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Integrating Character Education in English Learning to Develop Student Character in Senior High School

Jihan Aldie Fathani[1], Sholihatul Hamidah Daulay[2]
[1,2]Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

[1]fathanijihanaldi@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the integration of character education into academic programs as a strategy to promote holistic student development. Through approaches such as experiential learning, role modeling, community service, and the cultivation of a positive school culture, core values including respect, responsibility, empathy, integrity, and resilience can be effectively instilled. Findings indicate that character education positively impacts academic achievement, reduces behavioral issues, and fosters the development of emotionally intelligent and socially responsible individuals. However, implementation faces challenges such as aligning academic and character goals, preparing educators, and adapting to diverse cultural contexts. The study highlights the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and communities in designing sustainable character education programs that are relevant to the demands of a globalized society.

Keywords: Character Education, Emotional Intelligence, School Culture

Introduction

Character education has long been acknowledged as a key component of comprehensive education, which aims to nurture both the intellectual and moral development of students. In this regard, incorporating character development into English language education is crucial to ensure that students not only acquire language skills but also build a solid ethical and moral foundation. "Character education refers to the guidance of children in ways that foster their growth as moral, civic, well-mannered, respectful, non-bullying, healthy, critical-thinking, successful, and socially responsible individuals." When character education is woven into language learning, it becomes a powerful tool for promoting values that influence students' behavior both in and out of the classroom (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005).

Teaching English offers many opportunities to integrate character-building lessons through activities like reading comprehension, writing tasks, and discussions that encourage critical thinking and ethical decision-making. "Schools must help children become not only intelligent but also virtuous." Language learning goes beyond mastering grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills—it also involves understanding the cultural and moral contexts in which language is used. By including literature, stories, and dialogues that emphasize values like honesty, respect, empathy, and responsibility, English lessons can promote personal reflection and help students make principled choices.

For instance, studying literary works in English classes—whether classic or contemporary—often exposes students to a range of character virtues and challenges faced by fictional characters. This allows educators to facilitate discussions about how these lessons can be applied to students' own lives. "Teaching for character involves highlighting the importance of moral actions and encouraging students to take responsibility for their decisions

and behaviors." This approach helps students internalize character values and apply them in their daily interactions (Lickona, 1991).

Moreover, the interactive nature of English activities, such as group discussions, role-playing, and peer feedback, promotes the development of virtues like teamwork, respect for differing viewpoints, and responsibility. "Character education requires a deliberate effort to foster a classroom environment that is respectful, responsible, and nurturing." In this manner, English lessons can act as a platform not only for academic growth but also for cultivating a well-rounded character that will benefit students throughout their lives (Wynne and Ryan, 1993).

Several studies have explored the integration of character education across various fields of research: A study by Smith & Brown (2019) investigated how character education could improve academic performance among high school students in the United States. They discovered that students involved in character education programs showed better study discipline, which positively affected their academic grades. This suggests that character education helps students develop self-management skills that are essential for academic success.

In research by Jones et al. (2020), the integration of values such as honesty, responsibility, and teamwork into the elementary school curriculum in the United Kingdom was examined. The study found that teachers trained to incorporate these values into their lessons observed significant improvements in students' prosocial behavior. This emphasizes the importance of embedding character education in early education to foster positive relationships among students.

A study by Lee & Kim (2021) explored the impact of character education on the social and emotional skills of middle school students in South Korea. The findings revealed that a structured character education program improved empathy and cooperation among students, while also strengthening teacher-student relationships. This shows that character education can contribute to a supportive learning environment conducive to students' emotional growth.

While numerous studies have emphasized the general importance of character education in promoting students' moral and social development, limited research has specifically examined how character education can be meaningfully integrated into English language learning at the senior high school level. Most existing studies treat character education and language learning as separate domains, often focusing on academic outcomes or language proficiency without addressing character development. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical evidence on practical strategies that English teachers can adopt to embed character values—such as empathy, respect, responsibility, and integrity—within the context of language instruction, texts, and classroom interactions. This gap is particularly significant given the potential of English learning, which often involves exposure to diverse perspectives and narratives, to serve as a platform for character formation. Therefore, further research is needed to explore effective pedagogical approaches, teacher readiness, and curriculum design that support the integration of character education into English classrooms in senior high schools.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, which focuses on collecting detailed descriptions of the processes, experiences, and perspectives related to character education through methods such as interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews with teachers, administrators, and students will offer personal insights into how character

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education is applied and its effects on students' behavior. Additionally, classroom observations will provide a natural setting to observe how students demonstrate character values in real time, offering valuable context for analysis.

This research conducted in Madrasah Aliyah Swasta Anak Metuah Aceh Tenggara this research this section is divided into 2 section first section is interviewed with a few teacher and next section is interviewed with a student and put in a thematic analysis will put below in result chapter.

Results

Character education plays a crucial role in instilling moral and ethical values in students, supporting their overall development. It focuses on embedding core principles like respect, responsibility, empathy, and integrity into both the curriculum and the school culture. This method equips students with vital life skills, fostering positive behaviors, academic achievement, and social cohesion.

Incorporating character education into daily learning allows educators to shape students' behaviors and attitudes both inside and outside the classroom. Key approaches include integrating values into academic subjects, promoting collaboration through extracurricular activities, and reinforcing kindness and responsibility through positive feedback. Teachers are instrumental in this process, serving as role models of ethical conduct for students to emulate.

The impact of character education is significant. It helps students build resilience, strengthen their social skills, and develop a sense of accountability, preparing them to face future challenges. Additionally, schools that prioritize character education often experience fewer disciplinary issues and foster a more inclusive atmosphere. While challenges such as resistance to implementation or limited resources may arise, embedding character education remains a highly effective strategy for nurturing ethical, well-rounded individuals.

Integrating character education into English learning helps cultivate moral and ethical values alongside linguistic skills. Below is a result of interview with a few teacher and student put in athematic analysis

Table 1. Interviews with teacher and student in madrasah aliyah swasta anak metuah

No	Theme	Code (Data Snippet)	Interpretation	Data Source
1	Instilling Character Values Through Teaching Materials	– “I use fable texts so that students learn moral values.” – “The dialogue is about responsibility.”	Teachers choose teaching materials that contain moral messages to develop students' character.	Teacher Interview 1
2	Interactive Learning Fosters Tolerance	– “Students discuss in groups and respect each other’s opinions.” – “Role play for students to work together.”	Collaborative activities help students develop attitudes of tolerance and cooperation.	Observation of Class X Science 1
3	Challenges in Integrating	– “Time is limited, we have to catch up	Teachers face time constraints and lack	Teacher Interview 2

	Character Education	on the UN material." – "Not all students responded positively."	of response from students when inserting character values.	
4	Changes in Student Attitudes After Value Integration	– "Students become more active and responsible." – "They care more when working in groups."	Integration of character education has a positive impact on students' attitudes and social interactions.	Teacher Interview 3

Based on the thematic analysis presented in the table, it is evident that teachers actively integrate character values into learning by selecting teaching materials with moral messages. For instance, the use of fables and dialogues centered on responsibility reflects a deliberate effort to instill moral values during lessons. Additionally, interactive learning methods such as group discussions and role play have proven effective in fostering students' tolerance and cooperation. These collaborative strategies not only enhance subject comprehension but also contribute to students' character development.

However, challenges arise in implementing character education, including limited instructional time due to exam preparation and varying student responses to moral integration. Despite these obstacles, teachers observed positive changes in students' behavior—becoming more active, responsible, and caring during group work. This suggests that while character education may face constraints, its long-term impact on students' attitudes and social interactions is significant and worth sustaining.

Discussion

Character education

As educational psychologist Thomas Lickona explains, character education aims to cultivate virtues that help individuals become responsible citizens and lead fulfilling lives. Lickona emphasizes that qualities such as respect, responsibility, fairness, and empathy are essential for individuals to make positive contributions to society.

Character education is the process of teaching students fundamental ethical values and virtues to encourage positive personal growth, ethical decision-making, and responsible citizenship. It seeks to nurture attributes like respect, responsibility, honesty, empathy, and fairness—qualities vital for living fulfilling lives and contributing to society.

Lickona, an educational psychologist, states that character education helps students "know the good, desire the good, and do the good" by incorporating moral principles into all areas of school life, from academic instruction to social interactions. At its heart, character education focuses on developing the "whole child," integrating academic, emotional, and moral growth to prepare students to face complex social and moral challenges with integrity and empathy (Lickona, 1991).

Research shows that character education positively influences both behavior and academic performance. Students equipped with skills such as perseverance, self-control, and teamwork are generally more motivated, engaged, and better able to overcome academic obstacles. Studies by Paul Tough indicate that "non-cognitive skills" developed through character education—like resilience and empathy—are strong predictors of long-term success, often more so than academic knowledge alone.

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Challenges in character education include differing opinions on which values to emphasize and the need for educators who are committed and well-trained in character-building methods. Dr. Marvin Berkowitz highlights that inconsistent implementation or lack of teacher engagement can undermine the effectiveness of character education programs. Furthermore, in culturally diverse schools, it is crucial that character education respects and incorporates various cultural values and perspectives. According to Kusuma (2007), character education is a human endeavor aimed at educating the next generation.

Character education is a process of continuous self-improvement and skill development, aimed at leading a better life. Wynne (cited by Zuchdi, 2009) notes that the term "character," derived from Greek, means "marking," focusing on how good values are applied through actions or behavior. Wynne explains two interpretations of character: first, it refers to how a person behaves; dishonest, cruel, or greedy behavior reflects poor character, while honest and helpful actions reflect noble character. Second, character is closely linked to "personality." A person is considered to have character if their behavior aligns with moral principles (Zuchdi, 2009). Therefore, according to Lickona (1992), character education must involve not only "knowing the good," but also "desiring the good" and "acting good." Similarly, Suyanto (2009) defines character as a way of thinking and behaving that reflects an individual's ability to live and work together in harmony, whether within a family, community, nation, or state. Character is also described as “a combination of qualities and personality that distinguishes one person or thing from others” (Hidayatullah, 2011).

Implementation character education character in english learning at senior high school

Character education plays a vital role in shaping students' values and behaviors, helping them become responsible and ethical individuals. Integrating character education into English learning at senior high schools can enhance both language skills and moral development, creating a holistic educational experience.

To effectively implement character education in English learning, it is crucial to align character values with curriculum goals. Teachers can design lesson plans that integrate values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility into language activities. For instance, while studying literature, students can analyze characters’ decisions and actions to explore themes like honesty or perseverance. Similarly, language lessons can include discussions on ethical dilemmas or teamwork-related tasks, fostering critical thinking and collaboration.

Using literature and storytelling is a powerful way to highlight moral lessons. Stories with strong ethical themes allow students to reflect on real-life values and their relevance. Role-playing and drama are also effective strategies, as they enable students to enact scenarios requiring cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving. These activities encourage students to practice communication while internalizing key values.

Group work and collaboration further support character education by teaching responsibility and teamwork. Assigning group projects helps students develop interpersonal skills while completing tasks together. Additionally, debates and discussions on global issues, such as equality or environmental challenges, provide opportunities to respect diverse opinions and articulate thoughtful arguments.

Creative writing assignments can also promote character education by encouraging students to explore values through personal reflections, essays, or stories. Prompts such as "Describe a time you showed kindness to someone in need" not only build writing skills but also allow students to introspect on their values.

Teachers play a crucial role in modeling character values. By demonstrating patience, respect, and fairness, they inspire students to adopt these traits. Positive reinforcement, like acknowledging good behavior, further motivates students to embody these values.

Additionally, creating a supportive classroom environment fosters inclusivity and mutual respect among students.

Conclusion

Integrating character development into English education is an effective way to cultivate students' personal and social attributes alongside their language skills. By incorporating values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and empathy into English lessons, students learn to express these principles through both their language and behavior. This approach ensures that language learning is not solely about mastering technical skills, but also about nurturing moral and ethical development.

Through engaging activities like storytelling, role-playing, and discussions, students encounter real-world situations where they practice using English while reflecting on positive character traits. For example, discussing themes like kindness or teamwork in stories allows students to internalize these values while enhancing their vocabulary and communication abilities. This approach makes English learning more relevant and impactful by connecting it to their personal experiences.

Furthermore, integrating character education into language learning fosters critical thinking and emotional intelligence. Students learn to express their ideas respectfully, resolve conflicts, and collaborate effectively, all while improving their English skills. These experiences equip them to handle various social and professional situations with confidence and integrity.

In the end, combining character-building with English learning not only enhances students' language proficiency but also provides them with the moral foundation to become responsible, compassionate, and active individuals. This holistic method produces well-rounded students who are prepared for both academic achievement and meaningful contributions to society.

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