education. Some still prioritize academic achievement alone, without realizing that character is the main foundation for long-term success. Lack of communication and collaboration between schools and parents can be a significant obstacle in implementing character strategies based on the Independent Curriculum (Annisa, 2022).

Therefore, strengthening character through the Independent Curriculum cannot run alone without the synergy of all parties. Teachers and schools must be prepared systematically, resources must be available evenly, and collaboration with parents and the community must be strengthened (Indrawati & Rahmawaty, 2024). Overcoming these obstacles requires continued commitment from all elements of education to create students who are superior in competence and character.

CONCLUSION

The Merdeka Curriculum provides broad and flexible space for schools to strengthen character education as a whole. Through a holistic and contextual approach, this curriculum not only emphasizes academic achievement, but also encourages the growth of noble values in students. Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), cross-disciplinary thematic learning, differentiated approaches, and authentic assessment are strategic instruments that can be used to actively and meaningfully shape student character.

The success of the character strengthening strategy through the Merdeka Curriculum really depends on the synergy between various educational elements, starting from teachers, school principals, parents, to the community. The integration of character values in the daily learning process and the use of participatory and reflective methods will have a long-term impact on the formation of students' personalities. Therefore, it is important for all parties to commit and work together in implementing this curriculum as an effort to produce a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also strong in morals and ethics.

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