



Managing Character Education for Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the management of character education for students with disabilities in inclusive elementary schools, with a focus on the application of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating functions. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis involving school leaders and classroom teachers. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that character education management is implemented through an integrated yet gradual application of the POAC framework. Inclusive planning emphasizes core character values such as religiosity, empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and discipline, although these values are not yet supported by formal written documentation. Organizing is conducted flexibly through role distribution among school personnel, while implementation relies on role modeling, habituation, and adaptive daily learning activities. Evaluation focuses primarily on observing individual behavioral changes through informal communication with parents. The study implies that strengthening written planning and structured evaluation mechanisms is essential to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of character education management for students with disabilities in inclusive school settings.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, education is increasingly expected to produce individuals who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded and socially responsible. This expectation arises from growing social concerns such as declining empathy, intolerance, and weakened civic responsibility among younger generations. Character, understood as the integration of moral knowledge, internalized values, and virtuous behavior, plays a crucial role in

addressing these challenges (Alavi, 2024; Purwaningsih, 2024). Evidence from global and national educational discourse demonstrates that academic excellence alone is insufficient to prepare students for complex social realities (Widya et al., 2026). In Indonesia, character education has been positioned as a strategic foundation for cultivating tolerance, responsibility, and social harmony from early schooling (Sutarjo, 2023; Nuraeni & Nugraha, 2025). Therefore, strengthening character education is not merely an educational agenda but a societal necessity to ensure sustainable human development and social cohesion in increasingly diverse communities.

Despite the recognized importance of character education, its implementation continues to face substantial challenges, particularly within inclusive educational settings (Fauzi et al., 2025; Islamiah & Maulidiah, 2024). Inclusive schools are expected to serve students with diverse abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs, including students with disabilities, while simultaneously fostering shared moral values and social integration (Fauzi et al., 2025; Wisudaningsih et al., 2025). However, many educational institutions struggle to translate policy mandates on character education into systematic and inclusive practices. Limitations in teacher preparedness, insufficient institutional coordination, and lack of adaptive program design often result in character education being treated as symbolic rather than transformative (Sidik et al., 2024). These challenges are further compounded by the misconception that character formation can be achieved solely through curriculum content, without considering school culture, daily interactions, and management practices (Pratama, 2025; Sholehah & Ichsan, 2025). As a result, character education frequently fails to reach students with special needs in meaningful ways, creating gaps between educational ideals and actual learning experiences within inclusive elementary schools.

Empirical phenomena observed in inclusive elementary schools reveal that character education is often implemented inconsistently and unevenly across student populations. While values such as discipline, respect, and responsibility are formally introduced, their internalization among students—especially those with disabilities—varies significantly. Teachers frequently prioritize academic targets, leaving limited space for reflective moral learning and value habituation in daily classroom practices (Kultsum, 2025). Moreover, character education activities tend to rely heavily on teacher initiatives rather than structured school-wide management systems. Collaboration among principals, classroom teachers, special education teachers, and parents remains fragmented, reducing program sustainability (Nurmadiyah & Noer Fadlan, 2025).

These field conditions indicate that character education is not fully embedded within institutional planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Consequently, students with special needs may experience exclusion from character-learning opportunities that are essential for their social and emotional development within inclusive school environments.

Previous studies have extensively examined character education from pedagogical, psychological, and policy perspectives. Research highlights that effective character education involves instructional strategies, teacher role modeling, and value reinforcement through habituation (Sirojuddin, 2020; Kultsum, 2025). Other scholars emphasize the importance of early character formation at the elementary level, as this stage represents a critical period for internalizing moral and spiritual values (Munif, 2025). In inclusive education contexts, studies indicate that character education must be adapted to accommodate diverse learners, requiring differentiated approaches and supportive learning environments (Sidik et al., 2024). Furthermore, the Child-Friendly School approach has been identified as a promising framework for enhancing student well-being and engagement in inclusive settings (Indriani et al., 2025). These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of character education and the necessity of aligning pedagogical practices with inclusive principles.

Although existing literature provides valuable insights, several critical gaps remain. Most studies focus on classroom-level strategies or teacher competencies, with limited attention to the broader management of character education programs in inclusive elementary schools. Research examining planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation processes remains scarce, particularly concerning students with disabilities (Mala et al., 2025). Additionally, many studies adopt normative or conceptual approaches, offering limited empirical evidence on how character education management operates in real inclusive school contexts. The integration of national values, such as Pancasila, into inclusive character education management is also underexplored (Rafah et al., 2025). Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of how institutional leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and management systems collectively influence the effectiveness of character education for students with special needs. Addressing this gap is essential to develop sustainable and contextually relevant models of inclusive character education.

This study offers novelty by positioning character education as a management issue rather than solely a pedagogical concern within inclusive elementary schools. Unlike previous research, this study integrates management functions—planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation—with inclusive education principles to examine how character education can reach all

students without discrimination. By focusing specifically on students with disabilities, this research advances the state of the art in inclusive character education studies. It also contributes empirically to local Indonesian literature, where systematic investigations into character education management in inclusive settings remain limited. Furthermore, this study aligns character education with child-friendly and inclusive frameworks, offering an innovative perspective that connects moral development, institutional governance, and educational equity. As such, the study addresses an urgent and unresolved issue in contemporary education systems, particularly in developing inclusive and value-based schooling practices.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the central research problem of this study concerns how character education is managed in inclusive elementary schools to effectively serve students with disabilities. This study argues that effective character education in inclusive contexts depends not only on teacher competence but also on systematic management, collaborative stakeholder involvement, and responsive program evaluation. The temporary assumption guiding this research is that character education becomes more meaningful and inclusive when management practices are aligned with students' diverse needs. By examining management processes in inclusive schools, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the discourse on character education and inclusivity, and practically to the development of more effective educational strategies in Indonesia. Ultimately, the findings aim to support policymakers, school leaders, and educators in strengthening inclusive character education as a foundation for moral, social, and educational development.

RESEARCH METHOD

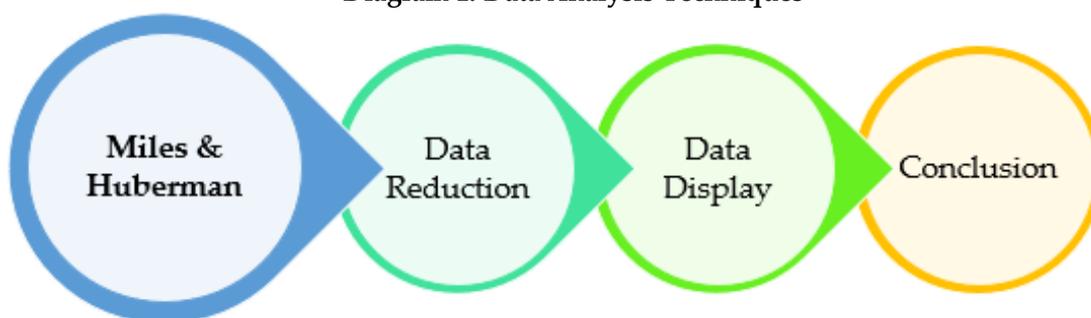
This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. This approach was selected because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of management processes in the formation of character among students with disabilities within an inclusive school environment. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon contextually, in accordance with the conditions and characteristics of the setting at SD Negeri (SDN) 25 Banda Aceh.

The research was conducted from late October to mid-November 2025. The research subjects consisted of the principal, vice principal, and two homeroom teachers. The object of the study was the management of character education for students with disabilities in an inclusive school. Data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in depth with the principal, vice principal, and one homeroom teacher selected through purposive sampling. In addition,

non-participant observation was carried out by positioning the researcher as an observer without direct involvement in character education management activities. Data were further strengthened through document analysis, including: (1) data on types of student disabilities, (2) guidelines or standard operating procedure (SOP) for character education for students with disabilities, and (3) teacher training documents related to character education and inclusion.

In this study, the researcher applied descriptive qualitative data analysis based on the analytical framework developed by Miles and Huberman. This approach was intended to achieve a focused and in-depth understanding of the research objectives. In this case study, data analysis was conducted systematically through three main stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014).

Diagram 1. Data Analysis Techniques

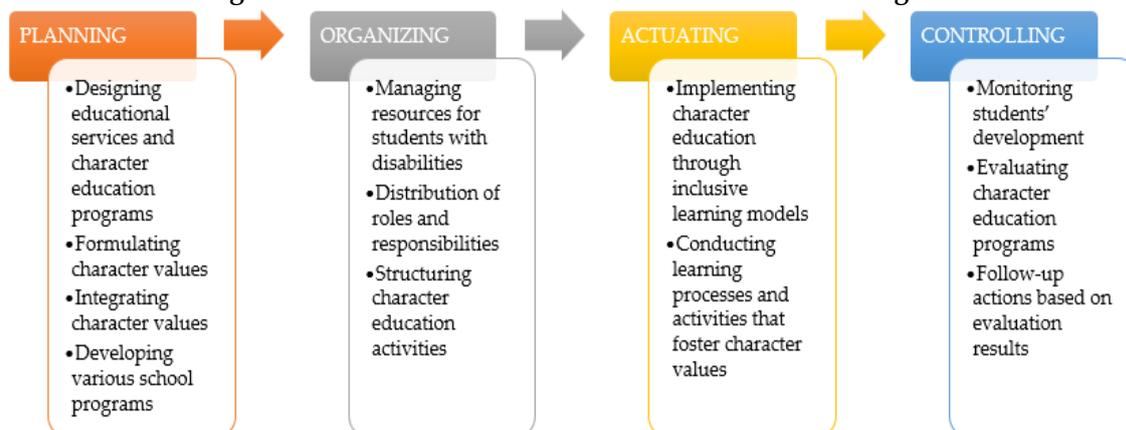


RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Character Education Management for Students with Disabilities

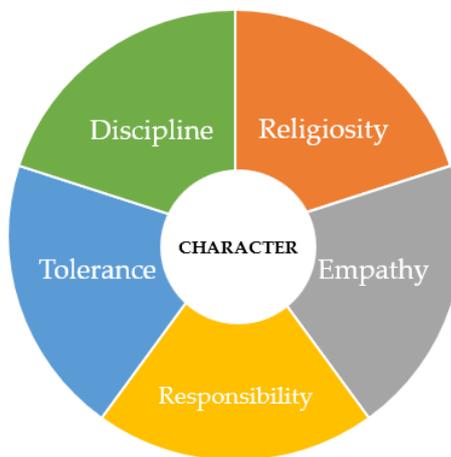
According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), management is defined as the process of managing resources to achieve goals effectively and efficiently through planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling. In line with this view, Terry conceptualizes management functions as intangible in nature but reflected through work outcomes that abstract the management process into four main functions: Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling (POAC) (Asni, 2025; Asni et al., 2024). The application of these functions reflects schools' efforts to manage character education in a structured and sustainable manner, as emphasized in the concept of educational management.

Diagram 2. POAC Functions in Character Education Management



Character education is understood as an effort to educate children to make wise decisions and to put those decisions into practice. It is defined as an educational process that develops students' character values so that these values become an integral part of their personal identity and are applied in their daily lives as members of society and citizens who are religious, nationalistic, productive, and creative. Character education is particularly essential in inclusive schools to ensure that character development can be harmoniously internalized by both regular students and students with disabilities.

Diagram 3. Formulation of Character Values



As illustrated in Diagram 3, religiosity, empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and discipline constitute the fundamental values shaping students' behavior. Religious character is reflected in religious observance and moral conduct; empathy in concern for others; tolerance in attitudes of respect for diversity; responsibility in the commitment to fulfilling duties; and discipline in adherence to rules and time management.

Planning of Character Education

Effective planning aligns closely with implementation, thereby enabling the objectives of character education to be achieved. Character education planning at the elementary school level is carried out through a series of systematic planning components. These components include the formulation of objectives, the development of implementation strategies, the establishment of school policies, the mapping of activity procedures, budget allocation, and continuous program improvement. All planning elements are designed to ensure that character education is implemented in a directed and effective manner, allowing character values to be aligned with students' needs and conditions (Nuraeni & Nugraha, 2025). The process of goal formulation is conducted participatively through deliberation between program implementers and school management, ensuring that the established objectives are mutually agreed upon and accountable in their implementation (Bastian & Fitri, 2025; Sumarto et al., 2023).

Table 1. Planning in the Development of Character Education Programs

Data Source	Findings
Interviews	<p>The character development program for students with disabilities is designed to be integrated with the school's overall programs through the cultivation of discipline, responsibility, and mutual respect, and is formulated during the annual planning meeting, although its adjustments are still implemented gradually (Principal, 6 December 2025).</p> <p>In planning character development, student affairs activities are adjusted to ensure that students with disabilities can participate while remaining integrated with programs for regular students, particularly through the habituation of discipline and compliance with school regulations (Vice Principal for Student Affairs, 29 November 2025).</p> <p>Homeroom teachers are involved in planning character development by integrating character values into lesson plans (RPP) and daily learning activities, while adapting them to the abilities and needs of students with disabilities (Homeroom Teacher, 2 December 2025).</p>
Observation	<p>The character education development program for students with disabilities in the inclusive school remains integrated with programs intended for regular students; for students with disabilities, implementation is still carried out gradually in accordance with the school's capacity and available resources.</p>

Based on the interview results presented in Table 1 with the principal, vice principal for student affairs, and homeroom teachers, character development for students with disabilities has been planned but has not yet been specifically

formulated. The program remains integrated into general school programs, with gradual adjustments and an emphasis on discipline, responsibility, and mutual respect, although it is not yet supported by specific written documentation.

The findings indicate that planning serves as a critical initial stage in determining the success of character education for students with disabilities at SD Negeri 25 Banda Aceh. Planning is conducted inclusively by considering the diversity of students' characteristics, beginning with early identification during the student admission process as a basis for designing services and character education programs. The school establishes core values such as religiosity, empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and discipline, which are integrated into the curriculum, instructional practices, and daily habituation programs. Emphasis on empathy and tolerance is directed toward creating a friendly and non-discriminatory school climate, thereby enabling character education to be optimally internalized through learning experiences and social interactions.

Organization of Character Education in Inclusive Schools

Based on the findings, the organizing stage of character education management at SD Negeri 25 Banda Aceh is reflected in the structured distribution of roles and responsibilities among the principal, classroom teachers, special education support teachers (shadow teachers), and educational staff. The principal performs a directive and policy-making function, while classroom teachers and special education support teachers play a direct role in implementing character education, both within instructional activities and through daily interactions in the school environment.

Table 2. Organizing the Management of Resources for Students with Disabilities Related to Character Education

Data Source	Findings
Interviews	<p>The management of resources for character development among students with disabilities is still adjusted to the school's existing conditions. We arrange for teachers to support one another in assisting students with disabilities, particularly in fostering daily attitudes and behaviors, especially when there are students with disabilities who require additional attention (Principal, 6 December 2025).</p> <p>From the student affairs perspective, resource management is carried out in a more flexible manner. School activities are adjusted to the abilities of students with disabilities and the availability of support staff. There are no specific written regulations in place; therefore, coordination is usually conducted directly with homeroom teachers when particular needs arise (Vice Principal for Student Affairs, 29 November 2025).</p>

Data Source	Findings
	In the classroom, resource management is more practical in nature. It is adjusted through the use of learning media such as visual aids, seating arrangements, and character habituation practices tailored to the conditions of students with disabilities (Homeroom Teacher, 2 December 2025).
Observation	Observation results indicate that resource management for students with disabilities remains flexible and is adjusted to the school's conditions and capacities.

Based on the interview results presented in Table 2, the management of character education resources for students with disabilities has utilized the existing potential of the school; however, the organizing process remains flexible and is not yet supported by clearly defined task distribution and written guidelines. This condition causes implementation to rely heavily on teachers' initiative, although its effectiveness is also influenced by the availability of human resources, facilities and infrastructure, as well as support from parents and the community.

The findings further indicate that the organizing stage of character education at SD Negeri 25 Banda Aceh is carried out through a clear division of roles among the principal, classroom teachers, special education support teachers, and educational staff. Organizing is also reflected in the grouping of learning activities and school habituation programs designed collaboratively and inclusively. This affirms that the organizing function is implemented to establish an effective working structure so that character education can be carried out optimally in accordance with the POAC principles (Bararah, 2025).

Implementation of Character Education for Students with Disabilities

The implementation stage of character education in schools emphasizes several key aspects, namely role modeling, habituation, learning, and reinforcement. Role modeling is demonstrated through educators' attitudes and behaviors that reflect character values in daily life (Adam & Lailatussaadah, 2022). Habituation is carried out by consistently instilling positive behaviors in school activities. Learning serves as a medium for internalizing character values through academic activities, while reinforcement is provided to encourage and sustain positive behaviors demonstrated by students (Mukti & Harimi, 2021).

Table 3. Implementation of Character Education Learning

Data Source	Findings
Interviews	<p>Character education is implemented in an integrated manner within classroom learning through teachers' attitudes, habituation practices, and role modeling, with adjustments made for students with disabilities, although its implementation has not yet reached an optimal level (Principal, 6 December 2025).</p> <p>From the student affairs perspective, character learning is evident in routine school activities such as time discipline, adherence to school regulations, and joint activities. In practice, teachers adjust their methods of delivery to ensure that the content can be understood by students with disabilities (Vice Principal for Student Affairs, 29 November 2025).</p> <p>In the classroom, character education is applied through daily learning activities with adjustments for students with disabilities, although the implementation remains relatively simple in practice (Homeroom Teacher, 2 December 2025).</p>
Observation	<p>Character education at SD Negeri 25 Banda Aceh is integrated into classroom instruction and routine school activities through role modeling and habituation, with adaptations for students with disabilities; however, its implementation remains basic and has not yet been fully optimized.</p>

Based on the interview data presented in Table 3 from the three informants, character education learning has been implemented in daily teaching and learning activities through integration into classroom instruction. Teachers instill character values through habituation, exemplary attitudes, and classroom interactions, including for students with disabilities. However, implementation is still adjusted to classroom conditions and individual teacher capacity, resulting in non-uniform practices and the absence of specific written guidelines.

In line with these interview findings, the implementation of character education at SD Negeri 25 is carried out through an inclusive learning model that emphasizes the principle of integration. This model allows students with special needs to participate in learning activities alongside regular students within the same educational environment. The level of integration applied is flexible, ranging from full participation in teaching and learning activities, limited participation in certain subjects, to involvement in social activities as a means of learning character values.

The actuating stage of character education management at SD Negeri 25 Banda Aceh is evident in the implementation of learning processes and various school activities that directly instill character values in students. In this process,

special education support teachers provide individualized assistance to students with disabilities to ensure that they can participate actively and optimally in every learning activity (Anggraini & Hasanah, 2025).

Evaluation of Character Education in Inclusive Schools at SDN 25 Banda Aceh

Evaluation of character education in inclusive schools constitutes a stage in the educational management process aimed at assessing the extent to which the planned and implemented character values have had an impact on the development of students with disabilities. Evaluation is generally oriented not only toward final outcomes but also toward learning processes and habituation practices that take place within the inclusive school environment.

Table 4. Parental Involvement in the Evaluation Process of Character Education

Data Source	Findings
Interviews	<p>Parents are involved in the evaluation of character education through direct communication when there are developments or problems concerning students, as well as through routine school meetings to convey students' progress, although discussions specifically focused on character have not yet been conducted in depth (Principal, 6 December 2025).</p> <p>From the student affairs perspective, parents are involved through routine meetings and direct communication when there are changes in students' behavior or specific needs, even though character evaluation is mostly communicated orally (Vice Principal for Student Affairs, 29 November 2025).</p> <p>As a homeroom teacher, I contact parents when there are changes in a child's attitudes or behavior, and character evaluation is conveyed orally based on daily observations (Homeroom Teacher, 2 December 2025).</p>
Observation	<p>Observation results indicate that parental involvement in the evaluation of character education at SD Negeri 25 Banda Aceh is carried out through direct communication and routine school meetings, particularly when changes in student behavior occur, with evaluations generally delivered orally based on everyday observations.</p>

Based on the interview results presented in Table 4, parents are involved in the evaluation of character education through direct communication and routine meetings. However, this involvement remains informal in nature and has not yet been supported by a structured written evaluation mechanism.

In line with the research findings, the evaluation of character education at SD Negeri 25 Banda Aceh focuses on individual behavioral changes among students with disabilities, program effectiveness, and the instructional strategies employed. Teachers conduct periodic reflections on teaching methods and adaptations in inclusive learning, supported by continuous communication with

parents to monitor student development (Fardiyana et al., 2024; Nisa & Lailatussaadah, 2025) This evaluation is used as a basis for program improvement and managerial decision-making, thus playing a strategic role in ensuring that character education is implemented effectively, equitably, and with respect for student diversity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that character education for students with disabilities can be effectively managed in inclusive elementary schools through a contextual and gradual application of the POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling) functions. The key insight derived from this research is that inclusivity in character education does not solely depend on formal documentation, but rather on the alignment of shared values—such as religiosity, empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and discipline—with daily school practices. Flexible role distribution among principals, teachers, and special education support staff, combined with role modeling and habituation strategies, enables character values to be internalized by students with disabilities in a meaningful way. From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes empirical evidence to the limited body of research on inclusive character education management in Indonesian elementary schools, particularly by highlighting how POAC functions can be adapted to foster a disability-friendly school climate within resource-constrained contexts.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research was conducted in a single inclusive elementary school, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts with different institutional capacities and student characteristics. Additionally, the absence of structured written evaluation data limits the depth of analysis regarding the long-term effectiveness of character education outcomes. Future research is therefore recommended to employ comparative or multi-site designs across diverse inclusive schools to examine variations in POAC implementation. Further studies may also explore the integration of systematic, written evaluation instruments to strengthen the controlling function of character education management. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how structured management models can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of inclusive character education practices in Indonesia.

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