# Boosting Teacher's Perception and Deeds in Indonesian Schools for the Character Education to Thrive

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**Abstract- The ministerial reform on character education in Indonesian schools and its effect on school practices remain a challenge as the roles of school leadership have been significantly unaddressed. This study aimed to examine the effect of school managerial practices on teachers' beliefs and perceptions in character education. This cross-sectional survey collected data from 574 teachers from the randomly selected 105 primary, junior and senior secondary schools in five districts throughout Indonesia. Using very simple models of education production function, this research found that the quality of school managerial practices had impacts on teachers'favorable beliefs and initiatives to create and manage students' activities in schools and boost students' values. Driven by the parental pressure to school, the principals were to build and manage local development measures as stipulated in the ministerial policy. Among those was the continuous professional development that enabled the teachers to learn, to discuss, and to share their best practices with others in a continuous manner.**

*Keywords: character education, leadership, school principals, teacher perception*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Though using many different terms e.g. civic education, Pancasila moral education, religious education, or citizenship education-- Indonesia has relatively long implemented values education in schools. These were challenged by what Lickona (1993) observes in the US more than two decades ago, the troubling trends in youth character. The Indonesian government began to notice the same problems ten years ago when the Minister of Education launched the character education reform to be incorporated into the school curriculum [1]. After the ten year implementation, the program was firstly revised through the second edition of the Character Education Guide published in 2017 [2]. The program was aimed to manage Indonesia's student character building, through all aspects of school intra-, co- and extra-curricular activities.

However, this reform did not enable schools to change toward meeting the favorable climate for the character education to grow. The teachers' behavior in teaching and learning processes remains significantly unchanged since the reform was driven more by the academic rather than values-based educational processes [3]. Among the causes was one that school management and leadership remain significantly unaddressed through the reform. The school principals too were not well prepared to manage character education by way of creating a school climate conducive for learning character values.

This study is aimed at observing the principal's intentional endeavor to facilitate character education in schools as depicted in the Ministerial policy [2] This study attempts to answer a question: to what extent did the school managerial practices affect the teacher's beliefs, perceptions, and deeds favorable to implement character education in school.

## II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

In the US, character education in school has been incorporated in school curriculum since the 1970s and well-grounded since then. It is grounded in the work of Lickona & Davidson emphasizing that to recover the wisdom and share a basic morality essential for American survival, adults must promote this morality by teaching the young, directly and indirectly, such values as respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and civic virtue [4]. The growing interest in character education over the last decade has been increasingly recognized; the roles that certain character traits (such as resilience, self-regulation, and emotional and social skills) can play in enabling children and young people to achieve positive attributes in support for pupils' (personal) development to become well-rounded, grounded citizens and individuals [5]. For the newly introduced reform in school, the following two factors are vital for the character education to thrive, i.e.: school leadership and teachers' favorable beliefs and perceptions.

## A. School Leadership

The broader view of school management initiatives inside the mind of school leaders is significant to affect the teacher's beliefs and deeds for the successful character education in schools [6]. The character education should be embedded in the school as an integral part of its overarching aims and purpose, rather than a stand-alone set of lessons or activities [5], [7]. However, character education in school cannot escape the perspective of moral reasoning, such as to develop students' capacity to judge which values are better than others [8]. This thought is necessary but not sufficient for good character as it underestimates the roles played by the schools as a moral socializer" [9, p. 7] and "...people can be very smart about matters of right and wrong; however, and still choose the wrong. Moral education that is merely intellectual misses the crucial emotional side of character, which serves as the bridge between judgment and action" [9, p. 313]. In their case-study schools, Walker, Sims & Kettlewell [10], adopted a whole-school approach to creating a positive school ethos and learning environment considered to help develop young people's character. Many of these approaches are continuing to drive for character education in schools in addition to other societal problems that have increased [11].The successful character education should be able to create a shared common belief that would provide the foundations for strong values and academic achievement and prepare young people for the future [10].

To creating a successful character education program, there is a need for improvement of school climate as well as the favorable social and physical environment in boosting students' academic outcomes and decreasing negative teenage behavior [12]. This is consistent with the argument of Lickona & Davidson [4, p. 15] that: "...character education should be the deliberate efforts in school to develop the virtues that enable the students to lead fulfilling lives and build a better world." This necessarily means that effective school leadership is critical for the betterment of character education to thrive. Leithwood and Riehl also argue that the chance required in any education reform is remote unless district and school leaders agree with its purposes and appreciate what is required to make it work. Leaders in a district and school play extremely important roles in helping teachers realize how centrally-induced reforms are manifested into school development efforts [13].

For Robinson, [14] "the total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on instructional effectiveness account for about a quarter of total school effects." Many findings differ about the roles of school leaders in implementing a reform as he asserts: "...empirical evidence available in this case is not fully consistent is not something rare in educational research." However, Day, Harris, & Hadfield [15] argue: "research findings from diverse countries and different school contexts have revealed the powerful impact of leadership processes on school effectiveness." For the successful accomplishment of instructional reforms, learning-centered leadership is the only way forward" [13]. Though the effects of successful leadership are considerably greater in schools that are in more difficult circumstances, many other factors may contribute to such turnaround, but

leadership is the catalyst" [16].

The roles of school leadership are critical to play in the centrally imposed character education reform in Indonesia [2]. School headmasters should be able to help teachers practice the recently induced reforms in their schools. The very first role the school leadership to play is to strengthen the beliefs and perceptions of teachers as the critical foundation for character education.

## B. Teacher's Beliefs and Perception

The moral reasoning argument introduced by Kohlberg [17], is only a necessary step for educating students in character; to be sufficient teachers should have a belief and perceive that imparting certain moral values in students should engage them in a set of deliberate, programmed activities in school [18]. Using a thematic case study method, Alexander finds that teachers should not only believe that character education is important and should be taught [19]. This should also be intentional. The school principals should perceive that teachers are capable and be allowed to spearhead the school initiatives intended to develop character [6]. Thus, teachers need adequate preparation for the initiatives to be effective and that school leadership must take on a greater role in the execution of these initiatives [6], [19].

Based on his study, Alexander suggests that the development initiatives at the school are needed and should be based on the experiences and perceptions of practitioners, such as school principals and teachers to implement the initiatives [19]. The only obstacle that Milson and Mehlig point to in schools, adopting character education programs was the lack of preparation in teacher education programs [6]. In fact, there is a gap in teacher beliefs on character education in the secondary schools and particularly around teacher perceptions of specific initiatives [19]. Budimansyah, Suharto and Nurulpaik also see the gap by observing high school teachers' beliefs and perceptions surrounding specific education initiatives in high schools through civic education [20]. They find that the teachers specializing in civic education have more initiatives than did other subject teachers just because they have sufficient exposure to both pre- and in-service training in character education.

Fullan asserts that "educational change is dependent on what teachers do and think; it is as simple and complex as that...teachers have control over their classroom and they will be guided by their beliefs and prior experiences" [21]. If we agree that character education is important and that teachers' beliefs and perceptions are important to practice and to student outcomes, then it is important to analyze what teachers have to perceive about the character education initiatives at the high school level in the context of a specific type of school [21]. It is then thought that: "whatever rich the knowledge and belief held by researchers or policymakers about education policies would not enable the teachers to improve their teaching practices unless they hold the same perception and beliefs" [18].

This study assumed that the successful instruction in school is so much determined by the broader views of teachers to think, act and behave while exposing students to problems in the school as well as out of school environment

[22], [23], the same is true in an educational program that aims to instill positive values in young people [24]. In some Indonesian schools, civic education teachers need managerial supports from school leaders to create deliberate, intentional school activities beyond the classroom instructional activities; these are aimed to instil values in students' character [20]. Among the vital supports needed is for the teachers to create and establish a student centered, problem-based learning through employing the already defined 'project citizen' model [24].

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

This cross-sectional survey in primary and secondary schools was the first part of a core study examining the effectiveness of 'the character learning project' model in teaching character education in schools. This survey used teacher's favorable insights and good practices of character education as perceived by teachers in schools. It is emphasized by Alexander that to be successful, teachers should perceive that not only should character education be taught in schools, but teachers should have favorable perceptions and beliefs that schools be intentional about the development of student character [19].

Using headmaster questionnaires, the survey collected data from 105 schools randomly selected from five selected districts. Teacher questionnaires were administered to collect data from 474 teachers consisting of 144 primary, 170 junior secondary, and 160 senior secondary teachers. Five provinces were selected by chance, i.e., Lampung, West Java, North Sulawesi, East Kalimantan, and Maluku. The model of analysis assumed that the effects of the principal's initiatives through school management on teacher's favorable perception and good practices would be a vital means for the successful character education implemented in schools [6]. The school management and teachers' beliefs were assumed to be conceptually dependent and empirically related; the relationship between the two remained properly untouched in the study of character education in Indonesia's schools.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Schools are to create a favorable environment to facilitate teachers to expand their beliefs and insights for implementing successful character education. In Indonesia, all teachers are obliged to take part in delivering character educaton in their respective subject matter classes [2]. However, character education would not by itself be a subject matter; it is a school program instead. The successful character education would be governed by all the teachers as well as headmasters. They should have perceptions, beliefs, and deeds through well-designed managerial & instructional attempts in schools.

Some schools created in-service training for teachers to introduce innovative teaching approaches. Table 1 shows, most of the schools (60.2%) frequently while some others regularly (35.14%) implemented the training programs, though only 56% of the teachers fully participated in the programs (Table 2). Some training programs introduced new (48.15%) and innovative (56.51%) teaching approaches in character education. One of them was the 'project citizen'

model in which some civic education teachers were trained by the researchers using the model developed by California's Center for Civic Education [25]. The schools are required to establish an incentive or reward system to help teachers improve their teaching methods in their respective classes over time.

Table 1: Profiles of the Schools to Manage Character Education

| No. | Schools' Profile | Headmaster's Responses (%) | | | N |
|-----|------------------|------|------------|-----------|---|
| | | None | Frequently | Regularly | |
| 1 | Implement in-service training for teachers in school | 4.42 | 60.2 | 35.14 | 407 |
| 2 | Using reward for teachers' attempts new teaching approaches | 35.63 | 48.16 | 15.48 | 404 |
| 3 | Using reward for teacher's innovation in teaching approaches | 27.03 | 56.51 | 14.25 | 398 |
| 4 | Using reward for teacher's quality of teaching & learning | 27.52 | 54.55 | 15.72 | 398 |
| 5 | Support for improvement of teacher credential | 60.44 | 38.08 | 17.94 | 474 |

One-third of the schools remained hesitant, and the rest (70.3%) frequently provided some forms of rewards, including those 15% that had established a reward system to encourage teachers'attempts to implement some innovative teaching approaches. Table 2 indicates though that only a small part (46.9%) of the teachers felt that the incentives had put into effect. The challenge of the principals is to make teachers involved in schools' continuous discussions through sharing ideas and best practices, since only 51.9% of them engaged. Most of them (92%); however, reported their participation in seminars and workshops in schools.

This study aimed to observe the effect of school managerial and instructional efforts on the beliefs, perceptions, and practices of the teachers as the first measured criterion, as shown in Table 2. Another criterion variable was the good practices in character education as a function of the same set of variables and results are shown in Table 3. Each of the school principals' and teachers' variables included in each model was hypothesized as the predictor that affects either one of the measured criterion variables.

First Benchmark; Teacher's Perception and Practices in Character Education

Table 2 shows how significant all the models account for the variance of the predicted first criterion ($R^2 = 0.981$; $p = 0.001$); the first variable that strongly affected this was the parental expectation at the pressures to schools to improve character education ($\beta = 0.67$; $p = 0.001$). It means that the stronger the pressures from parents pointed to schools, the better would be the principals' and teachers' efforts to make the character education improved. Another strong variable was the happiness of teachers for being part of, and teach character education in schools ($\beta = 0.44$, $p = 0.001$). In order to improve the function of schools as character education socializers (Alexander, 2017), the school principals should "rock their boat" between the two pushed factors, i.e.,

parental pressure and teacher's motivation to teach.

Table 2: Effects of School's Profiles on Teachers' Favorable Beliefs in Character Education to Thrive (R2 =0,981; p=0,001)

| Regression Model | Unstandard-ized Coeff. | | Standard-ized Coeff | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | S.E. | Beta | | |
| Constant | -6.90 | 2.28 | | -3.02 | 0.01 |
| Being a science teacher | -1.01 | 0.28 | -0.14 | -3.59 | 0.03 |
| Being a social studies teacher | -0.65 | 0.29 | -0.09 | -2.22 | 0.04 |
| Parent's expectation in character education | 3.28 | 0.23 | 0.67 | 14.55 | 0.00 |
| Proud of being part of the school as a teacher | 2.47 | 0.34 | 0.44 | 7.21 | 0.00 |
| School's plan in in-service teacher training | 5.26 | 0.26 | 0.97 | 19.97 | 0.00 |
| Participate in continues discussion in school | 2.09 | 0.26 | 0.36 | 7.94 | 0.00 |
| Participate in seminar/workshop in school | -1.42 | 0.42 | -0.13 | -3.39 | 0.03 |
| Happiness for being part of school as a teacher | 2.47 | 0.34 | 0.44 | 7.21 | 0.00 |
| Reward for a teacher to innovate in teaching | 0.98 | 0.18 | 0.25 | 5.56 | 0.00 |
| Punishment for the less performing teachers | -0.95 | 0.12 | -0.31 | -7.95 | 0.00 |

Criterion Variable: Teachers' Perception of Teaching Chared

The principals' plans for teacher in-service training shared the strongest variance to affect the first benchmark variable ($\beta$=0,97, p=0.001), the teachers' beliefs and perceptions in character education. The strong effect of the teachers' training was determined by the extent to which the training was designed by way of continuous discussion and share ideas and best practices among teachers in schools ($\beta$=0,36, p=0.001). The effect of teacher training in school on the second benchmark, good practices in character education, is consistent with the number of days teachers participate in on-school training that accounts for a significant share of variance. This is shown in Table 3 that this effect was small but significant on the second benchmark (R2=0,01; p=0,043). However, participating in seminars or workshops took place in schools negatively affected the first benchmark ($\beta$=-0.13;p=0.004) because these types of professional development were in fact too formal, unfocused, and rarely took place.

Second Benchmark; good practices in character education. The second model too accounted very strongly on the variance of predicted second benchmark variable (R2 =0.96; p=0,001). Table 3 shows that this benchmark was slightly but significantly accounted for by the two teacher's profiles: school level (R2=0.05; p=0.039) and teacher's credentials (R2=0.08; p=0.024). It shows that the higher the education of teachers and the higher the level of schools they teach, the better they would apply for good character education practices.

Table 3: Determinants of Good Practices in Character Education as Thought by Teachers in Schools (R2=0.93; p=0.001)

| Model | R | R² | Adjust-ed R² | S.E. of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | R²Cha. | F-Cha | Sig. F |
| Being a civic education teacher | ,608 | 0,37 | 0,34 | 2,190 | 0,37 | 14,06 | 0,001 |
| Reward for improved T&L process | ,796 | 0,63 | 0,60 | 1,707 | 0,26 | 16,52 | 0,000 |
| Teacher's credential level | ,843 | 0,71 | 0,67 | 1,549 | 0,08 | 5,92 | 0,024 |
| Reward for innovation in teaching | ,873 | 0,76 | 0,72 | 1,436 | 0,05 | 4,61 | 0,044 |
| School level | ,900 | 0,81 | 0,76 | 1,319 | 0,05 | 4,88 | 0,039 |
| Class size | ,929 | 0,86 | 0,82 | 1,146 | 0,05 | 7,49 | 0,031 |
| Feedback from principals | ,967 | 0,94 | 0,91 | 0,806 | 0,07 | 20,41 | 0,019 |
| N of days teacher participates in prof. development | ,980 | 0,96 | 0,94 | 0,665 | 0,01 | 4,84 | 0,043 |

Criterion: Student Centered Learning Exercised by Teacher

In-service training in schools was one, but incentive or feedback system in schools was another important variable to affect on the second benchmark, the good practices in character education. Table 3 shows that rewarding teachers for their innovation in teaching (R2=0,05; p=0.044), and rewarding them for improvement of teaching processes all the time (R2=0,26; p=0.001) were important to make the teachers teach better. Consistently, as reported by the principals (Table 2) the beliefs and perceptions of teachers were affected positively by the extent to which they are in support of an incentive system ($\beta$=0.25; p=0.001). In contrast, the punishment for undeforming teachers negatively affected the first benchmark ($\beta$=-0.31; p=0.001) as this was positively accounted for by the extent to which the school principals frequently feedback teachers for their good practices in teaching character (R2=0.07; p=0.019).

Finally, being a civic education teacher was one that accounts to affect on good practices in teaching character (R2=0.37; p=0.001); while being a science teacher ($\beta$= -0,14; p=0.03) and a social studies teacher ($\beta$= -0,09, p=0.04) were negatively associated with this benchmark (see Table 2). These findings were realistic since the civic education teachers had more experiences than did others in teaching students the rights and obligation as Indonesian citizens at all school levels [25].

V. CONCLUSION

This simply found that civic education teachers had gone through some experiences in practices and engagement in professional development activities on character education, more than those teaching other subjects. The teacher in-service training program in school provided the strongest

effect on teachers' perception; consistently the number of days the teachers engaged in professional development was also importantly influential. However, the effect of school-based training program was only necessary. In order to be sufficient, this would take other school effect variables into account.

The findings show that teachers would perceive and practice better in character education if they are given some opportunities to work together, for example, through continuous discussion, sharing ideas and best practices, and doing project-based learning together in schools. Some school management variables have given the strong effect, such as the principal's given incentives, rewards, and continuous feedbacks for those performing teachers; these would have given effect even stronger if those incentives, rewards and feedbacks are built-in and embedded within the school management system.

Finally, as the leaders, school principals should 'rock their boats' between two different pushed factors, such as parental pressure and teacher's motivation. Externally, the strong parental pressures to schools had encouraged schools to set up educational resources and made the school climate conducive for learning. Internally, the principals are obliged to develop and implement school-based training programs as autonomous institutions. This is the local development efforts developed from the ministerial policy. The continuous professional development for teachers was such an imperative task of the school principals; teachers in school need support to learn, to discuss, and to share their best practices with others in a continuous manner. These are to be reinforced through the system-wise efforts in forms of incentive, reward, and feedback mechanism for teachers to maintain the beliefs, motivations, and deeds in character education in schools.

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