Integrating Character Education and Social Studies in Elementary School: Prospective Professional Teachers' Experiences

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Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter di sekolah dasar merupakan aspek penting dalam membentuk moral dan etika siswa pada tahap perkembangannya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali pemahaman dan pengalaman guru profesional prajabatan dalam mengintegrasikan pendidikan karakter dengan pembelajaran IPS di sekolah dasar. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur dan wawancara mendalam terhadap 124 siswa guru yang terdaftar dalam program pendidikan guru. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa calon guru memiliki pemahaman yang kuat tentang konsep pendidikan karakter dan pentingnya integrasi mereka ke dalam pembelajaran IPS. Peneliti menerapkan berbagai strategi seperti pendekatan tematik, pembelajaran berbasis proyek, dan diskusi kelompok untuk menanamkan nilai-nilai moral. Namun tantangannya meliputi keterbatasan waktu, kurangnya sumber daya, dan kurangnya pelatihan khusus. Dukungan yang diperlukan meliputi pelatihan berkelanjutan, akses terhadap sumber daya yang memadai, dan pendampingan dari pendidik yang berpengalaman. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun calon guru memiliki pemahaman teoritis yang kuat, pendekatan holistik yang melibatkan dukungan pelatihan, sumber daya, dan kebijakan diperlukan untuk meningkatkan efektivitas integrasi pendidikan karakter dalam pembelajaran IPS. Rekomendasi untuk penelitian masa depan mencakup perluasan ukuran sampel dan penggunaan metode longitudinal untuk observasi yang lebih mendalam dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Calon Guru Profesional, Pendidikan Karakter, IPS

Abstract

Character education in elementary school is an important aspect in forming morale and students' ethics at their stage of development. This study aims to explore the understanding and experiences of pre-service professional teachers in integrating character education with social studies instruction in elementary schools. Employing a mixed-method approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 124 student teachers enrolled in the teacher education program. The findings indicate that pre-service teachers possess a solid understanding of character education concepts and the importance of their integration into social studies instruction. The researcher implements various strategies such as thematic approaches, project-based learning, and group discussions to instill moral values. However, challenges include time constraints, lack of resources, and insufficient specialized training. The necessary support includes continuous training, access to adequate resources, and mentoring from experienced educators. The study concludes that although pre-service teachers have a strong theoretical understanding, a holistic approach involving training support, resources, and policies is required to enhance the effectiveness of character education integration in social studies instruction. Recommendations for future research include expanding the sample size and employing longitudinal methods for more in-depth and sustained observations.

Keywords: Prospective Profesional Teacher, Character Education, Social Studies

1. INTRODUCTION

Character education in elementary school is an important aspect in forming morale and students' ethics at their stage of development (Hidayati et al., 2020; Jerome & Kisby, 2022). Character education does not only function to teach values, such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy (Manubey et al., 2021; Ningsih et al., 2021). However, character education is also to develop essential social and emotional skills for the well-being of individuals and society (Hutapea & Suwastini, 2019; King et al., 2020). Through character education integration, students learn how to recognize and overcome ethical challenges and

build constructive relationships with others (Amri et al., 2020; Ariyanti et al., 2019). The integration of character education in the elementary school curriculum not only helps students become individuals with glorious character but also prepares them to become responsible citizens and contribute positively to society. Character education in elementary schools can be integrated effectively into curricular activities or learning (Isnaini, 2018; Pratiwi et al., 2022), one of which is learning Social Studies. This integration is carried out by combining character values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation in social studies teaching materials and methods (Lukman et al., 2021; Ningsih et al., 2021). The methods, such as class discussions, case studies, and group projects can facilitate students to practice and internalize character values in real social contexts (Cahyani, 2020; Intania & Sutama, 2020). The integration of character education in social studies learning not only enriches students' academic understanding but also strengthens their moral and social development, which is essential for a harmonious and productive social life.

The success of integrating character education and social studies learning in elementary schools is influenced by the important role of teachers in implementing learning. The teacher is the main facilitator who designs and implements effective teaching strategies to combine character values with learning content (Istiyono et al., 2021; Muhtar & Dallyono, 2020). The teacher's ability to model behavior that reflects these values, as well as create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment, determines how well students can internalize and practice character (Birhan et al., 2021; Na'imah et al., 2020). Teachers' competence in using interactive teaching methods, such as class discussions, simulations, and group projects, contributes significantly to student engagement and the development of their social and moral skills.

Previous research has considerably discussed teacher competence in integrating character education and learning in elementary schools, which shows teachers trained in this holistic approach can significantly improve students' moral and social development (Birhan et al., 2021; Istiyono et al., 2021). These studies often highlight the importance of ongoing professional training, institutional support, and reflective practice in supporting teachers to incorporate character values into their curriculum. However, there is still no literature that specifically examines the competencies and experiences of prospective professional teachers, namely students of the Professional Education for Teachers in Indonesia known as the PPG program. This research on prospective teachers is important because they are at a critical stage in developing the skills and understanding that they will bring to their future teaching practice. By understanding the challenges and needs of prospective professional teachers in integrating character education, teacher training programs can be adjusted to more effectively prepare them to face increasingly complex educational demands (Ardiyani et al., 2020; Zulfitri et al., 2019).

This research aims to explore and analyze the experiences of prospective professional teachers, more precisely on the Teacher Professional Education (PPG) program in integrating character education into social studies learning in elementary schools. The novelty of this research is repose in the aspect of assessing direct experiences, challenges, and strategies of prospective professional teachers on integrating character education and social studies learning. This study can provide insight into the appropriateness and practicality of integrating character-based education with social studies from a new perspective. This approach not only occupied an important gap in the literature but also offered practical recommendations for teacher education programs and policymakers to better support future educators.

2. METHODS

This research used a mixed method (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Sugiyono, 2014), which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain comprehensive information regarding the competency of prospective professional teachers in integrating character education and social studies learning in elementary schools. The quantitative approach of structured questionnaires was used and distributed to respondents to collect statistical data about their knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach includes in-depth interviews to explore the understanding, challenges, and strategies implemented by prospective teachers in more depth. This research involved 124 prospective professional teachers at Ganesha University of Education as research subjects. They were students who studied themselves as teachers in elementary schools. As prospective teachers, they have undergone various theoretical courses and field practices organized by universities. The participants in this research come from various academic backgrounds and experiences, but they had the same goal, namely to acquire the necessary competencies and become professional educators. Their participation in this research is intended to explore their understanding of the integration of character education in social studies learning in elementary schools, as well as to explore their perspectives, experiences, and challenges they face in practicing this concept in everyday teaching.

Data collection methods in this research are covered with quantitative and qualitative instruments. The quantitative instrument is in the form of a structured questionnaire that has been designed to measure the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of prospective professional teachers in integrating character education and social studies learning. This questionnaire includes indicators such as understanding the concept of character education, frequency and methods of integration in learning, as well as perceptions of the effectiveness and challenges of this integration. Qualitative instruments include in-depth interviews and classroom observations aimed at exploring direct experiences, teaching strategies, and barriers faced by prospective teachers. Qualitative indicators include teacher reflection on teaching practices, adaptation of methods based on classroom situations, along student interactions and responses to integrated character education. The combination of these two types of instruments allows data triangulation, with the result that increases the validity of research results by confirming findings from multiple sources and perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

The data analysis method used in this research combines quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. Quantitative data from the questionnaire has been analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies and percentages to describe the characteristics of respondents as well as general patterns in their responses to structured questions related to the integration of character education in social studies learning. In addition, qualitative data from interviews has been analyzed using a thematic approach to identify patterns, and themes that emerge from the narratives and direct experiences of respondents. The integration of data from these two approaches provides a deep and comprehensive understanding of the challenges, strategies, and effectiveness of integrating character education in the context of social studies learning in elementary schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results
Prospective Professional Teachers' Understanding

Results that describe prospective professional teachers' understanding of character education and its integration with social studies learning content were obtained based on data from interviews and questionnaires. The results of the questionnaire regarding prospective

teachers' understanding of character education, social studies, and content that can be integrated with character education are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Prospective Professional Teachers' Understanding

No.	Aspect of Understanding	Percentage (%)
1	Character Education Concept	96.77
2	The Importance of Character Education	97.58
3	Social Studies Concepts in Elementary Schools	100
4	Social studies content that can be integrated with Character Education	89.52
5	Implementation of Social Sciences Learning integrated with Character Education	95.97

The results in Table 1 are also strengthened by the results of interviews with prospective professional teachers. Prospective professional teachers expressed a deep understanding of the concept of character education which they defined as a systematic process to instill moral values in students to form individuals with integrity and responsibility. They identified various characteristics that can be applied in social studies learning, including honesty, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and tolerance. The form of integration applied in social studies learning, for example in history content, teachers can teach about figures who teach good character and ethical character. The next example in geography content includes a discussion about the importance of sustainability and environmental responsibility.

Strategies and Methods

The findings of this research reveal various methods and strategies used by prospective professional teachers to integrate character education with social studies learning content. The questionnaire results summarized in Table 2 show the use of various methods and strategies by prospective teachers.

Table 2. Methods and Strategies Used by Prospective Professional Teachers

No.	Method/Strategy/Model	Percentage (%)
1	Problem-Based Learning	29.03
2	Project Based Learning	23.39
3	Group Discussion	17.74
4	Case Study	14.52
5	Role-playing	8.87
6	Others	6.45

Table 2 is reinforced by interview results which show that prospective professional teachers have actively used problem-based learning to link social studies topics with character values such as honesty and responsibility. Project-based learning is also mentioned as an effective learning model for encouraging cooperation and responsibility among students, allowing them to work in groups to complete projects related to social studies material and character values. The group discussion method is used to develop critical thinking skills and empathy, through students discussing social and moral issues that are relevant to social studies material. Case studies from history and contemporary events are also integrated to illustrate moral dilemmas and the importance of character values in

decision-making. Additionally, role-playing is used to help students understand different perspectives and develop empathy skills.

Challenges and Obstacles in the Integration Process

The challenges and obstacles experienced by prospective professional teachers in integrating character education with social studies learning content are summarized in Table 3 and are explained as follows.

Table 3. Challenges and Obstacles for Prospective Professional Teachers

No.	Challenges and Obstacles	Percentage (%)
1	Limited time	32.26
2	Lack of Resources/Facilities	25.00
3	Lack of Special Training	21.77
4	Student Resistance	16.94
5	Others	4.03

Table 3 shows that limited time is the main challenge for prospective professional teachers. This finding is in line with interview results which show that prospective professional teachers often feel pressured to complete the syllabus, making it difficult to pay attention to the integration of character values. A lack of resources, including relevant teaching materials and supporting facilities, has also prevented the efforts of prospective professional teachers to implement character education effectively in social studies learning. Additionally, many prospective teachers express a lack of specific training to develop and implement teaching strategies that integrate character values. Viewed from the student aspect, resistance from students is also identified as an obstacle, especially when students do not understand or appreciate the importance of character education. Interview results also confirmed the need for stronger support, including sustainable training, access to resources, and supportive institutional policies, to help teacher candidates overcome challenges and increase the effectiveness of integrating character education in social studies learning.

Required Support

The forms of support needed by prospective professional teachers to integrate character education with social studies learning content are summarized in Table 4 and are explained as follows.

Table 4. Support for Prospective Professional Teachers

No.	Support	Percentage (%)
1	Sustainable Training Program	100.00
2	Resource Improvement and Development	96.77
3	Supervision and Mentoring	97.58
4	Policies from Stakeholders	97.58
5	Collaboration with Peers/Learning Community	99.19

Table 4 shows that sustainable training is needed by prospective teachers to improve their ability to integrate character education into social studies learning. This is reinforced by the results of interviews which show that prospective teachers emphasize the importance of specific and practical training, which not only provides theoretical understanding but also teaching strategies that can be directly applied in the classroom. Improving and developing educational resources, such as teaching materials, relevant textbooks, and teaching aids, is

also mentioned as an urgent need to support the integration of character values. Supervision and mentoring from more experienced teachers are recognized as an important form of support, helping prospective teachers to overcome practical challenges and providing examples of effective implementation. Policy support from stakeholders, including school policies that encourage character education and time allocation in the curriculum, is also considered essential for the success of this integration. In addition, collaboration with peers and learning communities, through discussion and sharing of best practices, was identified as an effective way to strengthen abilities and increase motivation in implementing character education. These findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach that includes training, resources, mentoring, institutional policies, and collaboration between teachers to improve the quality of character education in social studies learning.

Discussion

The results of the research show that prospective professional teachers have a good understanding of the importance of character education and its integration into social studies learning in elementary schools. Prospective teachers realize that moral values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and empathy can be taught through historical, geographical, and socio-cultural contexts in social studies. This finding is in line with previous research which emphasizes the importance of character education in the curriculum to form moral and ethical students (Birhan et al., 2021; Shume et al., 2012). Various strategies and learning methods have been implemented to integrate character education into social studies learning content. Strategies that are often used include problem-based learning, project-based learning, and group discussions that allow students to explore character values such as honesty, responsibility, and cooperation in the context of social studies material. These findings are consistent with previous research which shows the effectiveness of interdisciplinary approaches and active learning in providing character values (Bali & Fadli, 2019; Davies et al., 2017; Haniah et al., 2020). Teacher candidates have applied case studies and role-playing to bring to life historical or social situations with moral dilemmas so that students can practice ethical problem-solving.

There are various challenges in integrating character education with social studies learning content. The main challenges identified include time constraints in the curriculum, lack of supporting resources, as well as limitations in specific training to implement integration strategies effectively. This finding is in line with previous research which found that the implementation of character education is often hampered by a lack of structural support and relevant teaching materials (Hilyana & Muhammad, 2018; Pratiwi et al., 2022). In addition, prospective teachers need more practical examples and guidance in applying the concept of character education in the context of social studies, which has also been suggested in previous research as an important factor in the success of character education (Birhan et al., 2021; Istiyono et al., 2021). Success in integrating character education with social studies learning content requires various forms of support. The support required includes ongoing training that focuses on practical and effective strategies, access to relevant teaching resources, and guidance from experienced mentors. This finding is in line with previous research which emphasizes the importance of training and institutional support in the successful implementation of character education (Istiyono et al., 2021; Nizarani et al., 2020; Rochmawati, 2018). In addition, collaborative support from colleagues and opportunities to share best practices are also considered important in supporting the successful integration of character education. This is in line with previous research which found that a supportive professional environment can increase teachers' skills and confidence in integrating character education. Prospective teachers also want supportive policies from educational institutions and the government to ensure sustainability and consistency in these integration efforts.

The implications of the results of this research focus on the importance of strengthening systematic support for prospective professional teachers in integrating character education with social studies learning. Research findings show that to improve the quality of character education in elementary schools, structured and practical ongoing training is needed, not only increasing theoretical knowledge but also the practical skills of prospective teachers. In addition, educational resources, such as relevant teaching materials and teaching aids, are essential to support effective implementation. Supervision and mentoring from experienced teachers and collaboration between colleagues can provide practical guidance and increase the motivation of prospective teachers. Overall, the results of this research imply the need for a holistic and coordinated approach that includes various aspects of support, to ensure successful and sustainable integration of character education in social studies learning, which will ultimately improve the overall quality of education.

This study has several limitations that need to be noted. First, this research only involved a limited number of professional teacher education program students, so the results may not be generalizable to all prospective teachers in Indonesia. Second, the mixed methods approach used, although comprehensive, may still be limited in reaching the depth and complexity of each prospective teacher's individual experience. In addition, limited time and resources also limit the ability to conduct more in-depth and sustained observations of prospective teachers' teaching practices in the field. Recommendations for future research include expanding the research sample to cover various educational institutions in various regions, as well as using longitudinal methods to observe the development of prospective teacher competencies in integrating character education more sustainably. Additionally, future research should also explore specific training interventions and evaluate their effectiveness in supporting professional teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

Prospective professional teachers have a good understanding of the importance of character education and methods for integrating it into social studies learning in elementary schools. Prospective professional teachers use various learning strategies such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, and group discussions to insert character values into social studies material. Nonetheless, they have faced several challenges, including limited time in the curriculum, lack of resources, and lack of specialized training. Required support includes ongoing training, improvement, and development of relevant teaching resources and guidance from experienced mentors. Overall, the results of this research emphasize the need for a holistic approach involving training, resources, and policy support to increase the effectiveness of integrating character education in social studies learning in elementary schools.

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