

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AT SEKOLAH ALAM UNGARAN

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Keywords: <i>Marketing Plan; Digital Branding, STP; Institutional Image; Early Childhood Education.</i> How to quote: xxx.xxxx.xxxx DOI: https://doi.org/xxx.xxxx.xxxx	<i>Character education is an essential aspect of early childhood education as it plays a significant role in shaping children's attitudes, behaviors, and personalities during their golden age of development. This study aims to describe the implementation of character education for early childhood students at Sekolah Alam Ungaran, covering planning, implementation, evaluation, supporting factors, and inhibiting factors. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. The findings revealed that character education at Sekolah Alam Ungaran is integrated into all learning activities through habituation, teacher role modeling, and nature-based learning. The character values developed include religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, independence, cooperation, environmental awareness, and politeness. Character education is continuously evaluated through observations of children's behavioral development. The successful implementation of character education is supported by the commitment of the principal and teachers, a nature-based learning environment, consistent habituation programs, and strong collaboration with parents. Meanwhile, the main challenges include differences in parenting styles, the diverse characteristics of children, limited parental involvement in reinforcing character development at home, and the considerable time required to establish consistent character habits. In conclusion, the implementation of character education at Sekolah Alam Ungaran demonstrates that nature-based learning, supported by habituation, teacher role modeling, and collaboration between the school and families, is an effective strategy for fostering character development in early childhood.</i>

A. Introduction

Character education is one of the fundamental components of educational practice, particularly in Early Childhood Education (ECE) (Unjunan & Budiartati, 2020). Early childhood is widely recognized as the golden age of human development, during which children's cognitive, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual capacities develop rapidly (Bonita et al., 2022). Therefore, instilling character values from an early age serves as a crucial foundation for nurturing children who are morally upright, responsible, independent, disciplined, honest, and respectful toward both the environment and others.

Character education is not solely the responsibility of families; it also constitutes an essential component of the educational process within schools (Indramawan, 2020). Early Childhood Education institutions play a strategic role in fostering positive habits through meaningful learning experiences, the establishment of daily routines, teachers' exemplary conduct, and learning environments that support children's character development (Alammy et al., 2025). When implemented consistently, character education enables children to internalize moral values and integrate them into their everyday behavior.

One institution that has successfully adopted an integrated approach to character education is Sekolah Alam Ungaran. The school implements a nature-based learning approach that utilizes the natural environment as both a learning resource and a medium for cultivating character values. Through a variety of outdoor activities, experiential learning, habitual practices, and teacher role modeling, children are encouraged to develop responsibility, cooperation, environmental awareness, respect for others, and independence from an early age (Margaretha et al., 2024).

A nature-based learning approach provides children with opportunities to learn directly through authentic experiences (Ningsih et al., 2021). Interaction with the natural environment not only enhances children's cognitive development but also promotes environmental stewardship, gratitude, discipline, courage, and problem-solving skills. Consequently, character education is not merely delivered through theoretical instruction but is embedded in meaningful daily experiences that allow children to practice and internalize positive values in authentic contexts.

Despite its importance, the implementation of character education in Early Childhood Education institutions continues to face several challenges. These include differences in parenting practices among families, the diverse characteristics of individual children, and the need to maintain consistency between character education at school and at home. Therefore, effective and sustainable character development requires well-designed strategies supported by strong collaboration among schools, families, and the wider community.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the implementation of character education for young children at Sekolah Alam Ungaran, focusing on the processes of planning, implementation, and evaluation, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the implementation of character education. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of effective character education models for Early Childhood Education institutions, particularly those adopting a nature-based learning approach.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design (Sugiyono, 2013). A qualitative approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of character education for young children at Sekolah Alam Ungaran, focusing on the processes of planning, implementation, evaluation, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation.

The research was conducted at Sekolah Alam Ungaran, located in Semarang Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The research participants consisted of the principal, classroom teachers, and parents of the children. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the consideration that they were directly involved in the implementation of character education within the school. The object of the study was the implementation of character education for young children as reflected in both classroom learning activities and daily habituation practices.

Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine learning activities, character-building practices, and interactions between teachers and children in their natural educational setting. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the principal, teachers, and parents to obtain comprehensive information regarding the planning, implementation, evaluation, and challenges associated with the implementation of character education. Documentation, including photographs of school activities, instructional materials, activity schedules, and institutional documents, was used as supporting evidence to strengthen the credibility of the research findings.

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source triangulation and method triangulation. According to (Sugiyono, 2013), source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the principal, teachers, and parents, whereas method triangulation involved comparing findings derived from interviews, observations, and documentation. The application of these triangulation techniques enhanced the credibility and reliability of the data collected.

This study was conducted in accordance with established research ethics principles. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the institution, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participants' identities were kept confidential, participation was entirely voluntary, and all collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study was expected to produce findings that are credible, objective, and respectful of the rights and dignity of all participants.

C. Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that the implementation of character education for young children at Sekolah Alam Ungaran is systematically integrated into all learning activities and daily habituation practices. Character education is not taught as a separate subject; rather, it is embedded throughout every activity designed and implemented by the school. Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, the implementation of character education encompasses five main components: planning, implementation, evaluation, supporting factors, and inhibiting factors.

1. Planning of Character Education

Character education is planned by integrating character values into the curriculum, teaching modules, and daily lesson plans. Teachers design learning objectives that focus not only on children's cognitive development but also on fostering positive attitudes and behaviors. The core character values emphasized include religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, independence, environmental stewardship, cooperation, and courtesy. The principal stated:

"At the beginning of each semester, we design learning activities that include specific targets for children's character development. Every learning activity is therefore intended not only to enhance children's knowledge but also to cultivate positive habits and behaviors."

This statement demonstrates that the school systematically develops a variety of routine habituation activities, including collective prayers, environmental clean-up activities, cooperative games, and outdoor learning experiences, all of which are designed to promote character development.

2. Implementation of Character Education

Character education is implemented through nature-based learning and daily habituation activities. Children learn directly through authentic experiences, enabling them to understand and apply character values more effectively in their everyday lives. The principal explained:

"Children develop a stronger sense of responsibility when they are assigned tasks such as watering plants or organizing playground equipment. At first, they need reminders, but over time they begin to perform these tasks independently without being asked."

The study identified several forms of character education implemented at Sekolah Alam Ungaran, including:

- a. Praying before and after learning activities as a means of fostering religious values.*
- b. Greeting others, asking for permission, and expressing gratitude to cultivate courtesy and respectful behavior.*
- c. Cleaning classrooms and the school environment together to develop responsibility and environmental awareness.*
- d. Participating in group play activities to strengthen cooperation, tolerance, and communication skills.*
- e. Returning learning materials and play equipment after use to reinforce discipline and responsibility.*

Teachers serve as positive role models by consistently demonstrating appropriate behavior, guiding children in resolving conflicts, and reinforcing desirable behaviors through praise, encouragement, and positive motivation.

3. Evaluation of Character Education

Character education is evaluated continuously through systematic observations of children's behavioral development during learning activities. Teachers employ anecdotal records, observation checklists, and documentation of children's activities to monitor each child's developmental progress.

One teacher explained:

"We assess not only children's academic learning outcomes but also changes in their behavior, such as whether they are willing to share, help their friends, or take responsibility for their assigned tasks."

The evaluation results indicate that most children have demonstrated significant positive behavioral development. They have become more independent in completing assigned tasks, more cooperative when interacting with peers, more disciplined in following classroom rules, and more concerned about maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment. Evaluation findings are also communicated regularly to parents to strengthen collaboration in supporting children's character development at home.

4. Supporting Factors

The study identified several factors that contribute to the successful implementation of character education at Sekolah Alam Ungaran, including:

- a. The strong commitment of the principal and teachers to consistently implement character education.*
- b. A nature-based learning environment that supports contextual and experiential learning.*
- c. Teachers' exemplary conduct in their daily interactions with children.*
- d. Routine and sustainable habituation programs that reinforce positive behaviors.*
- e. Effective collaboration between the school and parents.*

One parent stated:

"Since attending this school, my child has become accustomed to putting away toys independently and even reminds other family members to dispose of their waste properly."

The natural environment serves as an authentic learning resource, providing meaningful experiences that facilitate the internalization of character values in a natural and sustainable manner.

5. Inhibiting Factors

The findings also revealed several challenges affecting the implementation of character education, including:

- a. Differences in parenting styles and children's habitual behaviors within their family environments.*
- b. Variations in children's individual characteristics, abilities, and developmental levels.*
- c. The limited involvement of some parents in reinforcing character-building practices at home.*
- d. The considerable amount of time required to develop consistent habits and lasting character traits among young children.*

The principal remarked:

"Our greatest challenge is ensuring that the positive habits developed at school are consistently reinforced at home. Therefore, we continuously maintain communication with parents."

Despite these challenges, the school continues to strengthen collaboration with parents through

regular communication and parenting programs, ensuring that children's character development is consistently supported across both school and family environments.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the implementation of character education at Sekolah Alam Ungaran has been effectively integrated into all learning activities through the incorporation of character values into daily educational practices. The nature-based learning approach, positive habituation, teachers' exemplary conduct, and the supportive school environment collectively constitute the primary factors contributing to the successful development of young children's character. These findings suggest that character education is most effective when implemented holistically through meaningful daily experiences and sustained collaboration among schools, families, and the wider community.



Picture 1.1 Documentation of Interviews Conducted at PAUD Saung

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of character education at Sekolah Alam Ungaran is comprehensively integrated into all learning activities. Rather than being taught as a separate subject, character education is embedded in every activity undertaken by the children. These findings demonstrate that character formation is implemented holistically through habituation, teacher role modeling, and meaningful learning experiences acquired by children throughout their daily activities at school. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by (Cahyani & Rabarjo, 2021), which reported that character education at PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran is implemented through habituation integrated into all learning activities, enabling character values to develop naturally.

During the planning stage, Sekolah Alam Ungaran systematically integrates character values into its curriculum, teaching modules, and daily lesson plans. Core values such as religiosity, discipline, responsibility, honesty, independence, cooperation, environmental stewardship, and courtesy are incorporated into the intended learning outcomes. Interviews with the principal revealed that every learning activity is deliberately designed to support children's character development alongside their academic growth. These findings are consistent with the research of (Ruhaina et al., 2019), which explains that character education planning should be conducted systematically through the development of instructional programs, the allocation of teachers' responsibilities, and periodic program evaluations to ensure that character education is implemented in a structured and purposeful manner.

The implementation of character education at Sekolah Alam Ungaran is carried out through a nature-based learning approach combined with daily habituation practices. Activities such as praying before and after learning sessions, greeting others, maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment, participating in collaborative group activities, and organizing learning materials and play equipment are consistently incorporated into children's daily routines. According to the principal, children develop a stronger sense of responsibility when they

are given opportunities to engage directly in authentic tasks, such as watering plants and organizing playground equipment. This finding supports the study by (Wulansari & Sugito, 2016), which concluded that nature-based learning provides authentic learning experiences that not only enhance the quality of learning but also foster the character development of young children.

In addition to habituation practices, teachers play a crucial role as role models in shaping children's character. Teachers not only provide guidance but also consistently demonstrate discipline, courtesy, honesty, and environmental responsibility throughout the learning process. Their exemplary behavior serves as a concrete model that young children can easily imitate, as children at this developmental stage primarily learn through observation and imitation. These findings are in line with the study by (Widyastuti & Rifmasari, 2025), which emphasizes that Early Childhood Education teachers function not only as educators but also as role models, instructional designers, and educational consultants who foster children's character through consistent modeling and habituation.

Character education is evaluated continuously through systematic observations of children's behavioral development. Teachers utilize anecdotal records, observation sheets, and documentation to monitor each child's character development over time. Interviews with teachers revealed that evaluation extends beyond academic achievement to include behavioral changes, such as children's willingness to share, cooperate with peers, assist others, and take responsibility for assigned tasks. These findings support the study conducted by (Cahyani & Raharjo, 2021), which states that character education should be evaluated by observing behavioral changes as indicators of the effectiveness of habituation practices implemented within the school environment.

The successful implementation of character education at Sekolah Alam Ungaran is influenced by several supporting factors, including the strong commitment of the principal and teachers, a nature-based learning environment, consistent habituation programs, and effective collaboration with parents. Interviews with parents indicated that the positive habits developed at school have gradually been transferred to children's behavior at home. This finding demonstrates that character formation is influenced not only by educational institutions but also by the active involvement of families. These results are consistent with the findings of (Ruhaina et al., 2019), which emphasize that the success of character education programs depends on strong collaboration among schools, teachers, parents, and supportive learning environments.

Despite these strengths, the study also identified several challenges affecting the implementation of character education. These include differences in parenting practices, the diverse characteristics and developmental levels of children, and the limited involvement of some parents in reinforcing character-building habits at home. Interviews with the principal revealed that maintaining consistency between character education at school and within the family environment remains the greatest challenge. This finding is consistent with the study by (Cahyani & Raharjo, 2021), which identified external factors—particularly family environments and children's evolving developmental characteristics—as major obstacles to the successful implementation of character education through habituation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the implementation of character education at Sekolah Alam Ungaran has been successfully integrated into all learning activities through the incorporation of character values across the educational process. The nature-based learning approach, consistent habituation practices, teachers' exemplary conduct, and strong collaboration between the school and parents constitute the primary factors supporting the successful development of young children's character. These findings reinforce the view that character education is most effective when implemented through a holistic approach that combines meaningful learning experiences,

continuous habituation, and active collaboration among schools, families, and the wider educational community to support children's overall character development.

D. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that PAUD Sekolah Alam Ungaran (PAUD Saung) has successfully incorporated the principles of Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) into its day-to-day operational practices, although these strategies have not yet been formally documented as an independent marketing strategy at the institutional level. The institution has established a strong unique selling proposition (USP) through its distinctive nature-based and outdoor learning approach, which clearly differentiates it from other early childhood education institutions.

The institution's sustainability and relatively stable student enrollment are strongly supported by its substantial social capital, reflected in the close collaboration and mutual cooperation established with parents. This strength has been reinforced through conventional word-of-mouth marketing, personalized printed promotional materials, and community-based social initiatives such as Forum Ibu Saung. Collectively, these strategies have played a significant role in strengthening public trust and maintaining the institution's positive reputation within the community.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal several critical challenges. The most significant limitations include the institution's continued dependence on the foundation's macro-level policies and the underutilization of digital marketing. The official social media account dedicated to the PAUD unit has remained inactive for the past two years because the promotion of flagship programs continues to be centralized through the foundation's digital platforms. Furthermore, documentation of children's daily learning activities and creative experiences has been shared only within internal WhatsApp groups for parents, preventing these valuable activities from being disseminated through public digital channels and limiting the institution's broader online visibility.

Therefore, although PAUD Saung has successfully established a positive institutional image and maintained relatively stable student enrollment, the institution needs to adopt a more structured and sustainable marketing strategy. This can be achieved through the active, consistent, independent, and integrated management of social media platforms at the institutional level. Strengthening its digital branding strategy is expected to expand the dissemination of institutional information, increase public engagement, and further enhance the institution's image and reputation among the wider community.

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