

### IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: STRATEGIES, CHALLENGES, AND IMPACT

Muhammad Fariq Heemal Attruk<sup>1\*</sup>, Qurratul A'yun<sup>2</sup>, Nisak Ul Mujahidah<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Kristen Cipta Wacana, Jl. Satsui Tubun No.28, Kebonsari, Kec. Sukun, Kota Malang, Jawa Timur 65149, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Islam Malang, Jl. Mayjen Haryono No.193, Dinoyo, Kec. Lowokwaru, Kota Malang, Jawa Timur 65144, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>International Islamic University Malaysia, Jalan Gombak, 53100, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
e-mail: <sup>1\*</sup>fariqhemal@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The implementation of character education in higher education plays a pivotal role in shaping students with both academic excellence and moral integrity. This literature review explores strategies, challenges, and the impacts of character education across Indonesian universities. Strategies employed include integrating character values into curricula, leveraging religion-based education, utilizing technology, and aligning educational programs with local wisdom. Examples include the use of the AIKA curriculum at Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka and religion-based activities at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, which aim to foster traits such as honesty, discipline, and empathy. Additionally, institutions like Universitas Negeri Surabaya have adopted digital-based approaches to instill values relevant to the modern era. Despite these advances, numerous challenges persist. Limited resources, cultural diversity, and inadequate evaluation frameworks hinder the optimal implementation of character education. For instance, the lack of comprehensive assessments of students' attitudes and behaviors limits the visible impact on character formation. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted these challenges by disrupting traditional interaction-based teaching methods, demanding rapid adjustments to online platforms. This study highlights the significant role of local wisdom and religious values in fostering ethical behavior, responsibility, and social care among students. However, it also emphasizes the need for stronger policy support, resource allocation, and innovative approaches to overcome existing challenges. By addressing these gaps, higher education institutions can effectively contribute to the development of graduates who not only excel academically but also embody the principles of ethical leadership and social responsibility.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Higher Education, Curriculum Integration, Local Wisdom.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is one of the primary foundations in shaping individuals who are not only academically competent but also possess moral and ethical integrity. In this challenging era of globalization, higher education institutions bear a strategic responsibility not only to produce academically superior graduates but also to develop a generation of individuals with strong character. Character education has become increasingly important as the rapid advancements in science and technology are often accompanied by moral crises, such as rising individualism, social indifference, and unethical behaviors in various aspects of life.

Higher education plays a key role in fostering students' character through various approaches, such as integrating character values into the curriculum, strengthening religion-based values, and aligning with local wisdom. For instance, Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka implements character education through the AIKA curriculum, systematically designed to instill character values, although challenges remain in optimizing teaching methods [1]. Additionally, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara integrates religion-based activities, such as Qur'an memorization and community service, to cultivate students' religious and social character, despite challenges in managing cultural diversity and limited facilities [2].

This literature review aims to explore the various approaches adopted in implementing character education in higher education, identify the challenges encountered, and evaluate the effectiveness of its implementation. The focus includes strategies for integrating character education into curricula, the use of technology in character learning, and strengthening local and religious values to develop students with integrity. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of more effective character education strategies in Indonesian higher education institutions.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a literature review method, which involves examining various relevant literature on the topic of the implementation of character education in higher education. This method is conducted by identifying, selecting, and analysing credible sources such as scientific journals, books, and research reports.

The process includes searching for literature using relevant keywords, selecting based on criteria of credibility and relevance, and synthesizing findings to address the research objectives. This approach was chosen because it enables researchers to gain comprehensive insights from previous studies without conducting field data collection.

The literature review method provides a robust framework for gathering, analysing, and synthesizing findings from existing literature, resulting in a deeper understanding of the developments and challenges in the implementation of character education within the context of higher education.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Character Education Implementation Strategies

The implementation strategies for character education in higher education institutions include various approaches, such as integration into the curriculum, religion-based values, the use of technology, and alignment with local wisdom. Integrating character education into the curriculum is one of the most commonly applied approaches. At Muhammadiyah University Prof. Dr. Hamka, for instance, the AIKA curriculum is systematically designed to instill character values through effective policies and organization, although challenges remain in optimizing teaching methods [1]. At Achmad Yani University Banjarmasin, the Pancasila Education course has been adapted to explicitly include character elements in its syllabus and teaching methods, though comprehensive evaluation of students' attitudes has not yet been conducted [3].

Religion-based character education is another significant strategy. At the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, activities at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, such as communal prayers, Qur'an memorization, and mutual cooperation, focus on shaping students' religious and social character. However, challenges arise in managing students' cultural diversity and limited facilities [2]. A similar approach is applied at Brawijaya University,

where character education is integrated with the Tri Dharma of Higher Education through curricular and extracurricular activities, including worship training and religion-based community initiatives [4]. Additionally, Islamic philosophy is utilized in public universities to strengthen students' spiritual understanding and foster empathy and responsibility [5].

The use of technology is increasingly being adopted to support character education implementation. For example, the State University of Surabaya employs a digital-based approach encompassing nine elements of digital citizenship. This strategy aims to develop honesty, discipline, and responsibility among students in a digital environment [6]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Muhammadiyah University Ponorogo applied character values such as religiosity and honesty in online learning using platforms like Google Meet and the university's internal e-learning system [7].

Implementation based on local wisdom is also a vital strategy for character education. At the State Islamic University Raden Intan Lampung, values such as mutual cooperation, respect, and responsibility are integrated into academic and non-academic activities. This approach is supported by faculty training, university policies, and collaboration with local communities [8]. At Mahendradatta University Bali, the Tri Kaya Parisudha values are applied through socialization, exemplary behavior, and habituation, aiming to develop students with courteous, intelligent, and virtuous characters [9].

In addition to these strategies, character education is also implemented through thematic approaches in specific courses. For example, Citizenship Education courses in various universities have become platforms for instilling character values such as honesty, discipline, and social care. Studies reveal that although students understand the theory of character education, implementation in daily life still needs improvement through more innovative approaches [10] [11].

### **Challenges in Character Education Implementation**

The implementation of character education in higher education institutions faces various challenges, including management issues, cultural diversity, and limited resources. One of the primary challenges is the lack of adequate human resources to support the optimal execution of character education programs. For example, at Pamulang University, the management of character education is constrained by a limited number of educators, despite efforts in planning, organizing, and controlling being well-implemented [12]. A similar issue arises at Muhammadiyah University Prof. Dr. Hamka, where the focus on cognitive aspects in teaching methods and materials limits the depth of character development in students [1].

Cultural diversity among students also poses significant challenges. At the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, the diversity in students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds complicates the uniform application of approaches to build religious and social character. Additionally, the limited facilities in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah environment hinder the ideal learning process [2]. Similarly, at the State Islamic University Raden Intan Lampung, although local wisdom values such as mutual cooperation have been integrated into the curriculum, the cultural diversity of students requires more flexible strategies to achieve character education goals [8].

Evaluation and control also remain challenging. At the State University of Surabaya, the digital-based character education program faces obstacles in ensuring the consistent application of nine elements of digital citizenship across all levels. This is particularly related to students' ability to utilize technology effectively for character development [6]. At Achmad Yani University Banjarmasin, the evaluation of character education is also suboptimal, as assessments tend to focus on cognitive aspects, leaving students' attitudes and behaviors unevaluated [3].

The COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges to character education implementation through online learning. At Muhammadiyah University Ponorogo, adjustments were required to ensure the inculcation of character values such as honesty and responsibility via digital platforms. However, the lack of direct interaction between students and lecturers became a barrier to effectively instilling these values [7]. Furthermore, vocational higher education institutions faced issues in the initial implementation stages, where character values like discipline and responsibility were not yet optimally developed. Strengthening strategies in subsequent cycles partially addressed these challenges [10].

Overall evaluations indicate that although most higher education institutions have made progress in implementing character education, there remains a need to strengthen policy support, resources, and commitment from all stakeholders. For instance, Muhammadiyah University Ponorogo and the Islamic University of Ogan Komering Ilir reported that students have begun applying character values in daily life, but the success rate varies depending on students' backgrounds and institutional approaches [13] [11].

### **Evaluation and Impact of Character Education Implementation**

Evaluations of character education implementation in higher education reveal that most programs have been well-executed, although there are aspects that require improvement. At Pamulang University, evaluations highlight success in integrating character values through planning and organization, yet challenges persist due to inadequate human resources [12]. In general, the success of character education across institutions is influenced by policy support, facilities, and infrastructure, even though certain character aspects have not been optimally achieved [14].

The implementation of character education through coursework has yielded varying results. At Achmad Yani University Banjarmasin, evaluations show that the Pancasila Education course syllabus supports the formation of character values. However, the lack of comprehensive assessments on students' attitudes and behaviors limits the visible impact on character changes [3]. Conversely, character education implemented through Citizenship Education courses in vocational institutions shows improvements in values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility, particularly in the second learning cycle [10].

Positive impacts of character education implementation are also evident in students' abilities to interact in social environments. At the Islamic University of Ogan Komering Ilir, social care values have been successfully internalized through Citizenship Education courses, helping students from diverse cultural backgrounds develop empathy and a willingness to help others [13]. However, at Muhammadiyah University Ponorogo, while character values such as religiosity, hard work, and responsibility were applied in online learning during the pandemic, limited interaction between students and lecturers hindered the full internalization of these values [7].

The implementation of local value-based character education has also had a significant impact on students' character formation. At Mahendradatta University Bali, the Tri Kaya Parisudha values, which emphasize right thinking, speaking, and action, have been successfully instilled through habituation and exemplary behavior from lecturers and campus staff, fostering polite and responsible students [9]. Meanwhile, the State Islamic University Raden Intan Lampung successfully integrated local values such as mutual cooperation and responsibility into its curriculum, positively strengthening students' relationships with the surrounding community [8].

Despite these successes, challenges in evaluating character education remain in some institutions. For instance, at the State University of Surabaya, digital-based character education faces difficulties in ensuring the consistent application of nine elements of digital citizenship across study programs [6]. Additionally, while Islamic philosophy has been used to build students' spiritual and moral depth, the long-term impact of this approach requires further research to evaluate its effectiveness in fostering robust character development [5].

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the literature review, the implementation of character education in higher education institutions underscores the importance of integrating character values across various educational facets. Strategies employed include curriculum integration, religion-based approaches, technological utilization, and the reinforcement of local wisdom. Universities that have adopted these strategies, such as Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka and Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, have noted significant progress despite challenges like resource limitations and the cultural diversity of students.

The outcomes indicate that approaches grounded in local and religious values positively impact the development of student character, fostering traits like honesty, responsibility, and social empathy. However, challenges in management aspects, student background diversity, and the evaluation of character education

effectiveness require further attention. Notably, comprehensive assessments of student attitudes and behaviors should be enhanced to ensure the internalization of character values.

Overall, this literature emphasizes the necessity for policy support, adequate resource provision, and innovation in teaching methods to optimize the implementation of character education. By strengthening more targeted strategies, higher education institutions can contribute to shaping individuals who excel not only academically but also possess integrity in societal life.

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