Managing Character Education for Students with Special Needs: A Framework of Planning, Organizing, Implementation and Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of character education at SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Using a qualitative case study design, this analysis examines how character education is planned, organized, implemented, and evaluated within an inclusive elementary school setting. Data were gathered through direct observation, semi-structured interviews with school leaders and teachers, and analysis of school documents. Thematic analysis revealed that the school incorporates 18-character values, adapted to the local context, into all learning modules and daily routines. Character education is carried out through modelling, habituation, and reinforcement, supported by a dual-homeroom teacher model and differentiated instruction across regular, intensive, and transitional classes. Regular evaluations, aligned with continuous improvement principles, help monitor students' character development and inform program refinement. The findings highlight how inclusive management strategies and adaptation to local contexts can effectively support character education for SEN students. This framework offers practical insights that may be replicated or adapted by other inclusive schools aiming to strengthen character education.

Keywords: *Character Education, Special Needs, Inclusive Education, Elementary School*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi implementasi pendidikan karakter di SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang untuk siswa dengan Kebutuhan Pendidikan Khusus (SEN). Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana pendidikan karakter direncanakan, diorganisir, diimplementasikan, dan dievaluasi dalam lingkungan sekolah dasar yang inklusif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi langsung, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan pimpinan sekolah dan guru, serta analisis dokumen sekolah. Analisis tematik menunjukkan bahwa sekolah mengintegrasikan 18 nilai karakter, yang disesuaikan dengan konteks lokal,

ke dalam semua modul pembelajaran dan rutinitas harian. Pendidikan karakter dilakukan melalui keteladanan, pembiasaan, dan penguatan, didukung oleh model guru wali kelas ganda dan pengajaran yang berbeda di kelas reguler, intensif, dan transisi. Evaluasi rutin yang selaras dengan prinsip-prinsip perbaikan berkelanjutan, membantu memantau perkembangan karakter siswa dan menjadi bahan penyempurnaan program. Temuan ini menyoroti bagaimana strategi manajemen inklusif dan adaptasi terhadap konteks lokal dapat secara efektif mendukung pendidikan karakter bagi siswa SEN. Kerangka kerja ini menawarkan wawasan praktis yang dapat direplikasi atau diadaptasi oleh sekolah-sekolah inklusif lain yang bertujuan untuk memperkuat pendidikan karakter.

Kata Kunci: *Pendidikan karakter, Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus, Pendidikan Inklusi, Sekolah Dasar*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an educational approach that provides opportunities for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to learn alongside other children in a regular school environment (Woolfson, 2024). This model reflects a global commitment to ensuring equal access to quality education for all, regardless of physical, mental, or social differences. Internationally, inclusive education has become a key agenda in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education.

In the Indonesian context, inclusive education has been formally adopted through regulations such as Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and the Ministry of National Education Regulation Number 70 of 2009 on inclusive education for students with disabilities and those with exceptional intelligence or special talents. However, despite these policies, schools often face significant challenges in implementation, particularly in managing character education for SEN.

Character education management plays a crucial role in shaping the attitudes, values, and moral development of students with special needs (Vlachou & Tsirantonaki, 2023). Effective character education helps students develop essential skills, such as independence, discipline, and social responsibility (Perrin et al., 2021). Yet in practice, obstacles remain, including teachers' limited understanding of SEN-specific needs, inadequate facilities, and the absence of comprehensive school policies guiding character education (Irfan, 2022; Naeemya & Yoneda, 2024).

This study focuses on SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang, Bantul, an inclusive school that accommodates approximately 14 students with diverse needs, including autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, and speech delay. The school strives to adapt its curriculum, teaching methods, and school culture to

support character education for SEN. However, it still faces challenges in aligning these efforts systematically and sustainably.

Character education for SEN involves collaboration not only from teachers but also parents, the school environment, and the wider community (Schell et al., 2024). Teachers need both pedagogical competence and socio-emotional sensitivity, while parental involvement reinforces character values at home (Korthals Altes et al., 2024). Schools also play a central role by providing inclusive facilities and fostering a culture of acceptance. Nevertheless, coordination among stakeholders is often limited due to insufficient communication and structured collaboration.

Moreover, clear and consistent school policies are critical in supporting effective character education for SEN (Thomas & Kumar, 2024). Policies guide professional development, curriculum adaptation, and regular evaluation processes (Navas-Bonilla et al., 2025) Without them, character education initiatives risk becoming fragmented and inconsistent.

Innovative and interactive teaching methods are also essential to make character education meaningful and engaging for SEN (Shutaleva et al., 2023). Examples include game-based learning, storytelling, and experiential approaches tailored to each student's characteristics (Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025). Schools should also create professional learning communities to enable teachers to share strategies and experiences.

This study offers novelty by examining character education management specifically for SEN in an inclusive primary school in Indonesia, using a comprehensive framework of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. While prior research has discussed character education in general or inclusive practices broadly, few have focused on how these management stages are applied to SEN in the Indonesian context. The findings are expected to contribute not only to theoretical insights but also to practical guidelines for schools aiming to implement inclusive character education effectively. Ultimately, this research aims to help schools design inclusive character education programs that are policy-aligned and practice-oriented, ensuring that all students—without exception—can thrive academically and personally.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design, as defined by Yin (2018), to gain an in-depth understanding of how character education is implemented at SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang in the context of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The data were analysed using thematic analysis,

where the collected data were categorized into themes corresponding to the stages of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation.

Data collection was conducted through direct observations of classroom and extracurricular activities, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and document analysis of school curricula and character education programs (Izzah et al., 2024). The primary data sources consisted of interviews with the school principal, four teachers, and two administrative staff involved in the character education program, as well as field observations. Secondary data were obtained from official documents, including teaching modules, lesson plans, and school policy documents related to character education.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing and cross-validating information obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis. This method enabled a holistic understanding of how character education is planned, organized, implemented, and evaluated in the inclusive setting at SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang.

The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes three concurrent steps: (1) data condensation, where raw data were summarized and focused on relevant aspects; (2) data display, where data were organized into thematic matrices and visual summaries to facilitate interpretation; and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions, where patterns were identified, conclusions formulated, and their validity continuously verified against the data. This systematic process ensured that the findings accurately represented the reality of character education management for SEN at the school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

Character can be developed through teaching and learning activities, school culture, extracurricular activities, as well as at home and in the community (Ansori et al., 2024). SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang implements various routine programs, including daily, weekly, and monthly activities, alongside special programs for students with special educational needs (SEN), such as speech therapy in collaboration with psychologists. According to Athoillah (2010), management involves planning, organizing, mobilizing, and controlling to achieve goals through the utilization of human and other resources. Based on these concepts, the findings are presented below.

1. Planning

In the planning stage, the school conducts early identification of students' needs during the new student admission process. This is carried out through observation by teachers, informal interviews with parents, and psychological assessments (*psikotes*) when required. These steps help the school tailor academic and behavioral interventions effectively.

Character education planning is then integrated with instructional design. The school has identified 18 character values (Kemendikbud, 2017). With these values, the school strives to holistically shape students' character as the foundation for curriculum development. These include religiousness, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, patriotism, appreciation of achievement, friendliness, love of peace, reading habit, environmental care, and social care. As noted by the principal: "*Early detection helps us prepare appropriate learning strategies and character education plans tailored to each child's condition.*"

To strengthen implementation, the school assigns two teachers to each inclusive classroom (a homeroom teacher and a co-homeroom teacher) and provides three additional teachers for intensive classes to offer more focused support. Learning targets for SEN prioritize social skills and character formation, rather than solely academic achievement. Character education plans are evaluated at the end of each semester to measure effectiveness and guide improvements.

2. Organizing

This organizational structure aligns with inclusive education principles and differentiates management, enabling the school to tailor support based on students' diverse needs. SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang organizes its inclusive education into three types of classes:

a. Regular classes: SEN with mild difficulties join peers in a full inclusion setting.

b. Intensive classes: Designed for students with more significant needs, such as Down syndrome or intellectual disabilities.

c. Transitional classes: Serve as a temporary phase to evaluate readiness for moving into regular classes.

As part of this model, each regular class has two teachers: the main homeroom teacher delivers subject content, while the supporting teacher focuses on SEN support. These teachers may switch roles flexibly to ensure balanced teaching and support. This co-teaching model is a central strategy,

fostering inclusive learning and individualized attention. The principal explained: *"With this arrangement, every student gets the attention they need, without making them feel separated from their friends."*

3. Implementation

The school implements the Merdeka Curriculum, adapting teaching methods and assessments for SEN. While academic content is similar across students, materials and evaluation indicators are simplified for SEN to focus more on social skills development. Teachers serve as daily role models. For example, a teacher shared: *"We show how to greet politely, share food, and help friends — so students can see and practice these values naturally."*

To systematically observe character growth, the school uses daily character checklists completed by teachers, in addition to informal observations. These tools track the practice of the 18-character values. Program habituation includes:
a. Religious practices (prayer, reciting supplications, group worship)
b. Leadership roles (leading prayer, reading aloud, leading mealtime rituals)
c. Promotion of bilingualism (Bahasa and English) in daily conversation

Role modelling extends to teachers demonstrating polite language, respectful behavior, and Islamic ethics, such as the correct way to perform ablution and prayer. Reinforcement strategies include awarding stars, stickers, and other tokens, as well as involving parents through routine communication to maintain character education at home. As noted by a teacher: *"These small rewards make students feel proud, and parents become more motivated to continue character learning outside school."*

4. Evaluation

Evaluation is conducted every Saturday, involving all grades (1–6). The school uses a combination of:
a. Observation rubrics to assess students' daily behavior (e.g., honesty, discipline, empathy)
b. Assessment forms completed by teachers
c. School-level meetings to review findings

The evaluation includes not only students but also teachers and education staff. Teachers' assessments cover Qur'an reading skills, professional development, classroom management, and contribution to inclusive education programs. Tools include rubrics and self-reflection forms, which are reviewed by the principal. As explained by the principal: *"We don't just assess students;*

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we also evaluate teachers' growth through workshops, mentoring, and reflective discussions."

Results of these evaluations are used to improve the program, for example, by:

a. Holding internal workshops on inclusive teaching strategies
b. Updating teaching modules
c. Providing individual coaching for teachers facing challenges.

These measures help sustain an inclusive, character-focused culture. The impact is evident: SEN students show progress in social skills and moral behavior, while teachers increase their sensitivity and competence. Regular evaluation also helps the school adjust strategies based on real classroom dynamics and student needs.

Discussion

Planning: Adaptation of 18 Character Values and Early Identification

Character education at SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang begins with careful planning that aligns national guidelines with local context. The adoption of 18 character values follows the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2017). However, the school contextualizes these values to its multicultural environment by emphasizing religious tolerance and social harmony. This adaptation ensures that character education remains relevant and meaningful in students' everyday lives.

Early identification of students with special educational needs (SEN) i s carried out through systematic observations, interviews with parents, and psychological assessments. These steps allow teachers to design differentiated teaching modules tailored to students' unique needs. This practice aligns with Athoillah (2010) view on the role of organized educational management in fostering both academic and moral development.

Organizing: Dual-Homeroom Teacher Model and Inclusive Class Types

SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang structures its inclusive education program with three types of classes: regular, intensive, and transitional. This organizational strategy aligns with principles of inclusive education and differentiation Cruz et al., 2023; Astiwi et al., 2024).

A notable innovation is the dual-homeroom teacher model, which replaces the more common shadow teacher approach. In this system, two homeroom teachers collaboratively share instructional and support responsibilities. As the principal noted, *"With this system, every child feels included without losing personalized guidance,"* explained the principal.

This approach enhances individualized support and promotes a classroom culture that values diversity. Nevertheless, its successful implementation requires sufficient human resources and systematic support from school management, which could present challenges for schools with limited capacity.

Implementation: Modelling, Habituation, and Reinforcement

Character education implementation at SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang integrates modelling, habituation, and reinforcement, as proposed by Mulyasa (2018) and supported by Bandura's (1997) social learning theory, which highlights the role of observation and imitation in learning. Teachers act as daily role models through consistent language, actions, and behavior.

Habituation is visible in structured daily rituals, including congregational prayers, reciting supplications, and leadership rotations, which help internalize character values naturally. Reinforcement strategies further support this process and include:

a. Daily character checklists completed by teachers.
b. Award systems (e.g., stars and verbal praise).
c. Feedback to parents to reinforce character learning at home.

Interestingly, this approach contrasts with Tarso et al. (2025), who emphasized community-based programs, while SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang focuses on extracurricular and school-based character education.

In line with Salabi (2022), effective character education for SEN requires not only adaptive teaching strategies but also active collaboration with parents. Teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang regularly communicate with parents, share feedback, and encourage them to support character values at home, mirroring the emphasis on building positive emotional connections and creative learning support highlighted in Salabi's study.

Evaluation: Continuous Improvement Cycle

Evaluation is conducted weekly (every Saturday) using observation rubrics and structured assessment forms. This process not only monitors students' character growth but also evaluates teacher performance and curriculum effectiveness.

By aligning evaluations with the continuous improvement cycle of Total Quality Management (TQM), findings from these assessments directly inform the revision of teaching modules, planning of professional development workshops, and broader policy adjustments (Kintoko et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). As the principal explained, *"We continuously adjust our methods and training based on what we learn from evaluations."* This reflective, data-driven

approach positions character education as a shared responsibility that is continuously refined.

Policy Implications and Transferability

The findings offer broader insights:

a. The dual-homeroom teacher model, though resource-intensive, provides a replicable framework for schools aiming to strengthen support in inclusive settings.

b. Contextual adaptation of national character values addresses local realities, enhancing student engagement.

c. Integration of continuous evaluation into school culture supports sustainable character education.

These insights demonstrate that holistic planning, differentiated organization, modelling-based instruction, structured reinforcement, and data-driven evaluation can inform character education strategies in other inclusive settings, albeit with contextual adjustments. Furthermore, consistent with Salabi (2022), sustained collaboration between teachers and parents plays a critical role in ensuring program effectiveness and long-term impact.

Table 1: Key Findings and Novelty

Stage	Key Findings	Novelty / Contribution
Planning	Early identification; adaptation of 18-character values	Local contextualization beyond national guidelines
Organizing	Inclusive classes (regular, intensive, transitional); dual-homeroom teacher model	Innovation vs. shadow teacher; inclusive differentiation
Implementation	Modelling, habituation, reinforcement; daily checklist	Integration with an intracurricular approach; Bandura's theory application
Evaluation	Weekly evaluation with rubrics; data-driven feedback	Linking to the TQM continuous improvement cycle

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that SD Muhammadiyah Pulokadang has successfully integrated character education into all aspects of educational management: planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. The program begins with early identification of students' individual needs, followed by the organization of inclusive classrooms using a dual-homeroom teacher model to accommodate diverse learners. The implementation phase

emphasizes not only academic achievement but also the cultivation of moral values and social skills through modelling, habituation, and reinforcement. Routine and systematic evaluations, conducted weekly and supported by observation rubrics and reflective discussions, demonstrate the school's commitment to continuous improvement and consistent application of character education principles.

This holistic approach creates an inclusive environment where all students, especially those with special educational needs, can develop in accordance with their potential. The study also illustrates that adapting national character values to the local context and applying differentiated strategies can enhance the effectiveness of character education.

However, this research has several limitations. Being a qualitative single-case study, the findings may not be fully generalizable to schools with different contexts, resources, or management systems. In addition, the reliance on interviews, observations, and documentation introduces the possibility of interpretive bias. Future research could use quantitative or mixed methods designs, involving multiple inclusive schools and longer observation periods, to provide a broader and more robust understanding.

Despite these limitations, the study offers meaningful contributions: it demonstrates the practical application of an inclusive character education framework, shows how dual-homeroom teacher models can enhance individual support, and provides insights relevant for policy development and implementation in Indonesia's inclusive education system. The findings may serve as a reference for other schools aiming to design sustainable and context-sensitive character education programs.

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