



Enhancing Student Character through Effective Curriculum Quality Management for Special Needs Education

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ABSTRACT

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Character education in special schools is vital for developing students' personality, independence, and social skills. However, the 2024 Education Report Card indicates that student character development and curriculum management remain at the medium and developmental stages, suggesting a gap between ideal education goals and actual implementation. This study explores the application of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) quality management cycle in managing the character curriculum. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research involved in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Findings reveal that the Plan stage is collaboratively and adaptively implemented through a thematic approach with teachers and parents. The Do stage focuses on instilling character values through practice and teacher role modeling. The Check stage involves reflective supervision and ongoing evaluations, while the Act stage emphasizes internal teacher training and curriculum revisions based on field data. The PDCA cycle has proven effective in creating a responsive, reflective, and sustainable character curriculum system. This study provides valuable insights for special education institutions aiming to develop a more effective and context-specific curriculum management system.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is an essential component of the national education system, crucial for developing students into individuals with noble values, independence, responsibility, and social care (Iksal et al., 2024). It is vital for preparing future generations to contribute positively to society. In a broader context, it becomes especially relevant in special education, where students

with special needs require tailored strategies for both academic success and personal development. The education system must adapt to meet these needs, ensuring that all students, regardless of their challenges, have access to education that promotes not only intellectual growth but also emotional and social maturity. The importance of character education in these settings cannot be overstated, as it lays the foundation for their long-term success and integration into society. As such, a structured and systematic approach to character development within special education is necessary, not only for personal growth but also for social integration and inclusion. This study is critical because it examines the systematic implementation of character education in special schools, a crucial step in enhancing the educational landscape for students with special needs.

The challenges surrounding character education in special education institutions are significant. Despite the recognition of its importance, the current system faces various hurdles in effectively integrating character education into the curriculum. One of the primary issues is the lack of a structured approach to curriculum management, which has led to inconsistent and often superficial implementation of character education. In schools for students with special needs, the curriculum is usually overly focused on academic performance, neglecting the development of moral, emotional, and social skills. Moreover, there is a gap in leadership and management strategies, as school principals often lack the resources or training to implement comprehensive curriculum systems. This problem contributes to a less-than-ideal learning environment, where students are unable to reach their full potential in both academic and character development. Therefore, understanding how quality management systems, such as the PDCA cycle, can improve the management of character curricula is crucial in addressing these challenges.

In practice, the implementation of character education in special schools, such as SLB AT-Turmudzi 1 Malangbong, faces significant challenges. Based on the 2024 Education Report Card, the indicators for student character and curriculum management remain in the moderate category, indicating that there is still much work to be done. The gap between the ideal goals of character education and actual practice is clear, as there is no systematic or consistent approach to integrate character development throughout the curriculum. Teachers often struggle to effectively model and instill values in students, mainly due to the absence of a clear framework or support system. Furthermore, relying on routine and administrative management methods instead of a more adaptive, student-centered approach makes it challenging to create an environment conducive to the holistic development of students. The lack of reflective evaluation and continuous improvement mechanisms further

exacerbates the issue, indicating a need for more strategic and dynamic curriculum management in special education settings.

Several studies have highlighted the challenges and gaps in implementing character education in special education settings. Suriansyah & Effendi (2023) emphasize that the character curriculum in special education units is often not based on a well-structured quality management system, leading to ineffective character development. Their research found that character education is usually treated as an add-on rather than integrated systematically into the curriculum. Sidik et al. (2025) argue that the effectiveness of character education in students with special needs largely depends on the school principal's ability to manage the curriculum strategically, rather than just administratively. These studies suggest that leadership, curriculum planning, and quality management systems play crucial roles in the success of character education. However, the existing literature lacks a detailed examination of how quality management systems, specifically the PDCA cycle, can be applied in special education curriculum management to effectively strengthen character education. This research fills that gap by focusing on the role of the PDCA cycle in managing character curricula.

Setyaningsih (2022) points out that a lack of systematic evaluation and continuous improvement processes is a significant barrier to enhancing the quality of student character development in special education. This observation is consistent with findings from previous studies, which identify a recurring theme: character education in special education institutions lacks the reflective and adaptive practices needed for effective implementation. The absence of a structured system for curriculum revision and teacher professional development impedes progress in character education. Therefore, there is a clear research gap in understanding how quality management cycles, such as PDCA, can provide the necessary structure for ongoing evaluation, improvement, and adaptation of the character curriculum. This gap is critical to address, as integrating continuous improvement mechanisms into the curriculum can lead to sustainable and effective character education practices in special schools.

This study presents a novel approach to character education in special schools by applying the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) quality management cycle to curriculum development. While the concept of PDCA has been widely used in various educational settings, its specific implementation in character education for students with special needs is relatively unexplored. By using this cycle, schools can engage in continuous planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement, ensuring that character education becomes an integral and adaptive part of the curriculum. The novelty of this research lies in its practical

application of PDCA to manage the character curriculum, providing a framework for schools to address the unique challenges faced by students with special needs. By focusing on a dynamic and iterative management process, this research provides a pathway for special schools to systematically improve their character education practices. The importance of this research lies in its potential to provide a replicable model for other special education institutions, ensuring a more effective and responsive approach to character development.

The research problem addressed in this study is the gap between the ideal implementation of character education in special schools and the current challenges faced in curriculum management. Specifically, it seeks to analyze how the PDCA cycle can be applied to enhance the management of character curricula in special education units. The argument presented is that using the PDCA cycle will enable a more structured, responsive, and sustainable approach to character education, thereby fostering an environment where students with special needs can thrive academically and socially. By addressing the shortcomings of traditional curriculum management and integrating continuous quality improvement practices, the study posits that the PDCA cycle can help close the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that character education becomes a core and consistent part of the educational experience for students with special needs.

This research is expected to make significant contributions to the development of adaptive curriculum management systems in special education units. By examining the application of the PDCA quality management cycle in managing the character curriculum, the study offers valuable insights into how schools can systematically improve character education. It contributes to the growing body of knowledge on curriculum management in special education, offering a practical and strategic framework for school leaders and educators. Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of continuous evaluation and improvement in achieving long-term character development outcomes for students with special needs. Ultimately, it aims to provide a model that can be adapted by other special schools, helping them enhance their curriculum management practices and better support the holistic development of their students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing a case study method, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum quality management process in enhancing the character development of students with special needs at Garut City's Special School. The case study design is ideal for exploring the dynamic and complex context of curriculum

management, particularly how school principals and teachers holistically manage character education (Adien, Amjad, Sukirman, et al., 2025). The research was conducted at SLB AT-Turmudzi 1 Malangbong, a prominent institution catering to students with special needs in West Java. The primary subjects of the study included the principal, responsible for curriculum management, class and subject teachers, who implement the curriculum at the learning level, and official school documents such as the curriculum, syllabus, annual programs, report cards, and records of student character evaluations.

Data collection was conducted using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers to gather insights on the planning, implementation, and evaluation strategies of the character curriculum. Participatory observation involved researchers actively observing the learning processes, character-building activities, and the principal's involvement in improving the quality of learning. Documentation study analyzed various school documents, including the curriculum, teaching tools, character development programs, student evaluation results, and education report card data.

The data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) interactive model, consisting of three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved the selection and simplification of data gathered from observations, interviews, and documents. Data presentation organized the findings into a narrative that clearly described the process of curriculum quality management. Conclusion drawing and verification ensured the findings were valid through iterative processes, continually verifying the relationships between different data components.

To guarantee the validity of the data, triangulation techniques were employed, including source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information from principals, teachers, and documents to verify consistency and accuracy. Method triangulation compared the results from interviews, observations, and documentation to confirm their reliability and coherence. This structured and multi-faceted approach ensures that the research findings are robust, reliable, and reflective of the actual dynamics of curriculum management in special education settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The implementation of character education at SLB AT-Turmudzi 1 Malangbong follows a well-organized and collaborative approach, beginning with the planning phase, where the character curriculum is developed through a systematic integration of core values, including honesty, responsibility, and discipline. These values are not only incorporated into the Learning Implementation Plans (LIPs), syllabus, and school programs. Still, they are also emphasized in everyday activities, such as habituation routines and the school's culture. In the curriculum development meetings, teachers play an active role by sharing insights about the students' character development needs. At the same time, the principal ensures that the school's vision is reflected in the curriculum structure. Additionally, the involvement of parents in the process further strengthens the continuity of character education between school and home, a crucial factor for reinforcing values, as supported by previous studies. In the Do phase, the character curriculum is implemented through consistent value habituation activities such as moral storytelling, responsibility tasks, and group-based activities like "Jumat Berbagi" (social donations). Teachers act as role models, modeling polite, patient, and responsible behaviors, creating a learning environment where students internalize values through direct interaction. The use of visual media, like value cards and pictures, offers flexibility in accessing content based on students' cognitive and emotional capabilities. Furthermore, the integration of social activities within the school reinforces the sense of community, supporting students' character development beyond the classroom. These activities are aligned with international best practices, emphasizing the importance of a school culture that fosters social and moral learning.

The Check phase focuses on the ongoing evaluation and reflection of the curriculum's implementation. Weekly supervision by the principal and reflective meetings with teachers create an open dialogue for feedback and continuous improvement. These sessions enable teachers to address specific student challenges, adjust their teaching strategies, and adapt to any emerging classroom needs. The evaluation process also includes analyzing student progress through Education-Based Description (EBD) report cards, which show notable improvements in areas such as cooperation and responsibility. Furthermore, teachers regularly document their reflections on character education practices, ensuring that adjustments are made and strategies are continuously refined. This iterative evaluation, combined with regular supervisory checks, supports a dynamic and adaptive curriculum.

In the Action phase, SLB AT-Turmudzi takes concrete steps to act upon the findings from the evaluation and reflection processes. Internal teacher

training sessions are held to further enhance teachers' skills in character education, focusing on the use of visual media, contextualized storytelling, and reward systems. Following the training, teachers become more confident and creative in integrating moral values into everyday lessons. The curriculum is then revised based on real classroom experiences, ensuring that the learning materials remain relevant to the students' needs. Revisions to lesson plans, syllabi, and character assessment rubrics are made to provide clearer measures for student progress. These changes are not merely administrative; they reflect the evolving needs of the students and the dynamic nature of character development.

To ensure the sustainability of these improvements, the school establishes a Character Curriculum Team, comprising the principal, senior teachers, and support staff. This team regularly evaluates the effectiveness of character education strategies, makes further recommendations for strengthening character development, and develops inclusive teaching materials. This collaborative approach encourages teachers to actively participate in curriculum decisions, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and continuous improvement. Through this ongoing cycle of reflection, adaptation, and action, SLB AT-Turmudzi demonstrates a commitment to a responsive, adaptive, and humane approach to character education. The school's use of the PDCA cycle not only enhances the quality of character education but also ensures its sustainability, making it an efficient framework for developing students with special needs.

DISCUSSION

At SLB AT-Turmudzi 1 Malangbong, the development and implementation of character education follow a systematic and adaptive process, deeply rooted in the principles of quality management. This approach is not just about teaching moral values in isolation but about creating a school environment where character is embedded in every aspect of student life. The process begins with the planning stage, where the curriculum is designed collaboratively and responsively, ensuring that it meets the specific needs of students with special needs. Through a thoughtful integration of character values such as responsibility, honesty, and discipline, the school crafts a character curriculum that aligns with its vision and values. What makes this planning stage particularly significant is the involvement of parents, who actively participate in the curriculum development process, ensuring that character education is not confined to the school but extends to the home environment as well. This is supported by Retnasari et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of school-family partnerships in character

education, noting that values taught at school are more effective when reinforced at home.

In the implementation phase, SLB AT-Turmudzi transforms this carefully designed curriculum into action. Teachers play a key role in this process, not only as educators but also as role models who embody the values they wish to instill in their students. Daily routines, such as prayer sessions, group activities, and social programs like "Friday Sharing," provide regular opportunities for students to internalize values like responsibility and empathy. Samuel et al. (2023) support this approach, stating that repeated habituation of simple tasks is highly effective in shaping the moral character and social interaction skills of students with special needs. The importance of these routines lies in their ability to form habits that reflect character traits, making these values a part of students' everyday lives. Teachers also adapt their methods to cater to the diverse abilities of their students, ensuring that every child, regardless of their cognitive or emotional skills, can engage in the character-building process. This inclusive approach aligns with Woodcock et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of differentiated pedagogy in promoting the social-emotional and moral development of students with special needs.

The evaluation phase ensures that the character curriculum remains effective and responsive to the needs of students. Regular classroom observations by the principal, coupled with reflective discussions between the principal and teachers, help monitor the progress of character education. These discussions focus on evaluating how well character traits are being internalized by students, particularly in areas such as cooperation and solidarity. The continuous feedback loop allows for the adjustment of strategies, ensuring that character education remains relevant and impactful. This reflective practice aligns with Schön's (1983) concept of reflective practice, which emphasizes the importance of ongoing dialogue and self-assessment among teachers in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, Saputra et al. (2024) found that continuous professional training, combined with direct observation and reflective discussion, significantly improves inclusive teaching quality and teacher self-efficacy, supporting the evaluation model used at SLB AT-Turmudzi.

Finally, the action phase involves concrete steps to further improve the character curriculum. Based on the evaluations and reflections, SLB AT-Turmudzi organizes internal teacher training sessions to enhance educators' skills in delivering character education effectively. These training sessions focus on strategies such as using visual media, storytelling, and reward systems, helping teachers become more confident and creative in integrating moral

values into their classrooms. This aligns with Almajnuni & Alwerthan's (2024) research, which emphasizes the importance of contextualized internal training for enhancing teaching effectiveness in inclusive schools. The school also revises its curriculum documents, such as lesson plans and syllabi, based on feedback from evaluations. This revision is a form of adaptive response to the learning needs of students with special needs. The addition of measurable character assessment indicators and the integration of daily reflection sessions into the learning process further strengthen the character curriculum.

A key element of the school's ongoing improvement is the establishment of a Character Curriculum Team, composed of the principal, senior teachers, and support staff. This team works collaboratively to monitor the character education program, ensuring its sustainability and relevance. Their role in regularly reviewing the curriculum and strategizing improvements ensures that the character education system is not only continuously evolving but is also deeply rooted in the real needs of the students. Bakoč et al. (2024) highlight that the success of curriculum reform depends heavily on collective cohesiveness and empowering leadership, which is precisely what the Character Curriculum Team represents at SLB AT-Turmudzi.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the PDCA cycle in character curriculum management at SLB AT-Turmudzi 1 Malangbong demonstrates its profound impact on fostering a dynamic and sustainable character education system. Each stage of the PDCA cycle—from planning to action—has contributed to the creation of a responsive and inclusive curriculum that adapts to the unique needs of students with special needs. The Plan stage involves a collaborative and adaptive planning process, ensuring that character education is integrated meaningfully into the curriculum. The Do stage emphasizes the importance of habituation, teacher modeling, and differentiated approaches, which allow students to internalize values in a practical, consistent manner. The Check stage provides essential feedback through regular evaluations and reflective supervision, ensuring that the character curriculum stays relevant and effective. The Act stage leads to continuous professional development for teachers and curriculum adjustments, which ensures that the system remains aligned with student needs.

This research highlights the transformative power of integrating quality management principles into special education, showing that a PDCA-based approach not only enhances the delivery of character education but also cultivates a school culture rooted in collaboration, reflection, and continuous improvement. By prioritizing these principles, SLB AT-Turmudzi has created a

model that not only strengthens character education but also supports the professional growth of educators and the holistic development of students. This study serves as a valuable reference for other educational institutions to develop tailored, context-sensitive models that foster sustainable and effective character education systems in special education settings.

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