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21st Century Character Education in Mathematics Learning for Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: Character education has become an essential component of 21st-century learning, emphasizing not only cognitive achievement but also the development of students' moral values, responsibility, collaboration, and critical thinking. Mathematics learning at the elementary school level provides opportunities to integrate these character values through problem-solving and cooperative learning activities. **Objective:** This study aims to describe the implementation of 21st-century character education in mathematics learning for elementary school students. **Method:** This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo, Klaten, in 2022. The participants included the principal, teachers, and students. Data were collected through classroom observation, interviews, and documentation. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation, while the data analysis process involved data collection, reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. **Results:** The findings indicate that 21st-century character education in mathematics learning is integrated into the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) and classroom practices. Character values such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and critical thinking were embedded in learning activities and student interactions. **Conclusion:** Integrating character education into mathematics learning supports both academic understanding and character development among elementary students. **Originality/Value:** This study offers empirical novelty in the field of primary education and mathematics pedagogy by revealing the structured integration mechanism of 21st-century character values (discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and critical thinking) into lesson plans (RPP) and classroom interactions concerning the synergy between cognitive achievement and moral development within the context of elementary school mathematics learning, an area that has remained insufficiently documented. These findings enrich empirical evidence and serve as a strategic reference for designing character-infused mathematics teaching modules and teacher professional development programs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of learning change in the industrial era 4.0 in education emphasizes the 21st-century skills that human resources must possess (Kahar et al., 2021). These skills are expected to foster the development of 21st-century skills and shift the classroom learning paradigm (Muliastrini, 2020). Where previous teacher-centred learning can shift to student-centred learning with the presence of these 21st-century skills, this learning paradigm emphasizes students' ability to learn more and teachers acting as facilitators of learning. In the 21st-century learning

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process, students must possess certain character qualities (Angga et al., 2022). Character education is the quality of character, aiming to develop students' character values.

Character education is expected to equip students with character qualities to help them adapt to a dynamic environment (Nimatuzahroh et al., 2020). According to Utomo & Alawiyah (2022), character education is a system for instilling values (character) in school residents, including knowledge, awareness or willingness, and action to implement those values towards God Almighty, the self, fellow environment, and the nation, so that they become insan kamil. Shaping student character in an educational environment is a form of school support that aligns with the goals of National education. Teachers have an important role in shaping student character within the school (Nantara, 2022). Apart from teachers, parents also play a very strong role because the family is the main character in a child's development (Zubaedi & Utomo, 2021). So that teachers and students can work well together to build and shape student character.

Building students' character education is certainly based on the purpose of strengthening character education, namely preparing students to become the golden generation of Indonesia in 2045 (Iswatiningsih, 2019). By this, in building the golden generation of 2045, students are given 18 criteria contained in 21st-century learning. These character criteria include religion, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, love for the country, respect for achievement, communication, peace-loving, fondness for reading, environmental care, social care, and responsibility. Mathematics is one subject that can integrate character education into the learning process. Mathematics has various definitions; one, according to Nurhayanti et al. (2021), is that the nature of mathematics is logical and efficient reasoning, and a treasury of creative and amazing ideas and patterns, so mathematics is also called the art of creative thinking.

Elementary schools have an important role in shaping student character. Elementary school is a strong foundation, so all teachers need knowledge of character education to integrate it into the learning process (Rachmadyanti, 2017). Character education has been applied indirectly for a long time, but in the current curriculum, it has been slightly revised by integrating it across all subjects (Santika & Sudiana, 2021). The integration of character education into school learning is achieved by applying the knowledge taught to everyday life and by integrating subjects that foster good character traits. Integrating character education into the learning process can be done in several ways, namely through learning methods, teaching materials, teaching aids, and learning tools (Latifah, 2014). To achieve successful integration of character education, support from various parties is needed, with the aim of integrating it optimally (Utomo et al., 2022).

When viewed in terms of the importance of character education and its association with education in our country, the implementation of education in learning is expected to enable students studying mathematics to think logically and creatively. Students who think logically and creatively can shape students' characters into logical, creative, and imaginative individuals (Inayah & Sya, 2022). This was launched by the Ministry of Education regarding character education, starting at the elementary school level and then moving to the middle and high school levels. Implementing character education in the learning process can be done through several ways, namely learning methods, teaching materials, teaching aids, and learning tools (Siswati et al., 2018). To achieve success in implementing character education, support from various parties is needed to ensure it is implemented optimally.

In the field, especially at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo, in learning mathematics, there are still many problems regarding student character, such as cheating, less active students, lack of discipline upon entering class, and lack of responsibility for the tasks given by the teacher. This motivates the author to analyze character education in mathematics learning. However, currently, character education has been integrated into the Learning Implementation Plan used by teachers in their learning activities. Therefore, exemplary and supporting factors in implementing character education are highly influential in achieving its learning goals.

The purpose of this study is to find out (1) the implementation of character education in learning mathematics, (2) supporting factors and inhibiting factors in implementing character education in learning mathematics, and (3) efforts in overcoming obstacles in implementing 21st-century character education in learning mathematics.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This research method uses a qualitative research design with descriptive analysis. Qualitative descriptive research is intended to describe existing phenomena, both natural and human-engineering, with greater attention to the characteristics, qualities, and interrelationships among activities (Walther et al., 2017). This research seeks to provide an overview of the implementation of character education in mathematics learning, in which researchers must understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects to obtain descriptive data. Descriptive research

does not provide treatment, manipulation, or alteration of variable data, but describes a condition as it is through observation, interviews, and documentation.

2.2 Subject

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo, Klaten Regency, over a period of three months. This duration included research planning, data collection, and reporting of the findings. The participants in this study were the school principal, teachers, and students who were directly involved in implementing mathematics learning and character education in the school environment.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using three techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. An observation was conducted to examine classroom learning activities, while interviews were conducted with teachers and the principal to obtain information on the implementation of character education in mathematics learning. Documentation such as lesson plans and school records was used to support the findings. To ensure data credibility, the study applied source triangulation.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification (Elliott, 2018). Data reduction involved selecting relevant information, while data presentation organised the findings systematically to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The research results are presented in four findings. The four research findings are described in the following table:

First, 21st-century character education in mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo is sufficient. However, it needs further development because elementary school is the primary level in shaping student character. Students are expected to become a qualified and superior generation by achieving learning objectives by implementing the character values they have acquired during learning in everyday life.

Second, the role of the family, school, and community environment is also very influential in shaping student character. According to the researcher's observations, teachers at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo have shown an exemplary attitude in integrating character education into mathematics instruction, emphasising discipline, responsibility, religion, and self-confidence.

Third, the main supporting factor in this case is the principal, namely, the principal is very supportive of this character education integration by synergising with teachers and principals who are always active in monitoring the process of student character building. This implementation aims to ensure that children attending SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo become qualified and moral children in both family and community environments.

Fourth, character education at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo is currently integrated into learning, especially in this case, the teacher's package of character values, which is incorporated into learning materials. There is a similarity between the principal and the fourth-grade teacher that instilling character values can create outstanding students and superior schools.

Table 1. Research Findings on the Implementation of 21st Century Character Education in Mathematics Learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo

No	Research Finding	Description
1	Level of Character Education Implementation	The implementation of 21st-century character education in mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo has been carried out adequately. However, further development is still needed because elementary school plays a crucial role in shaping students' character. Through learning activities, students are expected to internalize character values and apply them in their daily lives.
2	Role of Educational Environment	The family, school, and community environments play an important role in shaping students' character. Teachers demonstrate exemplary behavior by integrating character

No	Research Finding	Description
		values such as discipline, responsibility, religiosity, and self-confidence into mathematics learning activities.
3	Institutional Support	The principal serves as a key supporting factor in implementing character education. Strong leadership support is shown through collaboration with teachers and continuous monitoring of character-building activities to ensure the development of students with strong moral values.
4	Integration in Learning Process	Character education is integrated into classroom learning, particularly through teaching materials and lesson plans. Both the principal and teachers share the view that embedding character values in learning activities contributes to the development of outstanding students and strengthens the overall quality of the school.

The findings indicate that 21st-century character education in mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo has been systematically integrated into the educational process, although further strengthening is still needed. The results highlight that character formation is supported not only by classroom instruction but also by the synergy among the school environment, family, and community. Teachers play an essential role by modelling positive behaviours and embedding character values, such as discipline, responsibility, religiosity, and self-confidence, into mathematics learning activities. In addition, strong institutional support from the principal contributes significantly to the successful implementation of character education through supervision and collaboration with teachers. The integration of character values into learning materials and lesson plans demonstrates that mathematics learning can function not only to develop students' cognitive abilities but also to foster moral and social competencies needed in the 21st century. Overall, these findings suggest that character-based mathematics learning can support the development of academically competent and ethically responsible students.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Implementation of Character Education in Mathematics Learning

Character education is a positive life value for humans. The expected character values are the 5 main ones: religion, independence, integrity, cooperation, and nationalism. The Implementation of character education involves carrying out activities every morning before learning begins, namely having students read books or engage in literacy activities, which can increase students' insight and knowledge. Starting with habits like this can shape the character of 21st-century students, but schools should further strengthen character-building by integrating it into every lesson. Character education in mathematics learning is implemented by integrating character values into the material delivered during the meeting. The integration is made in the lesson plan that the teacher will use to teach in detail.

The Implementation of character education must begin with a plan. Joyo (2018) said that planning, Implementation, and evaluation in student character building will yield very satisfying results. Character building in mathematics learning must be carried out through the learning objectives, with the intention that the results obtained align with the content of the material presented. This is also expressed by Norfika (2017) in her research, who explains that in mathematics learning with character values, there must be a match between the learning objectives of mathematics, the competencies outlined in the curriculum, and character-building values.

Mathematics learning becomes a means of character building when integrated into the curriculum. This must have the full support of several parties to ensure the integration of character education is well achieved. The teacher's commitment significantly influences students' character development. Character building in this learning is expected so that students can implement good character values in their daily lives (Pertiwi et al., 2021). These character values can foster a positive attitude in students, helping them avoid violating or deviating from their environment, whether in the family, school, or community.

3.2.2 Problems in Implementing Character Education in Mathematics Learning

Based on research findings on 21st-century character building in mathematics learning, several factors support and hinder its Implementation. Implementation: The Implementation of character education in mathematics learning encounters several supporting factors and obstacles. The Implementation of 21st-century education in mathematics learning is expected to shape student character successfully. This Implementation will work well because of support from all parties, from the principal to parents. In addition, support from school facilities, such as learning resources, classrooms, and other support facilities, is available. The problems faced in the Implementation of charac-

ter education are the lack of support from parents in shaping the character of students, one of which is not monitored by children at home whose parents work and only live with relatives, the teacher's delivery of character education in the learning process is less sharp so that students find it difficult to implement it in their daily lives, the lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure at school, and the various characteristics of students that differ from one another.

This is reinforced by Suarto's (2017) view that the school and family environments are highly influential in student character development. This support can have a major effect on character building. This aligns with the findings of Suriansyah & Aslamiah (2015) that the principal's performance in using his leadership strategy to shape teacher exemplariness, discipline, leadership, and the empowerment of all school members can affect students' character values. In addition, Meifa et al. (2016) stated that the supporting factors in the Implementation of character education in learning include active students. So, in this Implementation, students must actively participate in learning.

c) Efforts to overcome Problems in the Implementation of character education in mathematics learning

The Implementation of this Implementation has encountered the obstacles mentioned above, so, with these obstacles, the school has tried various things to overcome them in the Implementation of education in learning. Based on the research findings, efforts to overcome these obstacles include the school holding meetings between teachers and parents to convey student learning evaluation results, ranging from learning outcomes and attitudes to the character values teachers have instilled in learning. In addition, teachers provide examples for students, such as discipline on time and allowing students to ask questions, so that students do not harbour curiosity that ultimately cannot solve the problems they face during learning. Classroom teachers' efforts to overcome obstacles in implementing character education in classroom learning include learning activities and meeting with parents. The activities that teachers do to overcome these obstacles are providing examples of discipline on time, providing examples of obeying the rules, giving equal attention to all students, even though their characteristics differ, and providing opportunities for students to express their opinions. In addition, a meeting was held among parents to discuss the problems students experienced while learning at school.

Another effort is in conjunction with the Klaten Regency government, which developed a book titled “Buku Matur Jujur” as a guideline for daily student activities to foster aspects of student honesty, leading to character development and character education. The development book from the Klaten district government developed student activities under the name 'Mathur Jujur' book as a guideline for students' daily activities, both at school and outside school. This is also the right solution to the various obstacles encountered when implementing character education, ensuring the expected values are achieved by filling in this book, which parents and teachers monitor.

Character education is very important to implement in the school environment because education is the right step in shaping student character (Subianto, 2013). However, it is not only through schools that children are formed; the family environment also plays a very supportive role.

The problems faced by students can be overcome by optimising the strength of existing supporting factors. The existence of this strength means that all problems faced can be addressed by strengthening the factors that support the development of this character-building trait. This character building is intended to ensure that the Implementation of character education can be carried out by integrating learning outcomes and by synergising the roles of educational institutions and teachers as role models for their students (Kaimuddin, 2014).

Judging from the factors that support the Implementation of character education, namely (1) support from the principal. The Implementation received support from various parties, including the principal, who was very supportive of character education in learning. This is intended so that children who go to school at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo become quality children and have good morals in the family and community environment; (2) provide examples for students with the intention that students can obey the rules; (3) another effort is the existence of the 'Honest Mathur' book developed by the district government which contains daily student activities both at school and outside the school. Teachers and parents also monitor this book.

Meanwhile, the factors that hinder the Implementation of character education, according to Faiz et al. (2021), are (1) lack of control of students under parental supervision. The teacher stated that this factor is the main obstacle because students are difficult to work with in implementing this activity, because the lack of special attention from parents causes children to be unruly at school, and (2) the lack of learning motivation. During the Implementation of this activity, some students who were invited to be active still cannot. This can be seen when the learning activities take place, many students are just silent when invited to discuss together or to ask questions; (3) student characteristics that differ from one another. Characteristics are things that cannot be equated between students. This is because each individual has a different disposition and character, which may be due to inheritance from family and community environments, so the teacher must be able to understand.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this study provide several important implications for the development of character education in elementary school learning, particularly in mathematics instruction within the context of 21st-century education. The results indicate that integrating character values into mathematics learning activities can support the development of students' cognitive skills while simultaneously strengthening moral and social competencies such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and self-confidence. For academics, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on character education by demonstrating how character values can be embedded in subject-based learning rather than being taught separately. The findings also highlight the importance of collaboration among teachers, school leaders, families, and the community in supporting the successful implementation of character-based learning environments.

4.2 Research Contributions

From a practical perspective, the results of this study provide valuable contributions for educational practitioners, particularly teachers and school principals. Teachers can use these findings as a reference for designing lesson plans, teaching strategies, and classroom activities that integrate character education into mathematics learning. Meanwhile, school principals can utilise the results to strengthen school policies, supervision, and collaborative programs that support students' character development. Overall, this study offers practical guidance for schools seeking to implement effective 21st-century character education while maintaining the quality of mathematics learning in elementary education.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Research Limitataions

This study employed a qualitative research approach using primary data obtained through observations, interviews, and documentation. One of the main limitations of this study lies in the potential subjectivity of the researcher in interpreting the collected data. In qualitative research, the analysis and interpretation of findings are closely linked to the researcher's perspective, which may lead to differences in meaning or emphasis when describing the observed phenomena. Although data triangulation was applied to enhance the credibility of the findings, interpretative bias cannot be eliminated. In addition, the research was conducted in a single elementary school, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts with different characteristics.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Risearch Direction

For future research, it is recommended that researchers expand the study's scope by involving more schools and participants to obtain broader insights into the implementation of 21st-century character education in mathematics instruction. Future studies may also combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide more comprehensive and balanced findings. Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to deepen the theoretical fra-mework for character education and 21st-century learning competencies while developing more systematic research designs and data-collection strategies. Such efforts help produce more comprehensive evidence and strengthen understanding of how character education can be effectively integrated into subject-based learning in elementary schools.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of 21st-century character education in fourth-grade mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo is carried out through the integration of character values into the learning process. Character education is embedded in lesson planning, particularly within the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), which aligns character values with the learning objectives and mathematics materials being taught. Teachers implement these values through various student-centred learning methods in accordance with the principles of the 2013 Curriculum. Through interactive learning activities, students are encouraged to actively participate in the learning process while simultaneously developing important character traits such as self-confidence, responsibility, discipline, and cooperation.

In addition, the evaluation process in mathematics learning not only focuses on students' cognitive competence but also assesses the development of character values. Teachers evaluate student achievement by integrating 21st-century skills and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) assessments into learning activities. Observations of students'

attitudes and behaviours during the learning process also serve as an important indicator of character development. Furthermore, the use of the "Mathur Jujur" book, which records students' daily activities at school and at home, serves as an additional tool to monitor students' honesty, responsibility, and discipline.

The study also concludes that overcoming challenges in implementing character education requires collaboration between schools and families. School principals and teachers address these challenges by organising regular meetings with parents to discuss students' learning progress and any difficulties they encounter. In addition, teachers consistently serve as positive role models, encouraging students to follow school rules and develop good character. The use of the "Mathur Jujur" book, developed by the district government, further strengthens this effort by enabling teachers and parents to jointly monitor and guide students' character development both inside and outside the school.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Desti Rahayu: Conceptualization and Design; Writing - Original Draft. Sabar Narimo: Methodology, Writing - Review & Editing; Performed data collection and Analysis. Achmad Fathon: Interpretation of the results.

Declaration of Generative AI (GenAI) Usage in Scientific Writing

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence (Grammarly) tools were employed in the drafting and revision of this manuscript to check spelling and grammar, identify typos, grammatical errors, suggest paraphrases, reduce passive voice, and eliminate repeated words, sentences, and unnecessary adverbs. The suggestions provided by GenAI were critically evaluated and modified to ensure that the final draft remains representative of the authors' own work. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the IJCES GenAI Tool Usage Policy, with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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