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Implementation of Positive Habits and Culture in Strengthening Student Character in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Character education is a fundamental component of elementary education that can be strengthened through consistent positive habits and a supportive school culture. This study aimed to describe the implementation of positive habits and school culture in strengthening students' character, identify implementation challenges, and analyze changes in student behavior. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed at UPT SD Negeri Sawentar 04. Data were collected through observations, interviews with the principal and homeroom teachers, and documentation, then analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings showed that character education was implemented through the *Pagi Ceria* program, religious activities, singing the national anthem, orderly lining up, class contracts, permission-seeking habits, character-based extracurricular activities, and collaboration with parents. These practices fostered religiosity, discipline, responsibility, politeness, cooperation, leadership, and nationalism. A positive school culture was reinforced through teacher role modeling, supervision, rewards, educational consequences, and continuous evaluation. Although limited funding, teachers' workload, low student motivation, and minimal parental involvement remained challenges, the school addressed them through internal resource optimization, teacher coordination, parent communication, and regular evaluation. Overall, the program contributed to noticeable improvements in students' discipline, responsibility, religiosity, and politeness.

Keywords: Habit Formation; Positive Culture; Character Education; Student Character; Elementary School.

1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in developing students' full potential in terms of knowledge, skills, and character. At the elementary school level, character development is a crucial component of the educational process because students are at a stage of development where habits and behavioral patterns are formed through experiences gained from their environment. Elementary education, therefore, is not only focused on academic achievement but must also cultivate students who possess religious values, discipline, a sense of responsibility, honesty, tolerance, compassion, and the ability to interact positively with their social environment (Azizah et al., 2024).

Character education is a process that requires the involvement of various components of education. Instilling character values is not sufficient merely by imparting knowledge about good and bad behavior; rather, it must be embodied in real experiences and actions carried out consistently. The application of character education values requires a process involving habit formation and a supportive educational environment. Values practiced repeatedly have the potential to develop into habits and subsequently become part of an individual's character.

Habit formation is one strategy schools can use to instill character values in students. Through routine and repetitive activities, students have the opportunity to practice positive

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values in their daily lives. Habit formation such as praying, arriving on time, maintaining cleanliness, waiting in line, greeting others, respecting teachers, and taking responsibility for tasks are examples of simple activities that can provide students with direct experience in applying character values (Rapisa et al., 2026).

Sofia et al. (2023) suggest that positive habit-forming methods can be used to improve the discipline of elementary school students. Habits formed consistently help students understand that positive behavior is not merely a rule to be followed when under a teacher's supervision, but rather a part of their personal responsibility. Therefore, sustainability and consistency are crucial aspects in implementing habit-forming programs at school.

In addition to habit formation, students' character development is also influenced by the positive culture that flourishes within the school environment. A positive culture consists of values, norms, habits, and patterns of interaction that are collectively built by the entire school community. A supportive school culture can provide an environment conducive for students to learn and practice positive behavior. The implementation of positive habit-forming programs is closely linked to efforts to foster positive behavior and motivation within the educational environment.

Teachers hold a strategic position in fostering good habits and a positive culture at school. Teachers interact directly with students in various activities, so their behavior and actions can serve as examples for students. In addition to serving as role models, teachers play a role in guiding, supervising, providing reinforcement, and evaluating students' character development. Shi et al. (2025) argue that teachers play a crucial role in strengthening students' discipline in elementary school. This role requires consistency so that the values instilled can be reflected in students' daily behavior.

However, the implementation of character education in elementary schools still faces various challenges. Ke et al. (2023) explain that the success of implementing an educational program is greatly influenced by teacher readiness, institutional support, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and collaboration with families and the surrounding community. In practice, limitations in resources, teacher competence, facilities and infrastructure, as well as family support can be factors that influence the success of character education implementation.

These challenges can become even more complex in schools with limited student enrollment and resources. Schools are required to continue developing character-building programs despite facing constraints in funding, teaching staff, and facilities. Under these conditions, schools' creativity in optimizing available resources becomes essential to ensure that character education programs can continue to be implemented sustainably.

Based on observations at the Sawentar 04 Public Elementary School, character building among students is carried out through various forms of positive habits and culture. The school's vision is to foster a generation of learners who are religious, possess noble character, and excel academically. This vision serves as the foundation for both academic and extracurricular programs aimed at developing students' religiosity, discipline, character, and academic achievement.

One of the programs implemented is “Pagi Ceria,” which includes the “Senam Anak Indonesia Hebat” exercise routine, singing the national anthem, praying together, and memorizing daily prayers. This program is carried out as a routine activity to build students’ readiness while instilling religious character and nationalism. The school also conducts various religious activities, extracurricular activities, drill practice, and class contracts to strengthen students’ discipline and sense of responsibility.

The implementation of habit-forming activities involves not only the school but also requires continuity with the family environment. The school implements a program that involves parents in monitoring students’ habits through daily activities and evaluation sheets. This involvement is intended to ensure that the habit-forming activities carried out at school can be continued at home, so that character development proceeds consistently.

The results of the observation show that the implementation of the behavioral conditioning program has had a positive impact on student behavior. These changes are evident in improvements in discipline, responsibility, religious devotion, and politeness. Students have become more orderly in participating in activities, more responsible for their assignments and classroom cleanliness, accustomed to participating in religious activities, and have demonstrated more polite behavior when interacting with teachers and classmates.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the program still faces a number of internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include teachers’ health and workload, limited operational funds, a relatively small number of students, and limitations in comprehensively monitoring character development. Meanwhile, external factors include family economic conditions, low motivation to learn among some students, and suboptimal parental involvement.

Given these circumstances, it is important to conduct a more in-depth study of the implementation of positive habits and culture in strengthening students’ character. This study aims to describe the implementation of positive habits and culture in strengthening students’ character in elementary schools, analyze the challenges faced by schools and the strategies they employ to overcome them, and identify changes in student behavior following the implementation of the character-building program.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of positive habits and culture in strengthening students’ character based on the actual conditions observed in the school environment. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon contextually through the interpretation of experiences, behaviors, and social interactions that occur in the research setting (Surawy-Stepney et al., 2023).

The study was conducted at the Sawentar 04 Public Elementary School (UPT), Kanigoro Subdistrict, Blitar Regency. This public elementary school implements the Merdeka Curriculum and has 61 students, 8 teachers, and 6 classes. The research informants included the principal and homeroom teachers. The students served as the subjects of observation to gather data on the implementation of behavioral conditioning and behavioral development following their participation in the character-building program.

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to directly observe the implementation of the habit-forming program, positive school culture, teacher-student interactions, and student behavior in daily activities. Interviews were conducted with the principal and homeroom teachers to gather information regarding the program's structure, the character values being developed, implementation strategies, evaluation, challenges, solutions, and changes in student behavior. Documentation is used to supplement research data in the form of records of school activities and programs.

The research data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. During the data reduction stage, data from observations, interviews, and documentation were selected and grouped based on the research focus. The data were then categorized into the following areas: the implementation of positive habits and culture, character values developed, challenges and solutions, and changes in student behavior. Next, the data were presented narratively to identify patterns and relationships among the findings. Conclusions were drawn based on an interpretation of the data as a whole.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Implementation of a Habit-Forming Program to Strengthen Students' Character

The research results show that the Sawentar 04 Public Elementary School (UPT) implements a routine habituation program as a strategy for strengthening student character. The habituation program is implemented both during learning activities and outside of class, allowing students to directly practice character values. These findings suggest that character formation will be more effective if the values developed are integrated into daily school activities through continuous practice, not just through conceptual presentation (Ke et al., 2023; Flood & Banks, 2021).

One form of habituation that is a regular program is "Morning Cheerful." This activity consists of "Excellent Indonesian Children's Gymnastics," singing the national anthem, praying together, and memorizing daily prayers. The exercise is used to build student enthusiasm and readiness before learning. Singing the national anthem is aimed at instilling nationalism and patriotism, while praying together and memorizing daily prayers are used to strengthen students' religious character. These results demonstrate that systematic habituation can build a positive learning climate and increase student engagement in school activities. A supportive learning environment and consistent routines are known to contribute to the development of positive behaviors and the quality of students' learning experiences (Runge et al., 2023).

Religious habits are also reinforced through pre- and post-lesson prayers, istighosah activities, the dhuha prayer every Friday, the School + Quran program, commemorations of religious holidays, and extracurricular activities such as hadrah and the art of reciting the Quran. These activities provide students with a space to consistently practice religious values within the school environment. Learning practices that provide opportunities for students to directly experience the values taught have been shown to be more effective in developing attitudes, character, and social competence than learning that is solely cognitively oriented (Luo & Li, 2024).

These findings indicate that character education is implemented through repetitive activities integrated into students' school lives. This aligns with Apriliyanti et al. (2020), who emphasize the importance of implementing the noble values of character education through an educational process that provides students with real-life experiences. When positive behaviors are consistently practiced, students have a greater opportunity to internalize them into habits. In line with this, collaborative learning and the design of school activities that are designed sustainably can strengthen the internalization of values, increase student reflection, and build a school culture that supports continuous character development.

3.2 Fostering Discipline and Responsibility trough a Positive Culture

Character traits such as discipline and responsibility are developed through various school routines. Students are accustomed to lining up before activities begin, politely asking permission to leave the classroom, following class rules, and taking responsibility for assigned tasks. Repeated practice allows students to develop self-regulation through direct experience, so that the value of discipline develops into a habit that becomes ingrained in their daily lives (Sofia et al., 2023).

Teachers and students also develop a class contract outlining rules, rights, and responsibilities during the learning process. Student involvement in developing this agreement helps build a sense of ownership of the rules. Students are not only obligated to obey the rules but are also involved in building agreements regarding expected behavior in the classroom. This finding aligns with research by Rapisa et al. (2026), which showed that student involvement in developing class norms can increase a sense of responsibility, ownership of the rules, and commitment to creating a positive learning climate.

These findings also support the research of Alnahdi & Schwab (2021), which explains that a learning environment that fosters autonomy, active engagement, and self-regulation contributes to the development of social responsibility and disciplined behavior in students. Discipline built through direct experience provides students with the opportunity to understand the importance of order and responsibility in school life.

Schools also implement consequences for rule violations. Consequences are directed as part of the educational process so that students understand that every action has consequences and requires accountability. Teachers also reward students who demonstrate positive development and behavior. This combination of positive reinforcement and educational consequences aligns with the findings of Shi et al. (2025), who stated that a school culture that prioritizes positive reinforcement is more effective in fostering prosocial behavior and discipline than a solely punishment-oriented approach.

3.3 The Role of Teachers in Building a Positive Culture

Teachers play a crucial role in maintaining a positive culture within the school environment. Teachers not only provide guidance on expected behavior but also monitor and evaluate students' character development. From a contemporary educational perspective, teachers act as facilitators who create a safe, inclusive learning environment that supports students' social-emotional development (Ke et al., 2023).

Evaluation is conducted through direct observation by homeroom teachers. Teachers observe students' behavior daily, from attitudes during learning and discipline to the implementation of habits such as praying, queuing, and working together. Observation results are used as a basis for assessing students' character development and improving the habit development program. These findings align with those of Azizah et al. (2024), who demonstrated that continuous observation enables teachers to provide more appropriate feedback to strengthen students' character development.

Teachers also employ strategies to maintain a conducive classroom atmosphere. When students begin to lose focus, teachers provide additional activities to refocus their attention on the lesson. Furthermore, awards are given to students who are diligent, disciplined, high-achieving, or demonstrate positive character development. This strategy supports the creation of a positive classroom climate and increases students' intrinsic motivation (Wang et al., 2025).

This demonstrates that a positive culture requires active teacher involvement. Teacher consistency in modeling, reinforcement, supervision, and evaluation are crucial factors in ensuring that habituation does not cease as a formal program but develops into a sustainable school culture (Wang et al., 2025).

3.4 Parental Involvement in Character Building

Strengthening student character is not limited to the school environment. Schools strive to involve parents so that the positive values developed can be continued within the family environment. Family involvement is a determining factor in the success of character education because the process of internalizing values occurs continuously at home and at school (Nissim & Shamma, 2025).

One form of this involvement is achieved through habituation programs that encompass various positive habits in students' daily lives. Parents play a role in monitoring their children's activities and completing daily evaluation forms. Schools also use parent-teacher communication groups to convey information about assignments, school activities, and student progress. These findings align with Anastasiou & Hornby (2025), who explain that intensive communication between schools and families can increase the consistency of character development in students.

Collaboration between schools and families is crucial because character formation requires environmental consistency. When behaviors learned at school are reinforced at home, students gain more consistent experiences with expected values and behaviors. Conversely, differences in habituation patterns between school and home can present challenges to the process of character internalization (Nissim & Shamma, 2025).

3.5 Challenges in Implementating Positive Habits and Culture

The research results indicate that the implementation of positive habits and culture faces internal and external obstacles. Internal obstacles include the health conditions of some teachers and additional workloads, limited operational funds, relatively small student numbers, limited facilities, and suboptimal monitoring of student character. These conditions

align with the findings of Yada et al. (2022), which showed that teacher workload and limited resources are factors that influence the effectiveness of school program implementation.

Limited funding is one challenge because the relatively small student population impacts the school's ability to develop supporting activities. Schools face limitations in recruiting professional trainers for extracurricular activities, so hadrah (religious practice), painting, dance, and scouting activities are guided by optimizing the capabilities of internal teachers. Adaptive strategies such as these demonstrate the importance of school leadership in utilizing available resources.

Meanwhile, external obstacles include family economic conditions, low learning motivation, and suboptimal parental involvement. These findings reinforce the view that the success of character education is influenced by both school and family environmental factors, making collaboration between the two parties crucial (Saputri et al., 2025; Woodcock et al., 2023).

3.6 School Strategies for Overcomingin Character Building

The school implemented several strategies to maintain the program's sustainability amidst various limitations. When a teacher was absent or had additional duties, another teacher assisted in supervising students. The school also implemented inter-teacher coordination and a rotation system for implementing daily character building activities. These collaborative practices demonstrated the importance of collective teacher professionalism in maintaining the sustainability of the school's program (Rusconi et al., 2026).

To address funding constraints, the school optimized internal teachers as extracurricular activity instructors and utilized available facilities. Before acquiring a Smart TV, the school continued to implement character building activities using a simple projector. These findings demonstrate that school innovation and adaptability are crucial factors in maintaining the quality of program implementation (Liu et al., 2026).

The school also sought to increase parental involvement through communication within parent-teacher groups, a character building checklist, and parental involvement in school activities. These strategies strengthened the continuity of character building between the school and the family, thereby ensuring a more consistent character building process (Rusconi et al., 2026).

3.7 Changes in Students' Character Following the Implementation of Positive Habits and Culture

Observations showed positive changes in student behavior after implementing the character-strengthening program. These changes were evident in aspects of discipline, responsibility, religiosity, and politeness. These changes demonstrate that consistent habituation can gradually shape students' self-regulation and prosocial behavior (Woodcock et al., 2023).

Changes in responsibility were evident in students' increased awareness of completing assignments, maintaining classroom cleanliness, and fulfilling obligations without constant

reminders from teachers. This finding aligns with research by Woodcock et al. (2023), which confirmed that a positive school culture encourages the development of students' personal and social responsibility.

Changes in religiosity and politeness also demonstrate that repeated habituation can help internalize moral values into daily behavior. Teacher role models, positive reinforcement, and a supportive school environment are important factors in accelerating this process (Mu et al., 2026).

Overall, the research findings indicate that implementing positive habits and culture develops more than just one dimension of character. Consistently implemented programs provide experiences that support the development of religious character, discipline, responsibility, courtesy, cooperation, and leadership. These findings reinforce the view that a positive school culture is a crucial foundation for the sustainable development of students' character (Mu et al., 2026).

Thus, habituation and a positive culture are two interrelated components in character building. Habituation provides concrete, repetitive activities, while a positive culture provides an environment that maintains and strengthens these habits. When both are implemented consistently and receive support from teachers, schools, and families, character values have a greater chance of developing into ingrained behaviors in students.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the implementation of positive habits and culture at the Sawentar 04 Public Elementary School (UPT) is carried out in an integrated manner through various routine activities, learning activities, and extracurricular activities. These programs include Happy Morning, religious habits, singing the national anthem, marching, class contracts, asking permission habits, religious activities, character-based extracurricular activities, and a habit-building program involving parents.

The character values developed include religiosity, discipline, responsibility, politeness, noble character, nationalism, cooperation, and leadership. A positive culture is reinforced through the role of teachers in providing role models, supervision, rewards, educational consequences, and ongoing behavioral evaluation.

The program implementation faced several obstacles, such as limited funding and facilities, teacher workloads, low learning motivation among some students, and suboptimal parental involvement. The school addressed these obstacles through coordination between teachers, optimization of internal staff and facilities, communication with parents, additional learning activities, and ongoing evaluation.

The implementation of positive habits and culture demonstrated the development of student behavior, particularly in the aspects of discipline, responsibility, religiosity, and politeness. Thus, character building in elementary schools requires consistent practice and support from a positive school culture. Sustainable programs and synergy between schools, teachers, students, and families are crucial factors in shaping students' overall character.

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