

STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: COLLABORATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN A HOLISTIC CURRICULUM

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Abstract

This study aims to identify collaborative strategies between teachers and parents in strengthening early childhood character education through a holistic curriculum at TKIT As-Salam Jagir, Sine. A qualitative approach with a case study method was used to gather data through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that effective collaboration, characterized by open communication and active parental participation, strongly supports the successful integration of character values into learning. Values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and cooperation are successfully instilled through a structured approach. Teachers play a key role as facilitators, while parents are active partners in developing children's character. In conclusion, a holistic curriculum supported by collaboration between teachers and parents has proven effective in shaping children's character holistically from an early age.

Keywords : Character Education; Teacher Parent Collaboration; Holistic Curriculum; Early Childhood

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for children's character development (Kurnia et al., 2019). Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a fundamental educational platform, providing a foundation for the formation and development of foundations (Bun et al., 2020). Character education at an early age is not only about instilling moral values, but also about developing social-emotional skills that are essential for developing individuals with integrity and responsibility (Hadi, 2009). Unfortunately, the implementation of character education in PAUD often faces complex challenges that require serious attention from various parties. Currently, schools and universities are experiencing a worrying moral crisis, making strengthening character education increasingly relevant to addressing it (Izza, 2019). The degradation of morality, reflected in various criminal acts and deviant behavior, underscores the urgency of character education interventions from an early age (Syaikhon & Saleh, 2022).

One of the main problems is the lack of synergy between teachers and parents in implementing character values in the school and home environment (Fanny, 2022). Teachers and parents have a role as mentors and observers of children who can stimulate and witness the development of children's character (Rizkyani et al., 2020). Teachers, as role models for children at school, have a significant responsibility in instilling character values, while parents, as primary educators at home, play a crucial role in providing consistent examples and support (Prayoga, 2020). The lack of synchronization between the values taught in school and those practiced at home can cause confusion in children



and hinder the effective internalization of character values. Teachers, as facilitators, certainly want to have students whose EQ can be mastered well (Egستاني et al., 2023). Furthermore, the existing Early Childhood Education curriculum does not fully integrate character education holistically. A holistic curriculum should not only emphasize cognitive aspects, but also on the development of children's affective and psychomotor aspects (Ulya et al., 2023).

Based on these issues, this study proposes a collaborative approach between teachers and parents in designing and implementing a holistic curriculum focused on strengthening character education in early childhood education (PAUD). Solid and harmonious cooperation between teachers and parents is key to the successful implementation of character education. This collaboration can be implemented through various activities such as joint workshops, regular meetings, and parental involvement in classroom learning activities (Harni & Tarjiah, 2018). This collaboration serves to establish good communication to prevent errors in child development. The proposed holistic curriculum will include various activities designed to develop character values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and tolerance. Values education guides students to realize the values of truth, goodness, and beauty through a process of value judgment (Wahyuni, 2021).

Although the importance of teacher-parent collaboration in character education has been widely recognized in various previous studies, significant gaps in the literature remain that need to be addressed to optimize the implementation of character education in early childhood education. First, most previous research focuses on theoretical and normative aspects without providing a practical framework that can be systematically implemented across various early childhood institutional contexts with diverse characteristics. Second, the limited research using a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively measure the effectiveness of collaboration, both qualitatively and quantitatively, makes it difficult to generalize findings and develop standardized best practices. Third, limited research explores the role of digital technology in facilitating collaboration between teachers and parents in this digital era, even though technology can be an effective communication bridge between home and school. Fourth, the lack of development of valid and reliable measurement instruments to assess the effectiveness of teacher-parent collaboration in the context of early childhood character education. Existing instruments are generally general and not specific to measure the complex aspects of collaboration in character education.

This research was conducted at TKIT As-Salam Jagir, Sine, which was chosen as the location for the study because the school actively applies holistic curriculum principles and develops a collaborative model between teachers and parents in early childhood character education. This study aims to identify effective collaboration strategies between teachers and parents in implementing a holistic curriculum to strengthen character education in early childhood education. Further objectives are to formulate a holistic curriculum model that comprehensively integrates character

education and to measure the impact of this curriculum model's implementation on children's character development. With this research, it is hoped that teachers can integrate religious character education through integrated learning, without having to create their own programs (Djazilan & Akhwani, 2022). This model will include basic principles, content, learning methods, and an evaluation system that aligns with the developmental needs of early childhood.

Relevant theoretical studies include theories of early childhood cognitive and social development, principles of character education, and the concept of a holistic curriculum. Character education is not simply a process of memorizing exam material, but rather a serious practice of good behavior to achieve ideal strength (Restiana & Ulfa, 2021). Piaget's cognitive development theory emphasizes the importance of direct experience and social interaction in children's learning. Erikson's social development theory highlights the importance of identity formation and self-confidence at an early age. Meanwhile, the concept of a holistic curriculum emphasizes the importance of integrating various aspects of child development in a balanced manner. Collaboration between schools and families is a promising strategy for improving the quality of education and children's character (Abdullah, 2017).

This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of character education in early childhood education (PAUD). The results can provide practical guidance for teachers and parents in designing and implementing effective character education programs. Furthermore, these findings can serve as a basis for developing educational policies that support the strengthening of character education in PAUD. The latest breakthroughs in education can keep pace with current developments by integrating the use of local wisdom, thus creating a more inclusive, relevant, and meaningful learning environment for students (Annisha, 2024). Thus, integrated character education will help students recognize, understand, internalize, and practice character values in depth (Kuncoro, 2022). Through strong character education, it is hoped that Indonesia's young generation can grow into individuals with noble morals, responsibility, and positive contributions to society and the nation (Aswat et al., 2021).

Character education is crucial in the 21st century to balance intelligence and character (Hayati, 2022). Character education aims to shape the nation's next generation with quality, noble character, and noble national values. The importance of character education is also based on the reality that moral problems are acute issues that accompany human life (Sudrajat, 2011). Schools, as educational management facilities, play a role in shaping students' character and morals (Subroto et al., 2023). One of the most important character educations as a foundation for other characters is discipline (Mujahidin & Syiddiq, 2022). Islamic education is the key and best solution in developing disciplined character in students. Islamic education is a process of deepening and appreciating knowledge that contains Islamic values that are given to students through the growth and development of their natural potential so that they can achieve equality and perfection in life (Salsabila et al., 2021). Character education is associated with the

terms ethics, morals, and/or values related to moral strength, with "positive" and "good" connotations, not neutral ones (Albana et al., 2023) (Gusliana & Nurlela, 2022).

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the process of implementing character education in a natural and complex context, particularly in the interactions between teachers and parents in the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) environment. The case study method is considered most appropriate for examining the phenomenon of character education contextually and comprehensively in a specific educational unit, namely TKIT As-Salam Jagir, Sine, as the research locus. This study involved purposively selected participants, consisting of class teachers, principals, and parents who are directly involved in the process of character education for children. The characteristics of the selected participants are those who are actively involved in learning activities and collaboration between school and home, and have undergone this process consistently for a minimum of one semester. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation to explore the experiences, strategies, and dynamics of collaboration that take place in supporting children's character development. The entire process of data collection and analysis was carried out systematically to ensure the validity of the findings and relevance to the research objectives.

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations that could provide opportunities for further research and contribute to addressing gaps in the literature. First, the use of a purely qualitative approach without a quantitative component to statistically measure program effectiveness limits the ability to broadly generalize the results. Second, the focus on a single case study limits the ability to compare the effectiveness of collaborative models across different socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Third, the relatively short duration of the study (one semester) prevented it from capturing the long-term impact of teacher-parent collaboration on children's character development, which would require a longer period of time to be comprehensively measured.

These limitations also open up opportunities for further research that could utilize mixed-method approaches, multi-site comparative studies, and longitudinal designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of teacher-parent collaboration in early childhood character education. Furthermore, future research could develop and validate specific measurement instruments to assess various dimensions of collaboration and their impact on children's character development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Early childhood education (PAUD) teachers hold an irreplaceable strategic position in the character development process of early childhood. Their role extends beyond simply transferring knowledge, but more fundamentally serves as personality architects who guide and facilitate children in meaningfully exploring and understanding

their surroundings (Agustina & Broto, 2022). In this context, teacher personality competency is a crucial determinant of educational success, particularly in learning activities aimed at holistically shaping students' personalities (Rizkyani et al., 2020). Teachers with mature personality competencies are able to create a conducive, inspiring, and motivating learning environment for children to develop positive character traits such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and social awareness. This is reflected in the character education practices implemented at As-Salam Jagir Kindergarten, Sine, the location of this research.

The implementation of effective learning requires a deep understanding of the unique characteristics of early childhood who have great potential for development, relatively high spontaneity, a tendency to act without careful calculation, very high energy levels, still dominant egocentrism, an extraordinarily strong curiosity, unlimited imagination, and a relatively short attention span (Hadi, 2009). Based on these characteristics, PAUD teachers must be able to design creative, innovative, and fun learning strategies, such as role-playing methods that allow children to explore various characters and situations, storytelling techniques that can instill moral values through interesting narratives, and art activities that provide space for creative expression while developing an appreciation for beauty and creativity. This varied learning approach not only makes the learning process fun, but also ensures that character values are naturally internalized in children through meaningful direct experiences.

The family is the primary educational institution with the most profound influence on a child's character development. Parents serve as the primary mentors and role models for their children to emulate and follow in every aspect of life (Rizkyani et al., 2020). The family's strategic position as the primary educational environment makes it the place where children first receive character education and stimulation, which are crucial for their optimal growth and development (Bun et al., 2020). In this context, parents play a role not only as providers of physical needs but also as fundamental shapers of the core values that will serve as the foundation of a child's character throughout their life.

Parental role models in everyday life are the most effective and authentic method of character education. Children learn about moral values, ethics, and social norms through direct observation of their parents' behavior in various life situations. When parents demonstrate consistency between the values they teach and their actual actions, children will gain a deeper understanding of how character values are implemented in practical life. Furthermore, parents' active involvement in their children's formal education through participation in school activities, sharing experiences and skills with the classroom community, and collaborating with teachers in designing learning programs will enrich children's learning experiences and strengthen the synergistic relationship between the home and school environments (Harni & Tarjiah, 2018).

Effective collaboration between teachers and parents requires a strong foundation of communication, mutual trust, and a shared understanding of the goals of character education. This collaborative model is not limited to formal meetings or periodic progress reports, but involves a deep partnership in designing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive character education program. Through effective and ongoing communication, teachers and parents can share detailed information about children's character development, identify strengths and areas requiring special attention, and develop consistent and coordinated intervention strategies to optimally support children's character growth. Synergy between teachers and parents creates a consistent and mutually supportive learning environment, both at school and at home, so that children do not experience value conflicts or confusion in the process of internalizing character (Fanny, 2022). This consistency is crucial because children need clarity and certainty in understanding the values they should uphold and practice. When there is alignment between the values taught at school and those practiced at home, the character-building process becomes more effective and sustainable. Through structured positive interactions with significant adults around them, children not only learn about moral and social values theoretically, but also develop practical abilities to interact effectively, empathetically, and constructively with others in a variety of social contexts.

A holistic curriculum represents an educational paradigm that synergistically integrates various aspects of child development, creating a solid foundation for the comprehensive and sustainable implementation of character education. Within a holistic curriculum framework, character education is not treated as a separate subject or additional program, but is organically integrated into all aspects of learning and school activities (Prayoga, 2020). This integrative approach enables children to understand the relevance of character values to various learning areas, from mathematics, which teaches honesty and accuracy, science, which fosters curiosity and critical thinking, art, which fosters creativity and an appreciation of beauty, to physical education, which instills sportsmanship and teamwork.

The strength of this integrated approach lies in its ability to help children understand that character values are not merely abstract concepts to be memorized, but rather life principles that are relevant and applicable in their daily lives. Each learning activity is carefully designed to not only achieve academic goals but also instill specific and measurable character values. Through this approach, children gradually develop the ability to identify situations that require the application of character values, make appropriate moral decisions, and implement these values in various contexts of their lives. This holistic learning process enables children to grow into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess balanced emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence.

The successful implementation of character education depends heavily on the quality and competence of teachers in understanding, designing, and implementing

effective character education programs. Teachers with a deep understanding of character development theories, the principles of child developmental psychology, and appropriate pedagogical strategies will be able to create transformative and meaningful learning environments for children's character formation (Ariyanto et al., 2022). In this context, continuous professional development is a fundamental necessity that cannot be ignored, given the dynamic development of science on character education and the new challenges emerging in educational practice.

The findings of this study reveal a significant gap between theory and practice in the implementation of teacher-parent collaboration for character education. Although conceptually the importance of collaboration is well understood by education practitioners, implementation in the field still faces various systemic challenges that have not been fully addressed in the existing literature. This gap includes several crucial aspects: (1) the lack of clear standard operating procedures to facilitate effective collaboration, where each PAUD institution develops its own method without standardized guidelines; (2) the lack of technology platforms that support real-time communication between teachers and parents, even though the digital era demands more efficient and sustainable communication; (3) the absence of a standardized monitoring and evaluation system to measure the success of collaboration programs, making it difficult to assess effectiveness and make data-driven improvements; and (4) the limited systematic training programs to equip teachers and parents with the collaboration skills necessary in the context of character education.

Systematic and ongoing training and mentoring programs can provide teachers with the support they need to improve their competency in designing learning activities that are not only engaging and enjoyable, but also meaningful and relevant to the developmental needs of early childhood. This training should cover a wide range of aspects, from theoretical understanding of children's moral and character development, techniques for observing and assessing character development, effective learning strategies for various child character types, to the ability to collaborate effectively with parents and the community. The ultimate goal of all these professional development efforts is to ensure that teachers have the capacity to guide students' behavior so that they not only understand character values cognitively but also love and consistently practice goodness in their lives (Syaikhon & Saleh, 2022).

The integration of spiritual and religious values in early childhood character education plays a fundamental role in establishing a strong moral and ethical foundation. Character education that incorporates the spiritual dimension focuses not only on external behavioral aspects but also develops an internal awareness of the child's relationship with God, fellow human beings, and the universe (Munif, 2017). This approach aligns with the concept of education as a process that not only inculcates children into the prevailing value system in society but also deeply and authentically instills the world of these values into the child's soul and personality (Usman, 2017).

The implementation of religious values in character education requires a holistic and integrated strategy, including the provision of religious materials appropriate to the child's cognitive developmental level, the inculcation of positive religious practices in daily life, the provision of gentle and compassionate spiritual advice and guidance, educational reprimands when necessary, and most importantly, consistent role models from educators in implementing these religious values (Salsabila et al., 2021). This approach is highly effective in developing discipline, responsibility, and high morality in children, as they not only learn about spiritual concepts theoretically but also experience and feel how these values are practiced in real life by people they respect and love.

The success of character education cannot be achieved through partial efforts involving only schools and families, but requires systemic support from various stakeholders that make up the broader educational ecosystem. The government has a strategic role in creating policies that support the implementation of character education at all levels of education, providing adequate funding for teacher training programs and curriculum development, and creating regulations that encourage collaboration among educational stakeholders (Ismail & Subagyo, 2023). Government policies that support character education must be comprehensive, encompassing aspects such as character competency standards, appropriate evaluation systems, incentives for educational institutions that successfully implement character programs, and sanctions for those that ignore the importance of this aspect.

The mass media has tremendous power in shaping public opinion and providing examples of behavior that children can emulate. In this context, the mass media can play a strategic role in disseminating information about the importance of character education, promoting best practices from various educational institutions, and showcasing role models for children and adolescents (Nada et al., 2021). Furthermore, the mass media also has a responsibility to filter content that can damage children's character and instead produce content that educates and inspires. Optimal synergy between the government, society, academics, and students in supporting character education will create a conducive environment for positive and sustainable character development (Mahpudz, 2019).

The era of globalization presents complex challenges for children's character development, with various negative influences that can erode traditional and moral values held by society. Children today grow up in an environment filled with unfiltered information, technology that can distract from meaningful social interactions, and consumerist values that can obscure true life priorities. In this context, character education is a crucial bulwark in preparing children to face various global challenges while maintaining the identity and noble values of the nation and society (Ulya et al., 2023) (Yasir & Susilawati, 2021).

The importance of instilling character education from an early age is based on the understanding that childhood is a golden age, when a child's brain is most susceptible to

absorbing and internalizing the values taught to them. During this period, children still possess high mental flexibility and are less susceptible to the various distractions and social pressures they may face later in life. A generation with strong character must be equipped with holistic competencies, including mastery of science and technology, a deep understanding of religious and spiritual values, a positive and resilient mental attitude, critical and creative thinking, and an appreciation for superior civilizations and cultures (Egistani et al., 2023). The ultimate goal of character education is to create individuals who are not only materially successful but also possess moral integrity, social awareness, and positive contributions to the advancement of society and the nation.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of various dimensions of character education in the context of early childhood education (PAUD), this study identifies that strategic collaboration between teachers and parents through the implementation of a holistic curriculum is a fundamental key to creating a generation with strong character and ready to face future challenges. This study, conducted at TKIT As-Salam Jagir, Sine, provides a concrete illustration of this collaborative practice in the context of early childhood character education. The concept of national character education as a systematic and planned effort to help students recognize, understand, internalize, and internalize fundamental values so that they can behave as whole and perfect human beings (Albana et al., 2023) (Sudrajat, 2011) (Wahyuni, 2021) requires a holistic and integrated implementation involving all elements of society.

An effective model of collaboration between teachers and parents must be based on the principles of equal partnership, open and constructive communication, and a shared commitment to achieving agreed-upon character education goals. In practice, this collaboration can be realized through various mechanisms, such as parenting education programs that equip parents with the knowledge and skills to support character education at home, digital communication systems that enable the exchange of real-time information on child development, parental involvement in curriculum planning and evaluation, and volunteer programs that provide opportunities for parents to contribute directly to learning activities at school.

Character education in early childhood requires a strong commitment and sustained effort from all educational stakeholders, with collaboration between teachers and parents a key element in determining the program's success. Through the implementation of a holistic curriculum that integrates various aspects of child development, an optimal learning environment can be created for the formation of strong, authentic, and sustainable character. This research identifies that the success of character education is highly dependent on five main pillars: first, teacher professional competence that includes a deep understanding of the theory and practice of character education; second, the active and consistent involvement of parents in the character education process; third, the systematic integration of character values in all aspects of the curriculum and learning activities; fourth, adequate policy support and resources

from the government and other stakeholders; and fifth, consistent implementation of character values across various learning environments and children's lives.

The theoretical implications of this research point to the need to develop a more systematic and structured collaborative framework between teachers and parents, with clear mechanisms for communication, coordination, and joint evaluation. Practically, the results of this study recommend the development of innovative programs such as parent schools, teacher-parent mentoring systems, digital platforms for monitoring children's character development, and holistic assessment models that can comprehensively measure character development. To achieve optimal goals, strong policy support from the government, adequate investment in human resource development, and a long-term commitment from the entire community to make character education a top priority in the national education system are needed. Through coordinated and sustainable collective efforts, the ideal of creating a future generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses noble character, high integrity, and makes a positive contribution to the progress of the nation and humanity.

CONCLUSION

Strategic collaboration between teachers and parents through a holistic curriculum at TKIT As-Salam Jagir Sine has proven to be a fundamental key in shaping the character of early childhood. Research identifies five pillars of success: teacher professional competence, active parental involvement, systematic integration of character values, government policy support, and consistent implementation across environments. The findings indicate that effective character education requires ongoing synergy between home and school, with an integrated approach that incorporates spiritual values into all aspects of learning. Innovative solutions such as parenting education programs, digital monitoring platforms, and holistic assessments are needed to create a generation with strong character ready to face global challenge.

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