

# **Character Education in Junior High Schools: Teachers' Perceptions and Implementation Challenges**

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#### Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter di Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP) merupakan elemen penting dalam membentuk kepribadian siswa yang kuat dan berbudi pekerti luhur. Namun, dalam implementasinya, terdapat berbagai tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para guru, terutama terkait dengan pemahaman, keterampilan, dan dukungan terhadap program tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana guru SMP memandang implementasi pendidikan karakter di sekolah mereka serta tantangan yang muncul dalam pengembangannya. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif, dengan subjek penelitian sebanyak 30 orang guru SMP. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui angket, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis secara deskriptif, disajikan dalam bentuk tabel dan distribusi frekuensi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas guru, sebanyak 93,31%, memiliki perspektif positif terhadap pelaksanaan pendidikan karakter di SMP. Meskipun demikian, meskipun implementasinya sudah baik, masih terdapat ruang untuk peningkatan dalam pencapaian hasil yang lebih maksimal. Oleh karena itu, dapat disimpulkan bahwa pendidikan karakter telah berjalan dengan baik, namun sosialisasi dan pelatihan lebih lanjut untuk guru mengenai penguasaan teknologi dan informasi diperlukan agar dapat mendukung program pendidikan karakter dengan lebih optimal.

Kata Kunci: Perspektif Guru, Pendidikan Karakter, Sekolah Menegah Pertama

#### Abstract

Character education in Junior High Schools (SMP) is an essential element in shaping students' strong personalities and noble character. However, in its implementation, there are various challenges faced by teachers, particularly related to understanding, skills, and support for the program. This study aims to analyze how SMP teachers perceive the implementation of character education in their schools and the challenges that arise in its development. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, with 30 SMP teachers as the subjects of the study. Data collection techniques included questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. The collected data were analyzed descriptively and presented in the form of tables and frequency distributions. The results of the study show that the majority of teachers, 93.31%, have a positive perspective on the implementation of character education in SMP. However, although the implementation is already good, there is still room for improvement in achieving more optimal outcomes. Therefore, it can be concluded that character education has been well implemented, but further socialization and training for teachers regarding mastery of technology and information are necessary to optimally support the character education program.

Keywords: Teacher's Perspective, Character Education, Junior High School

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is crucial for today's youth. Character education essentially focuses on achieving desired outcomes in behavior. This involves developing habits that shape individuals' behavior, cognition, and emotions (Suhartini et al., 2019; Zaenab et al., 2020). Schools can foster character education by developing learning programs that aim to nurture noble and virtuous citizens (Loloagin & Naibaho, 2023; Muasyasya et al., 2023). In reality, the character education program in schools, which began 10 years ago, has not been running efficiently (Ritonga et al., 2020; Salirawati, 2021). This indicates that the implementation of character education in Indonesia has not been entirely successful. The issue is not with the character values being taught, but rather with the process of conveying and transferring those values, which needs to be improved and enhanced to make it more

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effective. Teachers who grasp the fundamental values and behavioral outcomes of character education can assist students in understanding how to demonstrate respect for others' viewpoints, show compassion towards others, and provide support to those in need (Purnomo, 2019; Shine & Heath, 2020).

Based on empirical data from several surveys and interviews with teachers in junior high schools in Konawe Regency, it is evident that despite efforts to implement character education, the outcomes have not been satisfactory due to challenges in the implementation process, such as a lack of support from school management and limited resources (Corredor et al., 2014; Spante et al., 2018). This underscores the fact that the implementation of character education is often hindered by a lack of training for teachers and limited parental involvement, which is partly due to the belief that character education is greatly influenced by the support of the school environment and the active participation of all stakeholders (Indroasyoko et al., 2020; Rohman, 2019).

Based on empirical data from previous research, it is evident that moral decline among the younger generation, particularly middle-level students, is still prevalent at Madrasah Aliyah Muhammadiyah Pokobulo in Jeneponto Regency, South Sulawesi. Some students continue to exhibit deviant behaviors, such as skipping school, smoking, fighting, being disrespectful to teachers, and bringing prohibited items to school (Yatun et al., 2021). Weak character education can have various negative consequences for the development of students and society. Therefore, character education is very important, as important as national character. Character development and the goals of national education are the main issues in education, this is because education is the most important means of forming national character, because the younger generation develops their character through education (Alrwele, 2017; Shine & Heath, 2020). However, there is a significant gap between expectations and reality in the implementation of character education in schools. Although there have been efforts to integrate character education in the curriculum, many challenges are faced in practice. These challenges include a lack of programs and communication between parents and schools, a complex student character assessment system, a lack of facilities and infrastructure, and an unequal number of teachers and students. This shows that the challenges related to implementing character education in schools in Indonesia come from the government, schools, and parents. Collaboration between parents and school is undoubtedly crucial in building an atmosphere of care that is created through collaboration and support in guiding students (Đukić et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020).

Therefore, to improve character education in schools, existing approaches need to be implemented, including the integration of character education in the curriculum without creating new subjects, the use of learning models that prioritize affective development, as well as training and outreach programs for teachers (Hendro & Risti P, 2017; Latifah, 2014). Even though there have been various efforts to overcome this problem, there are still many shortcomings that need to be corrected. Existing solutions are often not well integrated, lack infrastructure support, and lack of coordination between schools and parents in instilling character values in students (Ladamay & Mustakim, 2023; Rohman, 2019). Apart from that, assessing student character, which is still difficult to carry out, is also a big obstacle in measuring the success of character education.

The novelty of this research offers a more comprehensive alternative solution by proposing an integrated and sustainable character education system. This system includes a more holistic approach in integrating character education in all aspects of school life, from school management, classroom learning, to extracurricular activities. This research aims to identifying teachers' perspectives in the implementation of character education in School, so that solutions or strategies can be obtained that can be developed and implemented in developing character education learning in educational institutions.

## 2. METHODS

The research method used in this study is a descriptive research method through a quantitative approach. Descriptive qualitative research methods aim to describe a phenomenon, event, symptom and occurrence that occurs factually, systematically and accurately (Lambert & Lambert, 2013). The time for this research to be carried out is in September-October 2023 for the 2023/2024 academic year. This research was conducted at SMP Negeri Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. The subjects of this study were teachers of public junior high schools in Konawe Regency. The determination of research respondents was carried out randomly by taking three public schools in each sub-district, namely SMPN 1 Wawotobi, SMPN 1 Unaaha, and SMPN 3 Unaaha. The total research subjects are 30 teachers. This research data collection technique uses questionnaires, interviews and documentation. a) The questionnaire in this study is designed to gather respondents' opinions on integrating character education into various subjects, fostering student self-development, managing the school, and organizing extracurricular activities. Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a pilot test with relevant experts to ensure its validity; b) the researcher conducted in-depth interviews to understand teachers' perspectives on implementing character education and the challenges they face; c) The study includes documentation such as photos, videos, and audio recordings, as well as data, to enhance the credibility of the research findings. Flowchart of research implementation is presented in Figure 1.

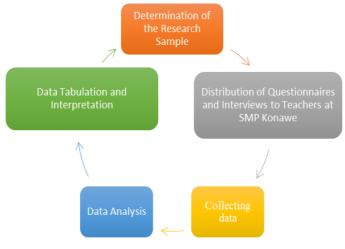


Figure 1. Flowchart of Research Implementation

Data analysis in this study was carried out descriptively by presenting tables and frequency distribution of each variable about the perception of Konawe Junior High School teachers on the implementation of character education and obstacles in its implementation.

#### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Results

#### Characteristic of the Respondents

The sociodemographic data of the respondents showed that 70.00% of the teachers were women. The most age range of teachers is more than 40 years old at 80%, with the majority of respondents currently in bachelor degree. Most respondents had been teaching for

more than 10 years, 96.67%. In addition, several teachers have attended character education training either from the Ministry of Education and Culture, or from the education authorities and schools, 70%. However, there are 30% of teachers who have never attended training. Moreover, the respondents teach different subjects in each school respectively as revealed in Table 1.

Sociodemographic characteristics	n=30	%
Gender		
Men	9	30
Women	21	70
Age		
20-30 years old		
31-40 years old	6	20
>40 years old	24	80
Education		
Diploma		
Bachelor	23	76.67
Master	7	23.3
Doctoral		
being a teacher		
1-5 years	1	3.33
6-10 years		
>10 years	29	96.67
Attending character education training from		
Ministry of Education and Culture	5	16.67
education authorities	8	26.67
school	8	26.67
Never	9	30
Teachers' Field study		
Indonesia language	5	16.67
English language education	5	16.67
Social	4	13.33
Mathematics	4	13.33
natural science	5	16.67
Sports physical Education and health	1	3.33
counseling guidance	1	3.33
art and culture	2	6.67
civic education	1	3.33
Islamic Education	2	6.67

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents

#### Junior High School Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of Character Education

The perspective of Konawe District junior high school teachers on the implementation of character education is measured by paying attention to 4 aspects, namely integrating character education in subjects, habituation/self-development of students, school management, and extracurricular activities. The results of the distribution of respondents' answers related to the perspective of Konawe Junior High School teachers on the implementation of character education in schools based on 4 main indicators were presented.

The following are the results of junior high school teachers' perspectives on the implementation of integrating character education in subjects which can be seen from Table 2.

No	Indicators	Percentage	Categorization
1	Reviewing Compatibility Standards, Basic	76.67%	Enough
	Competencies in each subject		
2	Each basic competency (KD) in learning contains character education	86.67%	Good
3	Include character values on the syllabus	90 %	Good
4	Syllabus creation refers to Content Standards	90 %	Good
5	Run the character values listed in the syllabus	90 %	Good
6	The syllabus lists the cultural values as well as the	76.67%	Enough
	character of the nation		
7	In the RPP include the character values	90%	Good
8	The subject matter contains character values	93.33%	Good
9	Teachers provide motivation during learning	100%	Excellent
10	Teachers emphasize their students to be active	100%	Excellent
	during the learning process		
11	Teachers provide assistance to their students who	96.67%	Excellent
	having difficulty in actualizing character values		
12	Teachers say greetings at the start and end of	100%	Excellent
	learning to exemplify politeness		
13	Teachers form groups of students based on	100%	Excellent
	different backgrounds in order to instill an attitude		
	of tolerance		
14	Teachers assess students' ability to practice	76.67%	Enough
	character education values		
	Total Average	90.47%	Good

**Table 2.** Junior High School Teachers' Perspectives on The Implementation ofIntegrating Character Education in Subjects

Based on the results in Table 2, it shows that there are several teacher highlights in the implementation of character education in schools in aspects of integrating character education in subjects, including indicators that are categorized as sufficient, namely some teachers have not reviewed Competence standards, Basic competency on Content Standards (SI) to determine whether cultural values and national character have been listed or included in, Some teachers also still do not include cultural values and national character in the syllabus, and teachers still do not assess students' ability to practice character education values. Next, the results of junior high school teachers' perspectives on the implementation of character education in schools on the aspect of habituation / self-development of students can be seen in Table 3.

 Table 3. Junior High School Teacher's Perspective on the Implementation of Character Education

No	Indicators	Percentage	Categorization
1	Performing the flag ceremony	100%	Excellent
2	Check the cleanliness and tidiness of students while	100%	Excellent
	entering the school environment		
3	Carry out special worship together	100%	Excellent

No	Indicators	Percentage	Categorization
4	Not clustered when entering the classroom	90 %	Good
5	Pray before, after class	100%	Excellent
6	There is a culture of greetings in the school environment	100%	Excellent
7	Reprimands of students who violate school rules	100%	Excellent
8	Making donations when there is a disaster, grief	96.67%	Excellent
9	Give praise to outstanding students	100%	Excellent
10	Reward to outstanding students	100%	Excellent
11	Students can overcome disagreements	96.67%	Excellent
12	Observe school rules	100%	Excellent
13	Crack down, punish, sanction students who violate	100%	Excellent
	school rules		
	Total Average	98.71%	Excellent

Based on the results in Table 3, it shows that the implementation of character education in the aspect of habituation / self-development of students in SMPN Konawe district has run very well by obtaining a percentage of 98.71%. It is hoped that this habituation activity will continue to be maintained so that it becomes a habit, trained consistently and then becomes a character for students at Konawe State Junior High School. Furthermore, the results of junior high school teachers' perspectives on the implementation of character education in schools in aspects of School Management can be seen in Table 4.

No	Indicators	Percentage	Categorization
1	Providing trash cans on the school premises	100%	Excellent
2	Use of school attributes	100%	Excellent
3	Neatness in parking vehicles	90 %	Good
4	Doing social activities	83.33%	Enough
5	Show courtesy towards teachers	90 %	Good
6	Attitude to support the honesty of all school	96.67%	Excellent
	residents		
7	Diligent culture	96.67%	Excellent
8	Imtaq Activities	100%	Excellent
9	Joint Gymnastics	100%	Excellent
10	Toilet cleanliness	93.33%	Good
11	Garbage processing	76.67%	Enough
12	Gotong-royong culture	90%	Good
13	Separation of organic, non-organic waste	76.67%	Enough
14	Greening the school environment	76.67%	Enough
	Total Average	90.71%	Good

 Table 4. Junior High School Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of Character Education in School Management Aspects

The process of shaping the character of an educational unit will be determined not by the strength of the learning process but by the strength of its management, implying that the quality of students' character depends heavily on the school's management quality. Based on the results in Table 4, it shows that there are several teacher highlights on school management aspects in terms of implementing character education in schools, including indicators that are categorized as sufficient, namely the lack of social activities that can foster students' empathetic character, waste processing is still lacking, the school has not provided separation of organic and non-organic waste and lack of school attention to greening the school environment can invite students to love or care for nature. The results of junior high school teachers' perspectives on the implementation of character education in schools in the aspect of extracurricular activities can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5.	Junior Hig	h School	Teachers'	Perspectives	on the	e Implementation	of	Character
	Education	in the Asp	ect of Extr	racurricular Ad	ctivitie	S		

No	Indicators	Percentage	Categorization
1	The existence of extracurricular activities in	100%	Excellent
	developing students' abilities		
2	Extracurricular activities in developing creativity	100%	Excellent
	according to students' talents, interests, potentials		
3	Extracurricular activities in shaping students to be	90 %	Good
	social		
4	Relaxed/comfortable atmosphere in extracurricular	86.67%	Enough
	activities		
5	Extracurricular activities in shaping students' career	90 %	Good
	readiness.		
	Total Average	93.33%	Good

In improving character education, extracurricular activities become high presentations so that they have an impact on improving children's character, although in their activities need to be improved in a comfortable learning atmosphere so as to foster social spirit and career readiness in students.

# Teacher's Challenge in The Implementation of Character Education in Schools

The perspective of junior high school teachers in Konawe on the implementation of character education in schools is good, even though there are still obstacles in its implementation. The results of this study show that teachers already have the same tendency regarding the implementation of character education in schools when viewed from four aspects measured such as integrating character education in subjects, habituation / self-development of students, school management, and extracurricular activities. However, there are still obstacles experienced by teachers, students, schools, and the government. In addition, lack of understanding also causes the implementation of education not to be carried out optimally. Despite the efforts, there are still obstacles being faced, which stem from various sources including teachers, students, schools, and the government. This can be observed in Figure 2.

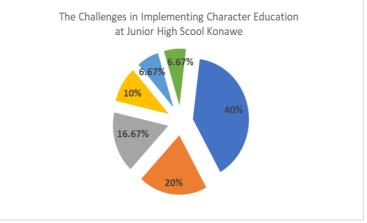


Figure 2. Teacher's Challenge

Base on Figure 2, challenges faced by teachers at Junior High School Konawe in implementing character education in school are firts, as many as 12 teachers (40%) reported that the diverse characteristics, social, and cultural backgrounds of students posed challenges for them in dealing with the varied characters of these students. Second, six teachers (20%) stated that the lack of collaboration between the school and parents regarding the continuous habituation of character values in children was a challenge. Third, five teachers (16.67%) complained about the lack of special tools for assessing student character. Fourth, three teachers (10%) mentioned that the lack of socialization and training for teachers regarding character education was a challenge. Fifth, two teachers (6.67%) also faced challenges due to the lack of socialization and training for teachers regarding character education. The last, two teachers (6.67%) reported that government policies that prioritize academic success over the development of social, emotional, and character aspects of students were a challenge. These challenges highlight the complexities and difficulties involved in implementing character education in schools, and the importance of providing teachers with adequate support, training, and resources to overcome these challenges.

#### Discussion

Character is understood as a label assigned to students after interactions, with the character itself being the outcome of an assessment based on the consistent behaviors exhibited by the students (Marshall et al., 2017; Shine & Heath, 2020). The results of this study indicate the implementation of character education based on teachers' perspectives at Junior High School Konawe. There are three aspects that have been well implemented: first, the integration of character education into subjects, which includes character education content in each basic competency and learning syllabus. Furthermore, extracurricular activities listed in the table aim to foster students, falls into the very good category. This is evident during interactions where educators give praise to high-achieving students for their personal development. Previous research findings indicate that feedback and active interaction between educators and students can enhance motivation, skills, and positive behavior sustainably in the future (Collie 2022; Woods 2020). Therefore, it is essential that education implementation focuses not only on intelligence but also on the character development of students (Meijer et al., 2013; Zhang, 2017).

Fundamentally, the implementation of character education is evident in students' abilities to think critically (cognitive), make choices (affective), and apply character in their everyday lives (psychomotor). This is expected to help students become more aware and reflective about their humanity, self-identity, environment, and relationship with God (Nurgiyantoro, 2011; Sudjalil & Mujianto, 2017; Suwiji et al., 2021). Thus, it is essential to establish habituation activities that promote positive character development in students, such as regular activities, spontaneous events, and modelling behavior, as merely conveying moral concepts directly does not effectively influence students' behavior (Gao & Wang, 2021; Lestari et al., 2019).

The success of character education implementation is not always straightforward, and teachers at Junior High School Konawe face challenges in applying it to students. The middle school environment presents a significant challenge for teachers because it is a transitional phase from childhood to adolescence, marked by physical, psychological, and social changes. Consequently, adolescents often resist rules that restrict their behavior (Utami & Prasetyo, 2021; Wheatley et al., 2009). The research findings revealed several challenges faced by teachers in implementing character education at SMPN 1 Wawotobi, SMPN 1 Unaaha, and SMPN 3 Unaaha. These challenges include the diverse social, cultural, and personality backgrounds of students, lack of collaboration between school and parents, and inadequate

school management in handling character education, which prioritizes cognitive development over character development. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that the formal and evaluative relationship between teachers and students can negatively influence students' behavior towards the school (Eccles & Roeser 2015).

Furthermore, the lack of specialized assessment tools for teachers, insufficient socialization and training for teachers, and the misuse of technology and information are obstacles that hinder the effective implementation of character education in the three schools. This is consistent with previous research indicating that character education often faces challenges due to inadequate structures, support, and suitable learning materials (Pratiwi et al., 2022). The study's limitations include the small number of teachers involved from the three schools. Therefore, future research should consider a larger number of subjects from various regions to ensure more comprehensive findings.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the perspective of junior high school teachers on the implementation of character education in schools is still in the good category with a percentage of 93.31%. Junior high school teachers already have the same tendency regarding the implementation of character education in schools when viewed from 4 aspects, but there are still obstacles in its implementation in schools sourced from teachers, students, schools, and the government. Concerning this, teachers need socialization and training for teachers in facilitation that is controlled by technology and information so, it can be implemented for character education at school.

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