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Strategies for Character Building for Students Majoring in Office Administration at SMK Nasional Makassar

Khairunnisa M[1], Siti Hardiyanti Arhas[2*], Nasir[3], Muallim[4]
[1,2,3,4]Universitas Negeri Makassar
Email: hardiyantiarhas@unm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the character formation strategy of students of the Department of Office Administration of the Makassar National Vocational School. Character formation in the Vocational High School (SMK) environment is very important, especially in preparing students to not only have technical skills but also strong moral and social values. Characters such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation are the main foundations in dealing with the world of work and community life in general. In the world of vocational education, character formation often receives less attention than the mastery of technical skills, even though the two should be balanced. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The informants consist of educators, students, and school management. The data was analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana and combined with SWOT analysis to formulate a character-strengthening strategy. The results showed that most students demonstrated good responsibility, discipline, and cooperation, although there were still several challenges such as low intrinsic motivation, the influence of the outside environment, and inconsistencies in the application of character values. The strategies implemented by the school include an exemplary teacher approach, project-based learning, extracurricular activities, and strengthening the role of parents and BK teachers. The recommendations from these results emphasize the importance of implementing holistic learning methods, strengthening a positive school climate, and increasing the capacity of educators in guiding students' character. Character building is not an instant process but requires continuity, for example, and synergy between schools, families, and communities. With the right strategy, vocational school students are expected to be not only technically competent but also ethically and socially superior. This study offers a distinct contribution to the existing literature by highlighting how character-building strategies in vocational schools operate through a combination of classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and teacher modeling.

Keywords: Character, Strategy, Education, Students

INTRODUCTION

Education is a complex tool and plays an important role in preparing individuals to face various aspects of life, including forming intellectual human beings. However, there is one important component that must be considered, which is character building. Character formation acts as a foundation so that individuals are able to implement the knowledge gained from education in the right direction and do not deviate from social ethics (Annisa et al., 2025; Darwis et al., 2022; Nasrullah et al., 2024; Saleh & Elfira, 2025). Education in Indonesia outwardly pays attention to related matters, as stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 Concerning the National Education System article 1 paragraph 1 which reads "Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble morals, and skills needed by themselves, society, nation, and state".

However, whether the related implementation is carried out is a matter that needs to be studied further.

Character is a set of characteristics, traits, values, and beliefs that affect the behavior of a person or group in various situations (Asmawati, 2025; Brevault et al., 2020; De Vega et al., 2025). This means that character encompasses the moral and ethical aspects that shape a person's personality and actions, including integrity, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and the ability to make informed decisions based on strong moral values. Character is formed not only from technical knowledge, but also through daily interactions, education, and life experiences, all of which contribute to the intellectual, emotional, social, and moral development of the individual. Therefore, character formation depends on internal and external factors by individuals. More specifically, character formation focuses on developing the moral, ethical, and personality aspects of individuals, as well as preparing them to become responsible members of society and contribute positively (Duan et al., 2016; Marini et al., 2019; Rifdan et al., 2022).

Referring to the factorization of character formation for students: (1) Education; (2) Peer Groups; (3) Family; (4) Social and Cultural Environment; and (5) Life Experience (Asbari et al., 2021; Shamionov & Grinina, 2021; Suprianto et al., 2022). The most crucial character formation is through formal education, because individuals can experience the different atmosphere that exists in family education that only accepts theoretical learning. The formal education in question is the school environment. Individuals can implement character learning (theoretical) to be practical because there is interaction between different individuals with different characters and lasts for a very long time. Communication exchange, culture of behavior, attitudes and the like are very influential in shaping the characteristics of individuals who play the role of students. "The important role of the learning environment in shaping student character, by emphasizing the need for student-centered learning and creating a school climate conducive to character development, with reference to this research aims to complement the existing understanding and provide additional insights into effective strategies in improving student character at the vocational level" (Hamutoglu et al., 2020; Kirwan, 2019; Rivera & Petrie, 2016). However, so that related matters do not go astray, teachers have a crucial role to play as facilitators in the application of character management to students.

A vocational school often overlooks the topic of character formation compared to a public high school. However, we should not overlook the fact that vocational schools possess the same standard curriculum capabilities. This can be seen at the Makassar National Vocational School, where from the results of observations, it was found that efforts to form students' character are realized through various extracurricular programs such as scouting activities designed to strengthen positive values, such as honesty, discipline, hard work, and empathy. Furthermore, this school's inclusive approach fosters the growth and development of students from diverse backgrounds and needs, enabling them to reach their full potential. However, problems arise in how students are characterized. Some students show behaviors that do not reflect positive character values, such as a lack of discipline, responsibility, and the ability to work together. This can be seen in various situations, such as non-compliance with school rules, lack of respect for teachers, and a tendency to neglect assigned tasks and responsibilities.

To improve related inequalities, a strategy is needed to solve the problems of student character at the Makassar National Vocational School. Indicators of character formation are (1) Cooperation, Cooperation is an important social skill in community life. The ability to work together in a team, appreciate individual contributions, and resolve conflicts well is indispensable to achieve common goals and create a harmonious environment; (2) Discipline

includes the ability to control oneself, obey rules, and take responsibility for one's own actions and decisions. Students who have good discipline tend to be more organized, more focused, and better able to achieve their goals; (3) Responsibility, Responsibility is the ability to accept the consequences of one's own actions and decisions. Responsible students will admit their mistakes, learn from their experiences, and strive to do their best in everything they do (Agus et al., 2020; Butt et al., 2023; Jamaluddin et al., 2021; Khan & Yildiz, 2020; Suprianto et al., 2022).

METHOD

A qualitative approach with a descriptive type is used in this study. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of student character formation in the school environment. In accordance with the opinion of Suprianto (2024), the descriptive approach aims to find out the value of a variable without comparing or relating between variables.

Direct observation was carried out at the Makassar National Vocational School to understand the real dynamics that took place in the field. The focus of observation includes social interactions, student behavior, and learning practices relevant to character formation. Information was obtained from students, Counseling Guidance teachers, and department heads to obtain views from various sides related to the character education process. The data sources used include primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews and participatory observations, while secondary data was sourced from relevant school documents, books, and scientific journals. The instruments used include interview guides, voice recording devices, cameras, and systematically compiled field notes.

The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation techniques of sources and methods, cross-examination between informants, and member checks to confirm the accuracy of the findings. The data analysis model refers to the concept of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which consists of four stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. This process is carried out simultaneously and repeatedly so that the results obtained truly reflect reality. SWOT analysis is used to formulate character building strategies based on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats found during data collection.

The entire study process relies on observers as the main instrument. During implementation, we established a strong rapport with the informant to foster a relaxed and transparent interview environment. In addition, direct involvement in the field provides an opportunity to capture social dynamics naturally, which reinforces the depth of meaning of the data obtained. With systematic implementation and a strong theoretical foundation, this method aims to produce a comprehensive and applicable understanding in the context of character formation among vocational school students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research on the strategy of character formation for students in the Department of Office Administration at SMK Nasional Makassar focuses on three main indicators, namely responsibility, discipline, and cooperation. In general, the results show that these three indicators have evolved gradually, although there are still some challenges that require further address.

Responsibility

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Students of the Department of Office Administration at SMK Nasional Makassar demonstrate a fairly good tendency in developing a responsible character. Most students have been able to demonstrate a responsible attitude in the implementation of tasks both inside and outside the classroom. They complete assignments on time, keep classrooms clean, and actively participate in student organization activities such as Student Council and Scouting. This reflects an awareness of the importance of responsibility as part of individual character. Even so, not all students have the same level of responsibility. There are still some students who lack discipline in doing assignments, often postpone work, or show indifference to the obligations given. To address this, schools implement approaches to personalization strategies, such as contextual assignments, regular counseling by BK teachers, as well as a reward system for students who show increased responsibility. Support from parents through intensive communication has also been shown to help strengthen the formation of students' character of responsibility. In addition, the instillation of the value of responsibility is carried out continuously through habituation activities in the classroom and reflection with teachers, so that students are not only aware of responsibility as an obligation, but also as a life principle that must be internalized.

According to the responsibility indicators, the majority of students have shown the ability to complete the assignments given by the teacher on time. They also show commitment to their obligations as students, such as keeping classrooms clean, carrying school supplies, and engaging in academic activities. This responsibility is reflected not only in the completion of individual tasks, but also in contributions to group tasks and social responsibilities in the school environment. But observations and interviews show that some students still lack a sense of responsibility. Some students often neglect assignments, show indifference, and lack initiative in school activities. This indicates the need for more personalized strategies, such as counseling guidance and the active role of teachers in fostering students individually. This approach is important so that students understand the meaning of responsibility not as an obligation alone, but as a character value that must be built in daily life.

Meanwhile, the discipline indicator shows that most students at the Makassar National Vocational School have been able to show disciplined behavior, especially in terms of attendance, dressing according to the rules, and obeying school rules. Teachers and schools apply the rules strictly but still educate, such as giving reprimands, warning letters, or approaches through homeroom teachers and BK teachers. The habituation of activities such as ceremonies, marching, and time discipline in attending lessons has a positive impact on the formation of students' discipline character. However, just like in the previous indicator, there are still some students who are inconsistent. There are still students who are often late, violate dress codes, and do not pay attention to time in completing assignments. This shows that the cultivation of discipline values needs to be carried out in a sustainable manner and supported by all parties, both teachers, staff, and parents. Discipline is not only instilled through punishment, but also through positive example and reinforcement so that students understand that discipline is an important part of success in learning and working.

Cooperation indicators are some of the ones that show quite good results. Many students are able to work in teams, help each other in completing group assignments, and respect the opinions of friends in discussions. This attitude appears not only in classroom learning, but also in extracurricular activities such as scouting and student council. Collaborative learning methods such as group work, open discussions, and joint projects help improve students' ability to interact and build solidarity. Nonetheless, there are still some students who are less involved in cooperation, for example relying only on groupmates or not actively contributing to the team. This shows that not all students have strong social skills or confidence to fully engage in group work. Therefore, teachers need to provide a balanced role in each group,

ensuring that all students have equal responsibilities, and encouraging participation through fun and meaningful learning.

Overall, the character formation of students at Makassar National Vocational School is on the right track, but it still needs to be refined in strategy. Students are starting to cultivate the values of responsibility, discipline, and cooperation, but their distribution is not uniform. The role of teachers, parents, and the school environment is very important in strengthening these three indicators. Character building strategies must be carried out consistently, structured, and involve an adaptive approach according to the needs and backgrounds of students. Thus, it is expected that students will not only have academic abilities, but also strong character to face future challenges.

A sub-indicator of responsibility is the ability to accept the consequences of actions, responsible decisions will admit mistakes and do their best in everything. The ability to accept the consequences of actions is an important aspect of responsibility, where individuals must be aware that every decision taken has a certain impact. Responsible students will understand that non-compliance with the rules or negligence in completing assignments will result in sanctions or reduced academic achievement. Therefore, students strive to manage their time well, follow school rules, and work together in teams to complete tasks efficiently. In addition, the application of firm but educational consequences by teachers and parental involvement in shaping student discipline also play a role in fostering awareness of responsibility from an early age.

The formation of a character of responsibility is one of the important aspects of the educational process, especially at the Vocational High School (SMK) level which specifically prepares students to face the world of work and community life. At SMK Nasional Makassar, the development of students' sense of responsibility is implemented using various integrative, participatory, and sustainable strategies, including intracurricular, extracurricular, and personal approaches.

A key strategy for developing a sense of responsibility is assigning meaningful tasks that match the student's ability. These tasks are not only Just academic, but also includes practical work activities, group project management, as well as responsibilities in student organizations such as student council and scouting. In this process, students are trained to complete work independently, on time, and according to predetermined standards. The teacher also gives direction gradually and gives students the opportunity to evaluate their work, so that students not only complete the assignment due to obligation, but also understand the meaning and value behind the task.

In addition, the strategy of internalizing the value of responsibility is carried out through integration in the learning process in the classroom. Teachers not only deliver subject matter, but also instill the value of responsibility through a reflective approach. For example, when students are late in collecting assignments, the teacher does not necessarily sanction them, but invites them to discuss the causes of the delay and its impact on their academic responsibilities. This process creates space for students to develop self-awareness and learn from experience. This strategy is also strengthened by habituating positive attitudes, such as saying student promises every day, developing an independent study schedule, and training in setting daily times and targets.

Another strategy implemented is to actively involve students in school organizations and activities. Extracurricular activities like scouting assign students the real responsibility of becoming team leaders, managing activity agendas, and completing group assignments. In this position, students not only learn to lead, but also take responsibility for the decisions and actions they take. The trust given by teachers to students is a strong encouragement to show commitment and maturity in carrying out their roles. The school also holds regular character

development activities through seminars, training, or motivational sessions that raise the theme of the importance of responsibility in students' daily lives. Teachers and parents play a crucial role in the strategy to develop students' sense of responsibility. Teachers function as mentors as well as role models, while parents accompany students at home in controlling the implementation of their personal responsibilities, such as completing homework, preparing school needs, and maintaining social ethics. Schools and parents establish collaboration through intense communication, which includes liaison agendas, homeroom teacher meetings, and periodic reports on student character development.

The teacher evaluates student responsibility by continuously monitoring their behavior. The teacher records and assesses students' involvement in assignments, attendance, discussion activity, and how they resolve conflicts or problems that arise in class. The teacher uses this assessment to provide constructive feedback and to determine whether to provide further awards or coaching. Overall, the strategy of building responsible character at SMK Nasional Makassar is designed to not only instill value theoretically, but also through real experience and positive habits that are practiced repeatedly. By combining a direct approach, exemplary, active involvement, and self-reflection, it is hoped that students will not only have academic abilities and work skills, but also have a strong character of responsibility as a provision to face life in the future.

Discipline

The character of student discipline shows positive but uneven results. Discipline is reflected in punctual attendance, neatness of dress in accordance with school rules, and adherence to general rules. Most students are familiar with school routines such as flag ceremonies, marches, as well as timely learning. Schools implement a habituation system through a structured approach, which includes fair rewards and punishments. Nevertheless, challenges remain. There are still students who break the rules, arrive late, or do not complete the assignment according to the deadline. To overcome this, a discipline strategy is developed through the active involvement of parents in monitoring children's learning activities at home. BK teachers also take an important role by providing a psychological approach for students with problems. The school periodically monitors and evaluates aspects of student discipline through character report cards. Extracurricular activities such as Scouting, Student Council, and marching training are also a forum to build a real attitude of discipline. Group assignments with strict rules and deadlines integrate discipline values into classroom learning. With this holistic approach, students are expected to be able to foster awareness of discipline that applies not only in school, but also in daily life.

Discipline has three sub-indicators, namely the ability to control oneself, obey rules and actions or self-decisions. The ability to control oneself in discipline plays an important role in creating effective teamwork. Individuals with excellent self-control tend to obey rules, focus on common goals, and complete tasks on time, despite facing pressure or challenges.

Students sometimes break the rules, such as arriving late. In response to this, Mrs. Muslimah explained that the department has implemented a discipline policy that includes attendance, punctuality, task completion, ethics, behavior, as well as the giving of rewards and sanctions to create an orderly learning environment. Mr. Ilham added that a conducive learning environment must reflect the values of mutual respect, openness, honesty, and support the emotional and social development of students. In terms of complying with the rules, discipline is an important aspect that supports the effectiveness of teamwork. The rules set within a group or organization serve as guidelines to ensure each member works with responsibility and consistency. Discipline in things like arriving on time, completing tasks on

deadline, and following applicable procedures helps to create an orderly, productive, and harmonious work environment.

SMK Nasional Makassar implements a systematic, all-encompassing, and enduring approach to cultivate student discipline. The school applies various methods that aim to instill discipline values from an early age in all students. One of the main strategies is the implementation of clear and consistent rules, which are socialized through written guidelines, regular briefings, as well as through the example shown by teachers and school staff. Teachers not only provide an understanding of the importance of discipline, but also become role models in daily attitudes and behaviors. In addition, extracurricular activities such as scouting, student council, and habituation programs are also a means to shape student discipline, through exercises in regularity, responsibility, and time management. Another strategy is the use of a balanced reward and sanction system. Students who show discipline are appreciated as a form of positive motivation, while students who violate the rules are given educational guidance. The school also involves parents in the character building process, especially in terms of supervising student discipline outside the school environment. With this collaborative and integrative approach, it is hoped that the values of discipline will not only become a formal obligation, but also embedded in the personal consciousness of each student so that they grow into orderly, responsible, and ready individuals to face future challenges.

Cooperation

Cooperation indicators are an important aspect of student character formation and show significant development. In the context of learning, cooperation is seen through students' ability to collaborate on group assignments, project-based learning, and open discussions in the classroom. Many students are able to take an active role in groups, listening to each other, dividing tasks, and completing work collectively. Extracurricular activities such as Student Council, Scouting, and interclass debates are also effective spaces in fostering cross-class cooperation skills. Nevertheless, not all students have an equal level of participation. Some students tend to be passive or overly dependent on more dominant peers. To overcome this, teachers apply a strategy of rotation of roles in groups, assign individual responsibility in teamwork, and evaluate the work process not just the end result. In addition, the formation of heterogeneous learning groups based on different abilities and backgrounds also enriches the dynamics of cooperation. The school also conducts soft skills training and motivational seminars to instill the importance of collaboration in social and professional life. Students learn to respect differences, resolve conflicts wisely, and build solidarity in a conducive and inclusive learning environment. This strategy is an important foundation so that students are not only capable of working together in an academic context, but also in social life and the real world of work.

The results also demonstrate that the synergy between school, family, and community can strengthen students' character. For example, in the cooperation with the industrial world program, students are given direct responsibility to engage in industrial work practices. From the results of the practice evaluation, students showed a more pronounced increase in the character of responsibility and discipline than in the classroom. In addition, soft skills training programs and motivational seminars also strengthen character values.

One of the other strengths identified in the results of this study is the importance of teachers as the main role models in the character formation process. Teachers not only play the role of delivering material, but also as role models in aspects of behavior, ethics, and how to resolve conflicts. Students' awareness of understanding and internalizing character values

increases when teachers consistently apply these values in their daily interactions with students. In addition, the application of technology also contributes to character building, especially in terms of responsibility and discipline. With the use of digital learning systems that demand on-time attendance, online assignment collection, and involvement in virtual discussion forums, students are trained to be more independent and responsible in managing their time and assignments. This is one of the alternative strategies that has proven effective in supporting character building, especially after the pandemic which has resulted in changes in learning patterns.

It is also important to note that the role of the peer environment greatly affects the character of students. Peers who have a strong character tend to be motivators for other friends. Therefore, schools adopted the formation of heterogeneous learning groups and character building in small communities as additional strategies. This strategy has been proven to be able to create an atmosphere of mutual support, strengthen social relations, and foster the value of solidarity among students. Overall, the character building strategy at the Makassar National Vocational School runs with a clear direction and a diverse approach. Increased student participation in school activities, a decrease in disciplinary violations, and the strengthening of individual responsibility values demonstrate success. Nonetheless, challenges remain, especially in reaching students who have low intrinsic motivation. Therefore, there is a need to improve strategies that are reflective, participatory, and based on the individual needs of students so that character formation becomes more optimal and sustainable.

Cooperation is one of the important elements in the formation of students' characters, especially in the context of formal education, such as in vocational high schools (SMK). As part of the value of social character, cooperation reflects the ability of individuals to interact harmoniously with others in achieving common goals. In the learning process, cooperation is not only a form of technical collaboration, but also trains students in developing mutual respect, tolerance, empathy, and social responsibility. These characters are particularly relevant to the needs of the world of work which demands good interpersonal skills as well as the ability to work in an effective team**.**

Various school activities, including group assignments, class discussions, and extracurricular activities, can foster character formation through cooperation. Through group interactions, students learn to listen to other people's opinions, convey ideas politely, and resolve conflicts wisely. This process not only shapes communication skills, but also strengthens personality aspects such as patience, caring, and mutual trust. In this case, teachers play the role of facilitators who create a conducive learning environment and provide a safe space for students to practice active and balanced cooperation.

In addition, cooperation is also a means of learning democratic values in the context of education. Collaborative students are more receptive to differences, capable of constructive criticism, and adept at making decisions in a fair manner. This is important in creating a school culture that is inclusive and respects diversity. Thus, cooperation is not just a method in learning, but a process of characterizing students as a whole, which prepares them to become individuals who are able to adapt, respect others, and contribute positively to society.

However, cooperation as a character formation process does not occur automatically. The school must ensure consistent planning, habituation, and evaluation. For example, in group work activities, teachers need to divide roles fairly so that each student is actively involved, not just dependent on certain members. Evaluation is not only carried out on the results of the group's work, but also on the process, such as the activeness, communication, and responsibility of each member. Through this approach, cooperation can be used as a medium for effective and sustainable character building.

Thus, it can be concluded that cooperation is a strategic character formation process in education, because it unites cognitive, affective, and social aspects in one real practice. Cooperative-based character education not only forms academically competent individuals, but also individuals who have high social concerns, are able to live in diversity, and are ready to face collaborative challenges in the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research conducted on the strategy of character formation by students of the Department of Office Administration at the Makassar National Vocational School, it can be concluded that the implementation of the strategy has had a positive impact on the development of students' character, especially on three main indicators: responsibility, discipline, and cooperation. In the aspect of responsibility, most students show the ability to complete assignments on time and carry out academic obligations consistently. However, it is still found that students do not have full awareness of the importance of responsibility in the learning process, so there is a need for a more intensive and personalized coaching approach. In the discipline indicator, students generally have complied with school rules and shown regularity in attendance and assignment execution. School strategies such as habituation, teacher supervision, and the provision of educational sanctions have played a role in shaping student discipline attitudes. However, some students still face obstacles that lead them to be less orderly and exhibit a negligent attitude towards regulations, indicating the need to strengthen strategies based on example and internal motivation. As for the cooperation indicators, students have shown the ability to collaborate in group assignments and extracurricular activities. Project-based learning and group discussions have proven to be effective in encouraging students' social skills and empathy. Even so, involvement is not even among all students, so a structured mentoring and assignment strategy is needed so that all students can actively participate in the team. In general, the character formation strategy implemented at the Makassar National Vocational School has shown significant success. However, this success has not been completely evenly distributed, so there is a need to improve the quality of strategies through a holistic approach that involves teachers, parents, and the school environment in a synergistic manner. The application of adaptive learning methods, positive habituation, and the strengthening of moral values in a sustainable manner are the keys to creating the character of students who are responsible, disciplined, and able to work together effectively in the future.

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