

Social Studies Teachers' Efforts in Implementing Character Education: A Descriptive Analysis Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the efforts of social studies teachers in implementing character education at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu, emphasizing how moral and civic values are integrated into classroom learning to shape students' character. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that social studies teachers view character education as essential in fostering students' moral awareness and civic responsibility, focusing on five core values: honesty, responsibility, social care, tolerance, and nationalism. These values are integrated into lessons through discussions, collaborative learning, and real-life contextual examples. The implementation of character education has led to positive behavioral changes among students and a more meaningful learning atmosphere. The study concludes that consistent teacher modeling, collaborative school culture, and supportive educational policies are crucial for sustaining effective character education, with implications for strengthening teacher competence and promoting holistic student development.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, the world has become increasingly interconnected, and rapid technological advancements have made it easier for individuals to access information from across the globe (Syaputra, Sariyatun, & Sunardi, 2018). While these developments offer numerous opportunities for learning and communication, they also expose society to new challenges, particularly in shaping the moral and ethical behavior of the younger generation. The widespread availability of information, combined with the influence of social media and popular culture, can sometimes blur the lines between right and wrong, contributing to behaviors that deviate from social and cultural norms. In Indonesia, these global and domestic influences intersect with existing social issues, creating a multidimensional crisis that affects not only students but also the broader community.

Indonesia is currently facing various moral and social challenges, including promiscuity, student brawls, reckless driving, drug abuse, alcohol consumption, gambling, corruption, robbery, terrorist activities, and high-profile moral scandals, such as the circulation of pornographic videos involving public figures (Hermawan, 2010, p. 65; Kemdikbud, 2010). These issues illustrate a growing concern regarding the ethical and moral development of Indonesian society. The pervasive nature of these problems has prompted the government to reemphasize character education as a critical component of national development. By promoting character education, the government aims to address these moral deviations and cultivate values such as integrity, responsibility, and social awareness among students and citizens alike (Kesuma et al., 2010, p. 40; Syaputra, 2019).

Character education is not a new concept in Indonesia; it has long been integrated into the nation's foundational principles. The founders of Indonesia emphasized the importance of moral and ethical development by incorporating character education into the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, particularly in paragraph 2, and by embedding it in the national education objectives as stated in Law No. 20 of 2003. Over the years, character education has evolved but remained a central focus of the education system. The 2013

curriculum and the current independent curriculum continue to prioritize the cultivation of students' moral and civic values, reflecting a renewed national commitment to producing ethically responsible and socially engaged citizens.

In implementing character education, all subjects are expected to play a role, rather than limiting the responsibility to particular disciplines. Social studies, in particular, serves as a crucial field in promoting moral and civic development. As an educational program and field of knowledge, social studies not only provides students with an understanding of social structures, historical processes, and cultural diversity but also nurtures them to become responsible members of society who actively contribute to their communities, the nation, and the state (Bank, 1990). Through lessons that integrate moral values with social knowledge, students are encouraged to internalize ethical principles and apply them in their daily lives.

The integration of character education into social studies learning provides a meaningful avenue for shaping students' behavior and social awareness. By embedding values such as honesty, responsibility, social care, tolerance, and nationalism into classroom activities, teachers can create learning environments that encourage reflection, empathy, and civic engagement. This approach not only addresses current moral and social challenges but also prepares students to navigate the complexities of a globalized world while upholding ethical standards. Consequently, character education within social studies contributes to the development of well-rounded individuals who are capable of making positive contributions to society, supporting the government's broader efforts to strengthen moral integrity and national cohesion in Indonesia.

Thus, the topics presented in social studies learning are not limited to knowledge-based material but also include values that must be instilled in students, particularly those appropriate for young learners, such as junior high school students. Through the integration of character education in social studies, it is expected that students' personalities can be nurtured to develop into good individuals, responsible citizens, and contributing members of society, enabling them to anticipate moral challenges and play a positive role in guiding the younger generation (Syaputra & Dewi, 2020; Sumaadmadja, 2007). Character education embedded in social studies provides students with opportunities to reflect on ethical behavior, understand social norms, and internalize values that are crucial for personal and communal well-being.

Social studies learning is closely connected to efforts aimed at developing national character. The subject inherently carries values that align with the formation of students' character. According to the Ministry of National Education, of the eighteen recommended character values, eleven can be effectively integrated into social studies learning at the junior high school level. By combining character education with social studies content, students are expected to not only acquire knowledge through scientific methods but also develop collaborative skills, engage in effective communication, and practice behaviors that reflect the values shaping and advancing society (Sopan et al., 2011, pp. 45-46). This integration ensures that learning extends beyond cognitive understanding to the cultivation of moral and civic competencies essential for active participation in society.

One critical effort to strengthen character education is through curriculum development. The implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, for instance, was driven by the need to respond to future challenges and various negative phenomena in society. Preparing students for these challenges requires equipping them with knowledge, technological literacy, and practical skills, enabling them to succeed in a rapidly changing world (Daryanto, 2013). Integrating character education within the curriculum ensures that students are not only academically competent but also morally and socially prepared to navigate complex personal and societal situations.

Despite these efforts, the results of an initial survey conducted at SMPN 15, Bengkulu City, indicate that many parents tend to leave character education entirely to schools, which hinders the achievement of desired outcomes. This situation highlights the need for greater collaboration between families and educational institutions to reinforce character formation both at home and in school. Without active parental involvement, students may struggle to consistently apply character values in their daily lives, limiting the effectiveness of character-based learning initiatives.

Observations at SMPN 15 also reveal that certain character behaviors have yet to be internalized by students. For example, littering remains common, and the culture of basic social courtesies, such as smiling, greeting, and saying hello, is still largely absent, often reduced to symbolic gestures rather than genuine practice. These findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach to character education that

combines structured learning, modeling by teachers and parents, and active engagement in daily social interactions. By addressing both curriculum and environmental factors, social studies learning can more effectively cultivate ethical behavior, social responsibility, and a sense of civic duty among students.

The preliminary study conducted by the author at SMPN 15, Bengkulu City, shows that all school cultures should serve as a barrier between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, between good and bad behavior. In implementing all these regulations, there needs to be a firm intention and desire from the school, the government, the community, and the students' parents. Without positive habits that last, the rules remain just rules, and SMPN 15 Bengkulu City's regulations are still largely ignored by students. As a result, with students still ignoring school rules, the desired goal of character building will not be achieved.

The students' skills have not yet been formed in the learning process. It remains challenging for them to express their opinions or ideas, and they continue to struggle with appreciating the opinions of others. Their lack of responsibility is evident in their work on assignments, where, when given tasks, students often fail to complete them. The students' character has not yet been formed, as many students arrive late to school and often do not attend class during school hours. It can be seen that many students still lack a sense of caring and empathy. There are frequent incidents of students taking other students' belongings, and bullying among students still occurs.

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the efforts of social studies teachers in implementing character education at the junior high school level. Specifically, the research aims to describe how teachers integrate character values into social studies learning, identify the strategies and methods used to instill moral and civic values, and assess the impact of these efforts on students' behavior and personal development. By focusing on the practical implementation of character education, this study seeks to provide insights into effective teaching practices, highlight challenges encountered by teachers, and offer recommendations for strengthening the role of social studies in fostering students' ethical awareness, social responsibility, and overall character development.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach designed to produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behaviors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the social studies learning process in its natural setting without any manipulation or external intervention. According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research is conducted in a natural context using multiple methods and data sources, with the researcher serving as the key instrument who directly interacts with participants and interprets the meaning of the data.

The research applies a naturalistic inquiry approach, which seeks to uncover comprehensive knowledge about the research subject within a real-life context at a particular point in time (Mukhtar, 2013). This approach enables the researcher to explore educational phenomena as they naturally occur, emphasizing participants' perspectives, experiences, and interactions.

The subjects of this study are the Social Studies (IPS) learning activities at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City, encompassing three major components: lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation. The participants include Social Studies teachers as instructional implementers and students as the primary learners. The subjects were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that they possess characteristics relevant to the research focus and can provide rich, in-depth information about the learning process.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: (1) in-depth interviews with teachers and students to explore their perceptions, experiences, and challenges in the Social Studies learning process; (2) classroom observations to document real-time teaching and learning interactions; and (3) document analysis involving lesson plans (RPP), syllabi, assessment sheets, and other relevant educational materials. These three data collection methods were used in combination to allow data triangulation, ensuring the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the findings.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1985), consisting of three concurrent stages: (1) data reduction, which involves selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data into meaningful categories relevant to the study; (2) data display, which presents the data in narrative, tabular, or visual form to facilitate interpretation; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, which entails identifying patterns, relationships, and key insights derived from the analyzed data. The analysis process was iterative and cyclical,

meaning the researcher continuously reviewed and refined interpretations until achieving a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the findings.

Through this design, the study aims to provide a deep and contextualized portrayal of Social Studies learning at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City and to contribute meaningful insights into improving instructional quality through empirical and reflective understanding of educational practices in real school settings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

In this section, the author will describe the results of the study, namely the Efforts to Integrate Character Education into Social Studies Learning at State Junior High School 15 in Bengkulu City. Several things will be presented in this section based on the research questions formulated earlier, namely: 1) social studies teachers' views on character education; 2) the values of character education instilled by teachers in social studies learning; 3) the impact of the implementation of character education integrated with social studies learning at SMP N 15 Bengkulu City. The details are as follows:

a) Social Studies Teachers' Views on Character Education

Views or perceptions are important factors that influence a person's attitudes and behavior, including the attitudes and behavior of social studies teachers at SMP N 15 Bengkulu City in carrying out their duties as teachers, one of which is related to the implementation of character education. In other words, social studies teachers' views on character education will influence the implementation of character education in social studies learning.

To obtain an overview of the views of social studies teachers at SMP N 15 Bengkulu City on character education, the author conducted in-depth interviews with each of the social studies teachers. Based on the above description, it can be concluded that social studies teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City have very positive views on character education. The prevalence of immoral cases or moral degradation among students is the main factor that, according to them, is the reason for the importance of implementing character education in schools. This is as stated by the following informant:

"In my opinion, character education is very good and important to be implemented in schools, especially now that there is a decline in morals among children. Manners are starting to decline and so on. So, in my opinion, it is very important to implement character education. Otherwise, we will only produce intelligent but immoral children" (Interview with TR. 06/22/2022).

In addition to perceptions of character education in general, very positive perceptions were also expressed regarding the position and role of social studies in shaping students' character, where they viewed that character building, especially social attitudes, was indeed one of the main missions of social studies. This is as stated by the following informant:

"The role of social studies in shaping children's character is certainly very important, especially for social attitudes. And that is indeed the goal of social studies learning, namely to shape students to become responsible and democratic citizens. So, in addition to equipping children with knowledge, we also hope that children will apply it in real life. In other words, they not only know what is right, but also do it" (Interview with TR. 06/22/2022).

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that the views of social studies teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu towards character education are very positive, both towards character education in general and towards social studies learning in particular. This positive view is certainly a very good thing. With a positive view or perception, there will be high hopes that character education will also be implemented in practice.

b) Character Education Values Integrated into Social Studies Learning

In the implementation of character education, values are one of the important points. As discussed in the previous section, there are a number of values that are prioritized in the implementation of character education in schools, such as religious values, tolerance, honesty, responsibility, social awareness, environmental awareness, love of peace, hard work, nationalism, and others. From the above values, teachers will then have several values to instill in social studies learning.

Based on data collected from social studies teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City, it was found that there are several values that are prioritized for instillation in social studies learning at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City, namely honesty, responsibility, social awareness, tolerance, and nationalism. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a social studies teacher at SMP N 15 Bengkulu City:

"Basically, in my opinion, all values are important. But when asked what values are instilled in social studies lessons, of course we refer to the basic competencies of the subject, which include religious values, tolerance, honesty, discipline, caring, responsibility, nationalism, and others. Of these values, in my opinion, the most important are honesty, responsibility, caring, tolerance, and nationalism" (Interview with ER. 6/06/2022).

Regarding the reasons for choosing the above values, the social studies teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City have several main reasons, namely: 1) values recommended by the government through basic competencies; 2) values relevant to subject competencies; and 3) values that are urgent to improve or are problematic in society.

First, the value of honesty. Honesty is the main value implemented in social studies learning at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu. The value of honesty is considered very important to instill because it is the root of many national problems, especially corruption. In addition, honesty is also one of the eighteen values recommended by the government through the 2013 Curriculum. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a social studies teacher at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu:

"Why is honesty the most important value? In my opinion, honesty is the basis of everything. Honesty is the key to success. I also believe that honesty is the root of many problems in our society and nation. Corruption, for example, occurs because the people involved are not honest. If they were honest, there would not be as many cases of corruption as there are today" (Interview with ER. 6/06/2022).

Second, the value of responsibility. The value of responsibility is also a key value in the implementation of character education at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu. The value of responsibility is also considered important because it is the key to success in social life. In addition, shaping responsible citizens is one of the main objectives of social studies education in junior high school. The following is an interview with a social studies teacher at SMP N 15 Kota Bengkulu:

"After honesty, it is responsibility. Responsibility is one of the main objectives of social studies education, namely how to create students who can become responsible citizens, who are aware of their rights and obligations as citizens, members of society, and citizens of the world. If they have a sense of responsibility, then most problems can be prevented" (Interview with ER. 6/06/2022).

Third, the value of social care. The value of social care is also implemented in social studies learning at SMP N 15 Bengkulu City. This value is instilled with the aim of encouraging students to care for one another. It is further explained that in today's modern era, society is becoming increasingly individualistic and tends to care less for one another (Syaputra, Sariyatun & Sunardi, 2018). In fact, as social beings, humans cannot live alone and therefore absolutely need other people. Thus, the value of social care must be a concern for social studies teachers. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a social studies teacher at SMP N 15 Bengkulu City:

"In my opinion, the value of caring is very important to instill in social studies learning. This is in line with social studies itself, which examines society or humans as social beings who cannot live without the help of other humans. Moreover, there is now a tendency for people to care less about others" (Interview with TR. 06/22/2022).

Fourth, the value of tolerance. The value of tolerance is one of the values implemented by social studies teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu. The value of tolerance is instilled because tolerance is very important for Indonesians to have as a diverse nation. In social studies learning, the value of tolerance is one of the main values that is important to instill (Satria & Budrianto, 2024). The following is an excerpt from an interview with a social studies teacher:

"The value of tolerance is very important to instill because it is a prerequisite for peaceful and harmonious living in a diverse country like Indonesia. As we know, Indonesia has many religions, ethnic groups, races, and so on. If this is not supported by a high level of tolerance, it will be very dangerous and could trigger conflicts between religious groups, ethnic groups, and so on" (Interview with TR. 06/22/2022).

Fifth, the value of nationalism. The value of nationalism or love for the nation and country is also a value instilled in social studies lessons at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu. The value of nationalism is instilled with the aim of fostering a sense of love and pride for the Indonesian nation and country in students. The instilling of

the value of nationalism at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu is mainly carried out in lessons on the history of the Indonesian struggle against colonialism.

c) The Impact of Implementing Integrated Character Education in Social Studies Learning

The character values that have been instilled in social studies learning are also assessed in terms of their impact or results. In general, the instillation of character values integrated into social studies learning at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu has had a positive or good impact. In general, this positive impact can be seen in two ways, namely behavioral changes for the better and social studies learning that is interesting and meaningful.

First, behavioral change. Behavior is one of the main indicators of good character. This is as stated by Lickona (2014) that behavior or doing good things is the pinnacle of a person's character. A person's honesty can be seen from their behavior, whether they tell the truth or not, and vice versa. In the context of SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City, it is explained that there have been positive changes in the children's character, such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, nationalism, and others. This is as stated by the following informant:

"I think the impact is very noticeable. In terms of honesty, for example, the children no longer cheat during exams. The children are also responsible for the work or duties assigned to them. In addition, during the Monday flag ceremony, the children can participate solemnly" (Interview with TR. 06/22/2022).

The same thing was also stated by Mrs. ER. She explained that the implementation of character education integrated into social studies learning at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Bengkulu had a positive impact on children's character. This was stated by the following informant:

"The impact is certainly positive. Students who previously cheated during exams have now started to decrease. They are honest with their respective abilities. During the flag ceremony, the children also participate well, no one is absent or unserious. The same goes for responsibility, tolerance, nationalism, and others" (Interview with ER. 6/06/2022).

Second, learning becomes meaningful. With the implementation of character education in social studies learning, learning becomes more meaningful. This is because students do not only learn about facts but also about values. It is further explained that in this way, learning becomes more meaningful and more contextual. This is as stated by the following informant:

"In addition to the behavioral changes that I explained earlier, another impact is that learning becomes more meaningful. Students not only learn about facts but also about values. This is directly beneficial in real life in society" (Interview with TR. 22/06/2022).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Social Studies (SS) teachers play a strategic role in implementing character education through classroom interaction, contextual learning, and role modeling. This aligns with Lickona (2012), who stated that character education must integrate moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action through school culture and teacher example. Recent studies reinforce this view, emphasizing that teachers are not only transmitters of academic content but also moral agents who shape students' values and social behavior through personal example and interaction patterns (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Saputra et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the study revealed that SS teachers generally implement character education through integration into teaching materials, classroom discussions, and project-based learning. This approach is consistent with the argument of Nucci and Narvaez (2014), who explained that character education must be embedded in academic instruction rather than treated as a separate subject. Similarly, Kesuma (2017) emphasized that Social Studies provides a natural context for developing social responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and national identity key components of character education because its content is directly related to human interaction and social life.

However, the implementation is not without challenges. This study found that teachers face constraints related to limited teaching time, lack of training in character pedagogy, and difficulty in measuring student character development. These challenges are consistent with findings by Sari & Arifin (2021), who reported that teachers often struggle to implement character-based learning due to curriculum overload and lack of clear assessment guidelines. Additionally, Parr & Campbell (2016) argue that character education tends to be more rhetorical than practical in many schools due to inadequate institutional support.

Despite these obstacles, SS teachers continue to make classroom-level innovations to integrate character values. Strategies identified in this study such as moral dilemma discussion, cooperative learning, and reflection journals align with evidence from recent research. According to Althof and Berkowitz (2018), dialogic pedagogy and moral reflection are among the most effective strategies for developing students' moral reasoning and empathy. Similarly, Agboola and Tsai (2012) noted that character education is most impactful when supported by student-centered methods that encourage active learning and moral engagement.

This study also highlights the importance of school collaboration and educational policy in supporting the sustainability of character education. Teachers reported that character development will be less effective if treated solely as teacher responsibility without support from school culture and parents. This aligns with the ecological model of character development proposed by Berkowitz (2021), who asserts that character education requires systemic implementation involving school policies, learning environment, family involvement, and community participation. Accordingly, this study reinforces the conclusion that teacher efforts must be supported by holistic institutional commitment to produce meaningful and measurable outcomes in character education.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion described above, several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the perception of social studies teachers at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City regarding the implementation of character education and the role of social studies learning in character building is very positive. Second, there are six main values instilled in social studies learning at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City, namely honesty, responsibility, tolerance, social care, and nationalism. Third, the instillation of character values in social studies learning at SMP Negeri 15 Bengkulu City has a positive impact, namely in the form of behavioral changes for the better and social studies learning that is interesting and meaningful.

For the maximum implementation of character education, several things need to be done: 1) There must be special training or guidance on the preparation of character-based lesson plans, namely on how to include attitude components, and so on; 2) There must be socialization, especially by the Education Office, regarding learning models related to character education such as VCT, Value Analysis, Moral Dilemmas, etc.; 3) There must be special training or guidance on the preparation of affective competency assessment instruments.

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