

Teacher Strategies for Instilling Character Education in 21st Century Learning in Elementary Schools

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Abstract. Twenty-first-century learning requires teachers not only to develop students' cognitive competencies but also to cultivate character values as the foundation for shaping a moral, adaptive, and competitive generation. This study aims to describe elementary school teachers' strategies in instilling character values within 21st-century learning. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method with data collected through in-depth interviews with elementary school teachers. The findings show that teachers implemented various integrative and contextual strategies, such as role modeling, project-based learning, the integration of character values into all subjects, and the reinforcement of positive cultural habits in the school environment. The character values developed include religiosity, discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, creativity, independence, environmental awareness, patriotism, and tolerance. Teachers designed learning activities by preparing lesson plans or teaching modules that contain character values, linking them to the Pancasila Student Profile, and applying authentic assessments. Technology was also utilized through educational videos, animations, and character-based educational games. The study also identified several challenges, including the negative influence of social media, limited parental supervision, teachers' administrative workload, and difficulties in measuring character development. Overall, instilling character education in the digital era requires innovative and collaborative strategies, technological support, and continuous enhancement of teacher competencies.

Keywords: Character Education, Teacher Strategies, 21st Century Learning, Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a very important part of the world of modern education, especially in facing the increasingly complex challenges of the 21st century. because education is a very important thing in life(Qaira et al., 2025).Technological advancements, globalization, and changing socioeconomic dynamics present significant challenges to education in this digital era (Pare & Sihotang, 2023). Twenty-first-century learning is an educational process that integrates literacy abilities, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and technological proficiency. This era requires fundamental changes within the education system, not only in instructional methods but also in shaping students' character so they can adapt to the rapidly shifting dynamics of the modern world.21st-century education demands fundamental changes in the way learning is designed and implemented (Sofiani et al., 2025). Twenty-first-century learning represents a transitional phase in which the curriculum encourages schools to shift from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered one. This shift in paradigm requires learners not only to acquire academic knowledge, but also to develop critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative thinking abilities—skills commonly referred to as the 4Cs (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication).21st-

century learning is carried out by integrating technology, problem-based learning, project-based learning, character education, and citizenship education (Astuti, 2024). Apart from that, in the 21st century we must also implement learning models that are relevant and in accordance with the dynamics and objectives of learning (Riyadi et al., 2025). The integration of these various approaches demonstrates that 21st-century learning cannot be separated from strong character building. Character is the foundation that determines how students use the knowledge and skills they acquire to contribute positively to society. Without a solid foundation of character, mastery of 21st-century technology and skills can actually have a negative impact on individual and social development. Meanwhile, character education is a system that instills character values in students, which includes components of knowledge, individual awareness, determination, and the will and action to implement these values, both towards God Almighty, oneself, fellow human beings, the environment, and the nation, so that we can realize the perfect human being (Suwartini, 2017). Instilling character education in this digital age faces many challenging challenges. Today's students, often referred to as the digital native generation, grow up in an environment filled with intense and diverse digital technology stimuli. The ease of interaction through social media, the rapid flow of information, and the instant culture of the digital age often impact moral values (Arifin, 2025). The rise of gadget addiction, declining attention span, limited face-to-face interaction, and increasing exposure to harmful content pose serious threats to the character development of children in the digital era.

Teachers play a crucial role in the learning process and in the development of students' skills. Teachers play a central role in the educational process, particularly in monitoring student learning progress and measuring learning success (Putri et al., 2024). Amidst the complex challenges of the 21st century, teachers no longer merely serve as transmitters of subject matter, but must also serve as motivators, inspirators, facilitators, and most importantly, role models for students (Zaskia et al., 2025). Teachers hold the key to integrating character education into 21st-century learning, so that students are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess strong character and noble morals. Therefore, teachers need to facilitate deeper and more diverse student understanding (Riyadi & Mufliva, 2025). However, to carry out this role effectively, teachers need appropriate, innovative strategies that are relevant to the characteristics of digital generation students. Teachers need to develop approaches that go beyond conventional methods such as lectures or direct instruction, and instead incorporate a variety of innovative learning strategies aligned with 21st-century demands. Strategies such as project-based learning, collaborative learning, the thoughtful use of digital technology, and

the creation of a supportive learning environment can be effectively utilized. Sustainable strategies such as the instilling of religious values, teacher role models, and character evaluation effectively shape students' personalities holistically (Dwiyana et al., 2025).

The importance of teacher strategies in instilling character education cannot be separated from the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum currently being implemented in Indonesia. The Independent Curriculum provides teachers with the flexibility to develop student-centered learning and integrate the Pancasila Student Profile as a target for character development. The Pancasila Student Profile encompasses the dimensions of faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity, in line with the needs of character development in the 21st century. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum is expected to further strengthen the achievement of the Pancasila Student Profile, especially for students at the elementary school level (Apriana et al., 2024). However, the success of this implementation depends heavily on the teacher's ability and creativity in designing and implementing effective learning strategies. Various studies have shown that effective character education requires consistency, role modeling, habituation, and integration into all aspects of school life.

Based on the description above, this study is important to examine in depth the strategies of teachers in instilling character education in 21st-century learning in elementary schools. This study aims to identify various strategies that have been implemented by teachers in integrating character education in 21st-century learning, analyze the challenges and obstacles faced, and formulate best practices that can be used as a reference for other teachers in instilling character education. Thus, this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of character education in Indonesia, especially at the elementary school level, so that it can produce a generation that is not only intelligent and skilled, but also has a strong character, noble morals, and is ready to face the challenges of life in the 21st century with full integrity and responsibility.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Case study research is a form of qualitative research based on events or situations, understanding and human behavior based on human opinion (Ilhami et al., 2024). A qualitative approach was chosen to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of teacher strategies in instilling character education in 21st-century learning in elementary schools. The research was conducted in an elementary school that has implemented 21st-century learning and has a

character education program integrated into the curriculum. The subjects of this research included the principal and class teachers. The principal was chosen as the research subject because he has a strategic role in designing character education policies and programs in schools, as well as supervising and evaluating the implementation of character education carried out by teachers. Class teachers were chosen as the main subjects of the research because they are the direct implementers who interact daily with students and apply various strategies for instilling character education in learning. Teacher selection was carried out purposively by considering teaching experience, active involvement in character education programs, and willingness to share their experiences and views on the strategies implemented by teachers in instilling character education.

The data collection techniques in this study utilized three main methods: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using a pre-prepared interview guide, but remained flexible to explore further information as the conversation progressed. Interviews with the principal were conducted to obtain information regarding the school's vision, mission, policies, and character education programs. Interviews with teachers aimed to explore the strategies they use to instill character education, the challenges they face, and their experiences and reflections on integrating character values into 21st-century learning. Participatory observation was conducted to directly observe the learning process taking place in the classroom and student activities in the school environment. Researchers observed how teachers implemented character education strategies in learning, interactions between teachers and students, the learning methods used, the use of technology in learning, and student behavior and responses to the character education provided. During the observations, researchers made detailed field notes to record all important events that occurred and were relevant to the research focus. Documentation studies were conducted to complement the data obtained from interviews and observations. Documents collected included the school curriculum, Learning Implementation Plans (RPP) containing character education integration, open modules, school character education programs, school regulations, relationship books or report cards that included assessments of student attitudes and character, photographs of learning and school activities, and other relevant documents. Document analysis was conducted to understand the formal context and policies that underlie the implementation of character education in schools, and to triangulate data from interviews and observations. Researchers acted as planners, data collectors, data analysts, data interpreters, and reporters of research results. To support the data collection process, researchers used supporting instruments in the form of interview

guidelines containing a list of open-ended questions in accordance with the research focus, observation sheets containing aspects to be observed during learning and school activities, voice recording devices to record interviews with permission from the informants, cameras to document learning activities and school activities, and field notes to record important things during the data collection process.

To maintain the validity and credibility of the research data, the researcher used a data validity checking technique, namely data triangulation. Triangulation was carried out in three forms, namely source triangulation, technical triangulation, and time triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing and cross-checking the degree of trustworthiness of information obtained from various different sources, namely the principal, teachers, and students. Technical triangulation was carried out by checking data against the same source using different techniques, namely comparing data from interviews with data from observations and documentation. Time triangulation was carried out by checking data at different times or situations to ensure the consistency of the data obtained. Through this data validity checking technique, the research is expected to produce valid, credible, and trustworthy findings, so that it can provide a comprehensive and in-depth picture of teacher strategies in instilling character education in 21st-century learning in elementary schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that teachers' strategies for instilling character education in 21st-century learning in elementary schools are implemented in an integrated, contextual, and sustainable manner. Teachers serve not only as instructors who transfer knowledge, but also as role models of values and behavior, serving as role models for students. In the context of character education, teachers are not only tasked with transferring knowledge but also with shaping character (Putra et al., 2025). Character building in elementary schools is no longer seen as an additional activity, but rather integrated into the entire learning process and daily school life. Teachers employ several key strategies to instill character education, including role modeling, project-based learning, integrating character values into every subject, and fostering positive habits within the school environment. Through role modeling, teachers demonstrate concrete behaviors such as punctuality, honesty in assessments, responsibility for assignments, and concern for school cleanliness and order. Modeling is considered the most effective strategy because elementary school-aged children are in the imitation stage, where teacher behavior is easily imitated by students.

Project-based learning strategies have also proven effective in instilling character values. Project-based learning demonstrates greater consistency in completing assignments on time, both individually and in groups (Halimah et al., 2025). Through Project-Based Learning (PjBL), students are encouraged to work in groups, collaborate, solve real-life problems, and produce useful products. For example, projects include creating environmental posters, school cleanup activities, or art exhibitions containing moral messages. These activities not only foster creativity and responsibility but also build character traits such as cooperation, social awareness, and independence. Project-based learning allows students to directly experience meaningful learning, where character values develop from experiences and social interactions, not just from teacher lectures. Furthermore, by using the project model, students are able to increase their engagement and develop skills in collaboration, communication, discipline, and responsibility in their learning and their surroundings. (Aisyah & Hadiyanti, 2025)

Character values that teachers focus on in 21st-century learning include religiousness, discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, creativity, independence, environmental and social awareness, love of the homeland, and tolerance. Character values developed in students can be achieved through two approaches: spiritual and social (Muslimin, 2023). These values align with the Pancasila Student Profile, the primary orientation of the Independent Curriculum. Teachers understand that 21st-century learning requires not only mastery of knowledge but also character development that supports students' readiness to face global challenges. In addition to these challenges, the 21st century also challenges students' readiness to think critically, independently, and develop discipline (Fitriani et al., 2022). In the learning design stage, teachers develop a Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) or teaching module that includes character values in learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments. Teachers link character values to 21st-century competencies (4Cs), namely critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. For example, collaborative activities are linked to the value of cooperation, while reflective activities are linked to the values of responsibility and honesty. This design process demonstrates that teachers strive to internalize character values in a systematic and directed manner. Commonly used learning methods are Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and Deep Learning. PjBL is used to encourage students to actively participate in real-life activities, while Deep Learning focuses on a deeper understanding of the values being learned. Furthermore, the PjBL and deep learning models not only improve the quality of learning but also empower teachers to develop innovative teaching methods (Afdania et al., 2024).

The use of technology and digital media is also an important strategy in strengthening character education. Technology is also useful for increasing student motivation, expanding access to learning resources, and enabling tailored learning approaches (Sari & Munir, 2024). Teachers use educational videos, learning animations, and educational games that convey positive moral messages. For example, videos about honesty, animations about cooperation, or interactive games that train empathy. Digital media makes learning more engaging and relevant to the world of children who are familiar with technology. On the other hand, teachers play a role in directing and controlling technology use to prevent students from being influenced by negative content widely circulated on social media. Wise use of technology is part of digital citizenship learning. However, research also shows that teachers face various challenges in implementing character education in the digital era. The main challenge that arises is the influence of negative content on social media, which can influence students' behavior and mindset. Furthermore, the lack of parental supervision at home is a major obstacle in maintaining consistency in children's character between school and home. Teachers also complain about administrative burdens and time constraints that prevent the implementation of character education from being optimal. Another challenge is the difficulty in measuring students' character development objectively, because character cannot be measured numerically like academic grades. To address this issue, teachers conduct qualitative character evaluations through direct observation of students' daily behavior, self-assessment, and peer assessment. Through observation, teachers record students' behavior in real-life situations, such as when working in groups or responding to teacher instructions. Self-assessment is used to train students' reflection and self-awareness of their behavior, while peer assessment fosters empathy and honesty. This evaluation is ongoing and serves as a reflection for teachers in improving subsequent learning strategies. Interviews also emphasized the importance of support from schools and parents for the success of character education. Teachers believe that children's character will not develop consistently if habits at home differ from those at school. Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents through regular communication, parent-teacher meetings, and joint activities is crucial. Schools are also expected to provide professional training for teachers on 21st-century character education strategies and provide supporting technology and learning media. Furthermore, the school environment must be created as a character ecosystem, a safe, conducive, and respectful place for diversity.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that elementary school teachers have developed innovative, adaptive, and contemporary strategies for instilling character education. These

strategies are oriented toward meaningful learning that not only develops knowledge but also builds students' moral and social values. The integration of character and 21st-century competencies makes learning more holistic, preparing students to become intelligent, moral, creative, and globally competitive individuals. Therefore, it can be concluded that teacher strategies for instilling character education in 21st-century learning include role modeling, integrating values into learning, implementing active, project-based methods, utilizing technology positively, and continuously evaluating through observation and reflection. Challenges faced by teachers can be overcome with support from schools, parents, and an environment that supports character development. Collaboration between all parties is the key to success in developing a generation of students who excel not only academically but also possess strong character, ethics, and a high level of social awareness.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teachers' strategies for instilling character education in 21st-century elementary learning are carried out through integrative and contextual approaches. Teachers function not only as facilitators of learning but also as role models who shape students' attitudes and behaviors. The strategies implemented include modeling, project-based learning (PjBL), integrating character values across all subjects, and cultivating positive habits within the school environment. The character values developed—such as religiousness, discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, creativity, independence, environmental awareness, patriotism, and tolerance—are in line with the Pancasila Student Profile. Teachers also make use of technology and digital media, including educational videos, animations, and character-based games, to strengthen character learning. The study identifies several challenges, including the negative impact of social media, insufficient parental supervision, and teachers' administrative workload. Therefore, collaboration among schools, teachers, and parents is essential to create a learning environment that supports effective character development. Overall, character education in the 21st century requires innovative, collaborative, and sustainable strategies to ensure that students develop not only academic competence but also strong character, ethical foundations, and global competitiveness.

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