

Implementation of Character Education: The Role of Teachers in Fostering a Hard-Working Attitude in Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of teachers in fostering the character of hard work among students at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak. Emphasizing the importance of character education in schools, it explores how principals and teachers collaboratively support students' work ethic through instructional and environmental strategies. A qualitative case study approach was employed to gain in-depth insights. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews with school stakeholders, and document analysis. This triangulation ensured a comprehensive understanding of the practices used to develop students' hard-working character. Findings indicate that teachers play a pivotal role in promoting a strong work ethic. They act as role models, incorporate the value of hard work into classroom activities, and cultivate a supportive learning environment. Additionally, the use of motivation and rewards strengthens students' commitment to learning. These practices are consistent with existing character education theories, highlighting teachers as both facilitators and motivators. The study underscores the necessity of a school-wide commitment to character development. Successful reinforcement of a hard-working ethos relies on strategic integration of values into teaching methods and school culture. To enhance students' character, especially the value of hard work, schools should adopt comprehensive policies that include teacher training, curriculum adjustments, and structured reward systems. These efforts can cultivate a consistent and effective culture of diligence across the educational environment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education plays a crucial role in shaping students' moral values and ethics and preparing them to face academic and life challenges with resilience and integrity (Shofiyyah et al., 2023). In the context of Islamic education, instilling character values such as hard work, discipline, and perseverance is an inseparable part of the holistic goals of education (Nabila et al., 2023). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the importance of hard work and sincerity in various aspects of life,

which aligns with the objectives of Islamic education to produce individuals who are knowledgeable and virtuous (Al-Attas, 1980). However, despite the emphasis on these values, implementing character education remains challenging in many schools, particularly private Islamic educational institutions in rural areas with limited resources and structured strategies.

SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak, as a private Islamic school, recognizes the importance of character education but faces various challenges in its implementation. Teachers play a central role as key agents in character formation, serving as educators and mentors who shape students' attitudes and behavior. Teachers are expected to set an example, instill discipline, and create a learning environment encouraging perseverance and motivation. However, in today's digital era, where students are increasingly exposed to various social media and technology influences, character education becomes more complex. According to Jannah (Jannah & Tanjung, 2024), rapid technological development has contributed to the decline in students' ethical behavior, making the role of teachers in reinforcing positive values even more crucial.

In addition to the role of teachers, school leadership also plays a vital role in determining the effectiveness of character education programs. As the highest authority, the school principal is responsible for setting policies, providing direction, and building a culture of discipline and hard work among teachers and students (Nurafni et al., 2022). In private schools, especially in rural areas, there is often a high dependency on the principal's leadership. Hence, the strategies applied by the principal significantly determine the success of character education programs (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). Effective leadership ensures that character-building efforts are not limited to classroom teaching but are also integrated into extracurricular activities and the overall school environment. However, many private Islamic schools still lack structured policies or teacher training programs to support character education strategies (Yahdiyani et al., 2020).

Although character education has been widely studied in various educational contexts, research addressing character education in Islamic schools, particularly in rural areas, remains limited. Previous studies have discussed the general framework of character education (Lickona, 2012). Still, they have not provided an in-depth understanding of the specific approaches implemented by teachers in private Islamic educational institutions. Moreover, although national education policies emphasize the importance of character development, there is still a gap in understanding how these policies are implemented at the school level (Nucci, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore how teachers at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak implement character education strategies to instill a work ethic in students.

Building a strong work ethic in students impacts academic success and prepares them to face future challenges, both in personal and professional life. Research has shown that students with high perseverance and determination tend to have better academic achievements and are more successful in their careers (I. D. C. K. Putri & Widodo, 2018). However, the process of instilling these values is not simple. A systematic approach involving teachers, school leaders, and parents is needed. Schools must create an environment that encourages students to face challenges, persist in overcoming difficulties, and take responsibility for their learning. This requires effective teaching methods and policies that support character development (Rosita, 2018).

However, many private Islamic schools have not yet made character education a structured program. In some cases, the role of guidance and counseling teachers (BK) is often overlooked, with the assumption that religious teachers can replace this function. While religious teachers play an important role in moral and ethical development, character education requires a more comprehensive approach that combines religious values with psychological and pedagogical strategies. Therefore, schools need to recognize the importance of special training for teachers in character education so they have the skills to guide students effectively (Hasbullah, 2011). Character education risks becoming an unintended process without a structured approach, leading to inconsistent outcomes.

To address this challenge, this study examines the strategies teachers at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak implemented to instill ethics in students. Specifically, this research will identify the methods

teachers use, their challenges, and best practices that can be adopted to improve the effectiveness of character education. By focusing on private Islamic schools in rural areas, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of teachers in shaping students' character. It provides recommendations for strengthening character education in similar educational institutions. Through this research, it is hoped that schools, policymakers, and educators can develop more effective strategies to instill values of hard work and perseverance in students, enabling them to achieve long-term success.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method with a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategies to develop students' hard-working character at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak, Boyolali, Central Java. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of social and educational phenomena based on the experiences and perspectives of informants. The research was conducted at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak, Boyolali, Central Java, and involved the principal and vice principal for curriculum, teachers, and students. The subjects were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that participants had direct involvement in character education initiatives. The principal was chosen for their role in shaping school policies, while the vice principal for curriculum and student affairs provided insights into program implementation. Teachers, mainly those responsible for Islamic education and character development, were included to explore their strategies and challenges. Students were also interviewed to understand their experiences and responses to character-building efforts. A total of 18 participants were involved, including one principal, two vice principals, five teachers, and ten students from different grade levels.

Data collection was conducted through interviews, observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' experiences in strengthening the hard-working character of students. Key questions focused on how character education was integrated into the curriculum, what teaching strategies were employed, and what challenges were encountered. Observations were conducted through participant observation, allowing the researcher to engage in school activities and directly witness interactions between teachers and students. Classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and daily school interactions were observed to assess how character education was implemented. Documentation was collected to complement the findings, including school policies, lesson plans, and records of character-building programs.

The data analysis followed the thematic approach to identify key patterns and themes. After data collection, information was transcribed and categorized based on emerging themes. Data reduction was applied to filter out irrelevant information and highlight the most significant findings. The results were presented descriptively, supported by direct participant quotations, theoretical comparisons, and previous research. This process ensured that the study captured meaningful insights into character education strategies.

Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were aware of the research objectives and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by protecting participants' personal information and using pseudonyms where necessary. Data validity was ensured through triangulation, comparing interview results, observations, and documentation to establish consistency and credibility in findings. By clarifying the research methods, including participant selection, interview procedures, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations, this study aims to provide a systematic and credible understanding of how teachers develop students' hard-working character in private Islamic schools in rural areas.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *The Role of Teachers in Instilling the Value of Hard Work*

Based on interviews with several teachers and students, it was found that teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' work ethic through various strategies, such as setting an example, integrating the value of hard work into learning, and providing motivation and rewards. These findings are further supported by field observations illustrating how these practices are implemented in daily school activities.

In an interview with Mr. A, a Religious Studies teacher with over a decade of teaching experience, he emphasized that leading by example is one of the most effective ways to instill the value of hard work. *"I always strive to be a role model for my students in discipline and teaching methods. If I want my students to be diligent in their studies, I must also show perseverance in my work,"* he stated. Classroom observations confirmed this, as Mr. A consistently began his lessons on time and was well-prepared. He frequently shared inspiring stories about historical Islamic figures who demonstrated perseverance and dedication in their pursuits. Students appeared engaged, often asking questions and responding enthusiastically to these stories.

Ms. S, a Bahasa Indonesia teacher, implemented a different but equally effective approach. In her interview, she explained that fostering a strong work ethic in students could be achieved by challenging them through assignments. *"I often give project-based tasks that require students to work hard and not give up easily,"* she explained. Observations supported her statement, as in one of her lessons, she assigned students to write a short story based on a personal experience that illustrated the value of hard work. Students were seen diligently working on their stories, some even using their break time to refine their assignments. Once submitted, Ms. S recognized students who demonstrated great effort through verbal praise in class or small rewards like notebooks or pens.

Meanwhile, interviews with students revealed how teachers' strategies directly impacted their motivation. A ninth-grade student, R admitted that her teachers' dedication inspired her to work harder. *"I see how my teachers work hard every day. It makes me feel like I should put in more effort in my studies to achieve something in life,"* she said. Observations confirmed this, as R often actively asked questions and demonstrated diligence in completing her assignments. Similarly, an eighth-grade student, F, stated that receiving teacher recognition boosted his motivation. *"When my teacher praises me for completing my tasks well, I feel encouraged to keep working hard,"* he shared. Observations in the classroom showed that Fajar was one of the most active students in discussions and consistently completed his assignments on time.

Beyond the classroom, the value of hard work was also instilled through extracurricular activities. Field observations revealed that teachers who supervised extracurricular programs, such as sports and arts, emphasized perseverance by providing consistent and challenging training sessions. One example was the futsal team, where the coach implemented rigorous physical training and stressed the importance of discipline and persistent effort. Students participating in these activities showed noticeable improvements in physical endurance and mental resilience.

From these interviews and field observations, teachers play a significant and multi-faceted role in fostering the value of hard work among students. Leading by example, integrating work ethic into lessons, and providing motivation and recognition have proven effective strategies in shaping students' perseverance. Additionally, a supportive learning environment—both in academic and extracurricular settings—further reinforces students' understanding of the importance of hard work in achieving success.

The findings of this study reveal that teachers play a fundamental role in instilling the value of hard work in students through various strategies. These include setting a personal example by demonstrating discipline and perseverance, integrating the concept of hard work into classroom learning and extracurricular activities, and creating a positive and conducive learning environment. Teachers also motivate students by providing encouragement and recognizing their efforts through

praise and rewards, significantly enhancing their enthusiasm and commitment to their studies. Field observations confirm that students respond positively to these strategies, showing increased engagement, diligence in completing assignments, and active participation in academic and extracurricular activities. Ultimately, the study highlights that a teacher's role extends beyond academic instruction to shaping students' character and work ethic, preparing them to face future challenges with perseverance and determination.

The findings of this study align with several educational theories that emphasize the role of teachers in shaping students' work ethic. One relevant theory is Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which states that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling (Apriyanto et al., 2025). In the context of this study, students develop a strong work ethic by observing their teachers' discipline, perseverance, and commitment. When teachers demonstrate hard work through punctuality, thorough lesson preparation, or dedication to student success, students internalize these values and apply them in their own learning. Another relevant theory is the Self-Determination Theory by Deci & Ryan, which explains that intrinsic motivation increases when individuals feel competent, autonomous, and connected to their environment (E. R. Putri et al., 2024). Teachers play a crucial role in fostering this motivation by creating a supportive learning environment and recognizing students' efforts, which encourages persistence and dedication.

Previous research has demonstrated similar findings that support this theoretical framework. A study by Wentzel examined the relationship between teacher behavior and student motivation, concluding that teachers who exhibit enthusiasm, provide encouragement, and model hard work positively influence students' academic engagement and perseverance (Djaafara, 2018). The study found that students were more likely to develop a strong work ethic when their teachers supported and recognized their efforts consistently. Similarly, Dweck and Leggett explored the impact of teacher feedback on student motivation, finding that students who received praise for effort rather than innate ability were more likely to embrace challenges and demonstrate resilience in their learning process (Sinaga, 2022). This aligns with the current study's findings, where students showed increased motivation and commitment when teachers acknowledged their hard work.

These theoretical and empirical perspectives reinforce the conclusion that teachers play a pivotal role in instilling the value of hard work. By modeling perseverance, integrating work ethic into lessons, and providing motivation and recognition, teachers help shape students' attitudes toward effort and success, ultimately preparing them for future academic and personal challenges.

3.2. Implementation of Management Strategies to Improve the Character of Hard Work in Student Learning at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak

3.2.1 Utilization of Online Media-Based Learning

Using digital platforms to enhance interactive and collaborative learning in Islamic religious education has proven to be a transformative approach at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak. Technology integration into education has been widely recognized as an essential tool to keep pace with the demands of the digital era, particularly in Islamic education.

a) Accessibility Improvements

One of the key advantages of online learning platforms is that they offer students the flexibility to access learning materials anytime and from any location. This aspect has proven to be particularly beneficial for students who face logistical challenges in attending traditional classes, such as those living in remote areas. An interview with a student highlighted the impact of this flexibility: *"I can access the materials at home whenever I need to, which helps me understand the lessons better, especially when I miss school."* This accessibility also allows students to learn at their own pace, which has been linked to improved academic performance. However, some challenges persist, such as internet connectivity issues in more rural areas, which can hinder the full potential of online learning. According to Paling (2024), while online

platforms increase accessibility, the lack of reliable internet infrastructure can limit the effectiveness of such platforms, highlighting the need for targeted investments in technology infrastructure.

b) Providing Interactive and Collaborative Content

Online platforms allow for the creation and sharing of interactive content, such as educational videos, online quizzes, and forums for discussion. These features are crucial for fostering engagement and active participation among students. An observation revealed that students were far more engaged when the lessons incorporated multimedia content such as videos and interactive quizzes than traditional lecture-based methods. One teacher noted, *"The use of videos and interactive discussions has helped make the lessons more engaging, and students are more motivated to participate."* This aligns with Sheehan's (2019) and Chai's (2021) research, which emphasized that interactive content enhances learning and stimulates students' interest and involvement, allowing them to apply what they have learned more dynamically and hands-only.

c) Teacher Training in the Use of Technology

For the full potential of online learning platforms to be realized, teachers must be adequately trained in the use of technology. This ensures that they can effectively utilize the features of digital platforms to enhance learning outcomes. A school principal shared, *"We have conducted training programs for our teachers, which has made them more confident and capable in using online tools to teach Islamic religious education."* Training programs focus on the technical skills needed to operate digital platforms and pedagogical strategies for integrating technology into the curriculum. This finding is consistent with the research of Carpenter (2019) and Lo (2018), which suggests that teachers who receive technology training are more effective in creating engaging, interactive lessons that enhance student learning.

d) Implications for the Future

Online learning platforms represent a significant opportunity to enhance access to Islamic education, particularly in Indonesia's geographically dispersed regions. However, as observed, several challenges still need to be addressed, including inconsistent internet access and a lack of suitable devices. To overcome these obstacles, the school partners with other stakeholders to improve technological infrastructure and support policies that ensure equitable access to digital learning resources. This aligns with the broader goal of preparing the younger generation to navigate the global digital era, as discussed by McCarthy (2023), who stressed that the future of education must embrace digital tools and platforms.

The research findings indicate that online media-based learning at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak has significantly enhanced the accessibility and quality of Islamic religious education. Online learning platforms allow students to access materials at their own convenience, particularly benefiting those in remote areas who might face logistical challenges attending traditional classes. This flexibility has allowed students to learn at their own pace, which has been linked to improved academic performance. However, challenges such as inconsistent internet access in rural areas persist, limiting the full potential of online learning. These findings align with Paling (2024), who highlights the importance of addressing the technological infrastructure to ensure the effective use of online platforms.

Furthermore, integrating interactive and collaborative content into the learning process has fostered higher student engagement and motivation levels. Observations revealed that multimedia content, including videos and online quizzes, increased student participation and interest compared to traditional lecture-based methods. This supports Sheehan (2019) and Chai (2021), emphasizing interactive content's positive impact on student involvement. Teacher training in technology use has also been critical for maximizing the potential of digital platforms. As noted by a school principal, teacher training programs have enhanced their confidence and ability to integrate technology effectively into their teaching practices. This corresponds with Carpenter's (2019) and Lo's (2018) findings on the importance of teacher preparation for successful technology implementation. Despite

these advancements, challenges remain, such as inconsistent internet access and limited devices, which the school is actively working to address through partnerships and policy improvements.

3.2.2 Strengthening the Character of Hard Work in Learning

a) The Strategic Role of Teachers

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character, especially developing their work ethic and interpersonal skills. They are academic instructors and role models for the students, demonstrating values such as dedication, responsibility, and perseverance. A teacher stated, *"Our students often mirror our actions, so it's essential that we exhibit the values we want them to adopt, such as hard work and discipline."* This insight is aligned with Bond's (2015) theory that teachers function as agents of change, influencing not just academic knowledge but also students' personal and moral development. Teachers' ability to model strong work ethics and perseverance in the classroom profoundly impacts how students approach their academic and personal challenges.

b) Integration in Classroom Learning

Teachers at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak are incorporating the values of hard work into their lessons by designing tasks that challenge students and require them to collaborate and problem-solve. This integration occurs through various methods, including group discussions, simulations, and project-based learning. During a classroom observation, students were seen working diligently on group projects. When asked about the assignments, a student shared, *"The group projects make us work harder, and we learn to be disciplined while respecting others' opinions."* These approaches promote essential life skills, including teamwork, communication, and responsibility, while reinforcing the importance of hard work. This method supports Marwan's (2025) findings, which emphasize the importance of experiential learning in shaping students' character by internalizing core values like cooperation, responsibility, and hard work.

c) Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are inevitable in a school setting, and effective conflict resolution is essential to maintain a harmonious environment and teach students critical life skills such as empathy, cooperation, and communication. Observations in the school revealed that managing conflicts is handled with an emphasis on understanding all parties involved and finding a solution that benefits everyone. The school principal mentioned, *"We always try to find solutions that benefit all parties, ensuring that no one feels neglected or harmed in the process."* This approach reflects Mulyasa's (2017) framework, which advocates for conflict management strategies that prioritize resolution without creating winners and losers.

At SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak, several strategies are applied to resolve conflicts effectively:

- Collaboration: The school encourages a collaborative approach, where conflicting parties work together to find a solution that accommodates everyone's interests.
- Compromise: Teachers and administrators help mediate by forming small teams to analyze the root causes of the conflict, ensuring that both sides feel heard and respected.
- Win-Win Strategy: The school prioritizes a win-win approach to conflict resolution, ensuring that both parties reach a satisfactory agreement.

The findings from interviews and observations at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak highlight the significant role of online learning platforms, teacher leadership, and conflict resolution strategies in fostering a culture of hard work among students. Integrating technology in the classroom has expanded access to learning and increased student engagement. At the same time, teachers' roles as mentors and role models remain central to cultivating a strong work ethic, while the school's effective conflict management strategies help maintain a positive learning environment. Despite challenges related to technological infrastructure, the school continues to make strides in enhancing educational outcomes by ensuring both students and teachers are well-prepared for future demands.

The research findings highlight the significant role of teachers in shaping students' character, particularly in instilling a strong work ethic. Teachers at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak serve as both academic instructors and role models, demonstrating key values such as perseverance, responsibility, and dedication. Their ability to model hard work in the classroom profoundly influences students' approach to academic and personal challenges. As seen in the school, integrating hard work into lessons through collaborative tasks, group discussions, and project-based learning has helped students internalize essential life skills like teamwork, communication, and discipline. These methods reinforce the importance of hard work and contribute to developing students' interpersonal skills as they learn to respect others' opinions and collaborate effectively, supporting Marwan's (2025) emphasis on experiential learning for character development.

In addition to teacher influence, the school's conflict resolution strategies play a crucial role in fostering a positive learning environment. The school emphasizes a collaborative, win-win approach to conflict management, ensuring that conflicts are resolved to benefit all parties involved. This approach, in line with Mulyasa's (2017) framework, prioritizes understanding and mutual respect, teaching students essential life skills like empathy and communication. The research findings underscore the importance of integrating technology and effective teaching strategies to strengthen students' character. While challenges such as technological infrastructure persist, the school's ongoing efforts to improve access to learning and prepare teachers and students for future demands contribute to a culture of hard work and personal growth.

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that teachers play a crucial role in instilling the value of hard work in students at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak. Teachers serve as academic instructors and role models in discipline, perseverance, and dedication. Strategies employed by teachers, such as setting an example, integrating the value of hard work into lessons, and providing motivation and rewards, have proven effective in shaping students' character. Additionally, online learning platforms have expanded access and increased student engagement, although challenges related to technological infrastructure remain. The school's conflict management approach fosters a positive learning environment, encouraging cooperation and empathy. In conclusion, the reinforcement of hard work values at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak is influenced by a combination of teaching strategies, the use of technology, and effective conflict management.

This study was limited to one school, and future research should examine multiple institutions across different regions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how these strategies work in diverse settings. Schools should implement structured mentoring programs where teachers actively model and reinforce hard-working behaviors. Additionally, educational policies should prioritize investments in improving technological infrastructure to ensure that online learning platforms can be fully utilized. Furthermore, schools could adopt more formalized conflict resolution strategies emphasizing collaborative problem-solving and empathy to foster positive learning environments across different contexts. In conclusion, the reinforcement of hard work values at SMP Nurul Islam Ngemplak is influenced by a combination of teaching strategies, the use of technology, and effective conflict management, with implications for educational policies focused on teacher training and infrastructure development.

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