

Integration of Responsibility and Empathy Character Values in Learning Activities in Elementary Schools

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Article History: Received on May 14, 2026, Revised on June 9, 2026, Published on June 15, 2026

Abstract: This study aims to examine the integration of responsibility and empathy character values in elementary school learning. The research focuses on identifying instructional strategies, classroom practices, and learning approaches that support effective character education, as well as understanding how these values are internalized by students through daily learning experiences. A qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving principals, teachers, students, and parents selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that responsibility is developed through structured assignments, classroom routines, and accountability practices, while empathy is fostered through collaborative learning, social interaction, and peer engagement. Teacher role modeling and student-centered learning approaches play significant roles in strengthening the implementation of both character values. School programs and supportive learning environments further enhance the character formation process. However, challenges remain, including limited instructional time, diverse student backgrounds, and inconsistencies in lesson planning and implementation. This study contributes a contextual and integrative framework for embedding responsibility and empathy simultaneously in classroom learning. The findings provide practical implications for educators, school leaders, and policymakers in designing sustainable character education programs that support students' holistic development and social-emotional competencies.

Keywords: *responsibility, empathy, character education, elementary school learning, teacher modelling.*

A. Introduction

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping not only students' intellectual abilities but also their character and moral values (Liu & Zhang, 2022). In the context of 21st-century education, the paradigm of learning has undergone a significant transformation, moving beyond the traditional emphasis on cognitive achievement toward the holistic development of learners (AlAli, 2024). This holistic perspective encompasses not only intellectual growth but also affective, social, and ethical competencies that are essential for navigating increasingly complex social realities (Martatiana et al., 2023). As such,

education is expected to produce individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also possess strong character, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility.

Elementary school, as the foundational stage of formal education, represents a critical period in the formation of students' character (Asrohah, 2026). At this stage, children experience rapid cognitive, emotional, and social development, making them highly receptive to value formation and behavioral modelling (Afifah & Setiawan, 2026). The experiences and learning processes encountered during these early years play a decisive role in shaping students' long-term attitudes, habits, and patterns of interaction (Warsiyah et al., 2022). Therefore, integrating character education into elementary learning activities is not merely complementary but constitutes a fundamental necessity in building a strong moral foundation for future generations.

Among the wide range of character values emphasized in educational discourse, responsibility and empathy stand out as two essential and interrelated components (Chowdhury, 2016). Responsibility reflects an individual's awareness and commitment to fulfilling duties, adhering to rules, and being accountable for one's actions. In the context of learning, responsible students demonstrate discipline, perseverance, and independence in completing academic tasks (Zahrotunnisa` Siswahyuningsih et al., 2025). They also exhibit integrity in their work and show consistency in meeting expectations.

On the other hand, empathy refers to the ability to understand, feel, and respond appropriately to the emotions and perspectives of others. It is a core element of social competence that enables students to build meaningful relationships, cooperate effectively, and resolve conflicts constructively. Empathetic students are more likely to demonstrate kindness, tolerance, and respect in diverse social settings. When responsibility and empathy are cultivated simultaneously, they contribute to the development of individuals who are not only self-regulated but also socially aware and responsive.

The integration of responsibility and empathy within learning activities is therefore essential in creating a positive, inclusive, and collaborative classroom environment (Alquriyah & S, 2025). Such integration encourages students to engage actively in the learning process while also being mindful of their roles and the well-being of others. It fosters a classroom culture where mutual respect, cooperation, and accountability become shared values that support both academic success and social harmony.

However, despite the recognized importance of character education, its implementation in elementary schools often remains fragmented and less than optimal. In many cases, educational practices continue to prioritize academic outcomes, such as test scores and content mastery, while character development is treated as a secondary or implicit objective. Character values are frequently delivered through isolated moral lessons rather than being systematically embedded within everyday learning experiences (Gusrianto et al., 2025). This approach limits the effectiveness of character education, as students may fail to internalize values that are not consistently reinforced through practice.

As a consequence, a gap emerges between students' academic performance and their social-emotional competencies. It is not uncommon to find students who excel academically but struggle with responsibility, lack discipline in completing tasks, or demonstrate limited empathy toward peers. This imbalance highlights the urgent need for a more intentional, structured, and integrative approach to character education one that positions character values as an inseparable component of the learning process rather than an additional element.

Integrating responsibility and empathy into classroom learning requires thoughtful and deliberate instructional design. Teachers must move beyond conventional teaching methods and adopt interactive, student-centered approaches that actively engage learners in meaningful experiences. Contextual learning strategies, problem-based learning, and collaborative activities provide opportunities for students to practice responsibility and empathy in real-life situations. For instance, group discussions and cooperative projects encourage students to take responsibility for their roles while also considering the perspectives and contributions of others.

In this process, teachers play a pivotal role not only as facilitators of knowledge but also as role models of character. The way teachers demonstrate responsibility, fairness, and empathy in their interactions with students significantly influences how these values are perceived and internalized. Additionally, reflective practices, such as self-assessment and guided reflection, can help students develop awareness of their behaviors and attitudes, thereby strengthening their character formation.

Furthermore, the integration of character values is closely aligned with contemporary educational policies that emphasize the importance of character education as a central goal of national education systems. In many educational frameworks, character development is recognized as a key component in preparing students to become responsible citizens who can contribute positively to society. This alignment underscores the relevance and urgency of integrating responsibility and empathy into elementary education as part of broader efforts to enhance the quality of human resources.

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement and increasing social complexity, the need for individuals who possess not only intellectual competence but also strong moral character becomes even more critical. Responsibility and empathy serve as foundational values that enable individuals to navigate challenges, build constructive relationships, and participate meaningfully in society. Therefore, embedding these values within early educational experiences is a strategic investment in the development of future generations.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine how responsibility and empathy character values can be effectively integrated into learning activities in elementary schools. It also seeks to identify instructional strategies, learning models, and classroom practices that support the successful implementation of character-based education. By exploring these aspects, the study is expected to contribute to the development of more holistic and effective educational practices that balance academic excellence with character formation.

B. Methods

This study utilizes a qualitative approach with the aim of obtaining a deep and comprehensive understanding of how responsibility and empathy character values are integrated into learning activities in elementary schools. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to explore meanings, experiences, and processes of character internalization that occur naturally within the educational context (Sugiyono, 2023). Through this approach, the study seeks to capture real classroom dynamics and the ways in which responsibility and empathy are practiced and developed in everyday learning.

The research design applied is a multi-site case study, conducted across four elementary schools in Jambi Province, namely SD 20/I Jembatan Mas, SD 15/I Lubuk Ruso, SD 78/I Teluk Ketapang, and SD 30/I Pulau Betung. This design was chosen because the integration of character values is highly contextual and may vary across different school environments. By involving multiple research sites, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of how responsibility and empathy values are implemented in diverse educational settings. The research was carried out over a specific period to allow sufficient time for observing classroom activities and character-based learning practices in depth.

The participants in this study include school principals, classroom teachers, and upper-grade elementary students who are actively involved in learning activities. In addition, parents are included as supporting informants to provide broader insights into students' character development beyond the school environment. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that they possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the integration of responsibility and empathy values in learning.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted with school leaders, teachers, students, and parents to gather detailed information regarding strategies used to integrate responsibility and empathy into classroom learning, as well as challenges encountered during implementation. Observations were carried out to directly examine teaching and learning processes, including teacher-student interactions, group activities, and classroom behavior, in order to identify how these character values are manifested in real situations. Documentation studies were conducted to analyze relevant documents such as lesson plans, school programs, classroom rules, and assessment records related to character education.

The data analysis process follows the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles, M., & Huberman, 2014). Initially, the collected data were organized, selected, and simplified according to the research focus. Subsequently, the data were presented in a systematic and narrative form to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn gradually through continuous verification

to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings regarding the integration of responsibility and empathy character values in elementary school learning activities.

C. Results and Discussion

Result

The findings of this study reveal that the integration of responsibility and empathy character values in elementary school learning activities is implemented through various interconnected strategies across the four research sites, namely SD 20/I Jembatan Mas, SD 15/I Lubuk Ruso, SD 78/I Teluk Ketapang, and SD 30/I Pulau Betung. Although each school demonstrates unique contextual characteristics, several common patterns of implementation were identified.

First, the integration of responsibility values is primarily reflected in students' involvement in structured learning tasks and classroom routines. Teachers consistently assign individual and group responsibilities, such as completing assignments on time, maintaining classroom cleanliness, and participating actively in group work. Observational data indicate that students are trained to be accountable for their learning tasks through daily practices, including submitting homework punctually, organizing their learning materials, and adhering to classroom rules. In addition, teachers reinforce responsibility by providing clear instructions, setting expectations, and giving feedback on students' performance. As a result, students gradually develop discipline, independence, and a sense of ownership toward their learning activities.

Second, the integration of empathy values is evident in the social interactions that occur during learning processes, particularly in collaborative and discussion-based activities. Teachers encourage students to listen to others' opinions, respect differences, and assist peers who experience difficulties in understanding the lesson. In group work settings, students demonstrate empathetic behaviors such as helping classmates, sharing learning resources, and resolving conflicts through discussion. Interview data with teachers and students reveal that empathy is not only taught explicitly through moral messages but also implicitly fostered through classroom culture and teacher modeling. This creates a learning environment that supports mutual respect and positive peer relationships.

Third, the integration of responsibility and empathy values is strengthened through teacher role modeling and instructional strategies. Teachers play a crucial role in demonstrating responsible and empathetic behavior, such as being punctual, fair in assessment, attentive to students' needs, and respectful in communication. Furthermore, the use of student-centered learning approaches, such as group discussions, cooperative learning, and contextual teaching, provides opportunities for students to practice both responsibility and empathy in real-life learning situations. Lesson plans and school documents also show that character values are embedded in learning objectives and classroom activities, although the level of explicit integration varies across schools.

Fourth, school programs and policies contribute to supporting the integration of character values. All four schools implement rules and activities that promote responsibility and empathy, such as class duties (piket), collective prayers, social

activities, and character-building programs. These programs function as a reinforcement mechanism that complements classroom learning. Documentation analysis indicates that schools have incorporated character education into their vision, mission, and program planning, although implementation consistency differs among schools.

Despite these positive findings, several challenges were identified in the integration process. Teachers reported limited time allocation as a major constraint, as academic targets often take priority over character development. In addition, differences in students' backgrounds, particularly in terms of family upbringing, influence the level of responsibility and empathy demonstrated by students. Some students require more intensive guidance and reinforcement to internalize these values. Moreover, not all teachers systematically integrate character values into lesson planning, resulting in variations in implementation quality.

Overall, the findings indicate that the integration of responsibility and empathy character values in elementary school learning activities has been implemented through a combination of classroom practices, teacher modeling, and school programs. While the integration has shown positive impacts on students' behavior and social interactions, it still requires more structured and consistent efforts to ensure optimal outcomes across different educational contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of responsibility and empathy character values in elementary school learning activities has been implemented through a combination of classroom practices, teacher modeling, and school-wide programs across the four research sites. This multidimensional implementation demonstrates that character education is not confined to a single instructional strategy but rather emerges through the interaction of pedagogical practices, social environments, and institutional support systems.

These findings strongly support the perspective that character education is most effective when it is embedded within daily learning experiences rather than treated as a separate or additional subject. Effective character education encompasses three interconnected dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which must be continuously integrated into students' everyday experiences (Ridwan, 2026). In this study, responsibility and empathy are not only introduced as conceptual knowledge but are also enacted through routine classroom practices, indicating that students are engaged in the process of moral action, which is essential for meaningful character internalization.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the integration of responsibility values is systematically facilitated through structured learning tasks, clearly defined classroom rules, and consistent expectations regarding student accountability. These practices contribute to the development of students' self-regulation, discipline, and independence. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with (Abubakar, 2024) social learning theory, which posits that individuals acquire behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social contexts. Teachers who consistently demonstrate responsible behavior such as punctuality, preparedness, and fairness serve as influential models,

reinforcing the importance of responsibility through both verbal instruction and observable actions (Ibrahim et al., 2025). In addition, the presence of structured routines, such as timely submission of assignments, participation in classroom duties, and adherence to rules, reflects the cultivation of habits that support long-term behavioral consistency (Saw et al., 2025).

This process is further reinforced by the concept of self-regulated learning which highlights the importance of students' active involvement in managing their own learning processes. The findings suggest that when responsibility is integrated into daily learning activities, students gradually develop the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own performance. This indicates that responsibility is not merely a behavioral expectation imposed by teachers but evolves into an internalized value that guides students' actions. Such internalization is critical in ensuring that responsible behavior persists beyond the classroom setting (Holisoh et al., 2025).

In terms of empathy, the study demonstrates that collaborative and interactive learning activities play a pivotal role in fostering students' social awareness and interpersonal sensitivity (Sartika et al., 2023). The use of group discussions, cooperative learning, and peer interaction creates opportunities for students to engage with diverse perspectives and develop an understanding of others' emotions and viewpoints. This finding is consistent which emphasizes that learning and development occur through social interaction and cultural mediation. Through collaborative activities, students are not only constructing knowledge but also developing social competencies, including empathy (Dalimunthe, 2023).

Moreover, the development of empathy observed in this study aligns with framework of emotional intelligence, in which empathy is identified as a core component that enables individuals to build positive relationships and navigate social complexities (Sagita & Saputri, 2024). The repeated exposure to social interactions within the classroom environment allows students to practice empathetic behaviors, such as listening actively, helping peers, and resolving conflicts constructively. Importantly, the findings suggest that empathy is not primarily developed through direct instruction but emerges through experiential learning and social engagement (Debora Lala & Agus Pramodjati, 2020). This highlights the importance of creating a classroom climate that supports open communication, mutual respect, and emotional safety.

Another significant finding of this study is the central role of teacher modeling in the integration of both responsibility and empathy values. Teachers function not only as facilitators of academic content but also as moral agents whose behaviors and attitudes influence students' character development. This finding is the students are more likely to internalize values when they observe consistent, authentic, and meaningful behaviors from authority figures. In this study, teachers who demonstrate fairness, patience, care, and discipline contribute to shaping a classroom culture where responsibility and empathy are valued and practiced. The process of value internalization observed here reflects experiential learning, where students learn not only from instruction but also from observation and participation.

In addition, the integration of responsibility and empathy through student-centered learning approaches further strengthens the process of character formation. Approaches such as cooperative learning, contextual teaching, and problem-based learning provide students with meaningful opportunities to engage actively in the learning process. Knowledge and values are constructed through active interaction with the environment. The findings of this study support this view, as students who are actively involved in collaborative and contextual learning experiences demonstrate higher levels of responsibility and empathy. This suggests that character education is more effective when students are positioned as active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

Beyond classroom practices, the role of school programs and institutional support is also evident in reinforcing character education. The presence of structured programs, such as class duties, social activities, and character-building initiatives, reflects the implementation of a whole-school approach to character education. This approach is consistent with the framework proposed that effective character education requires alignment between curriculum, school culture, and community involvement. The integration of character values into school vision, mission, and policies further indicates a commitment to sustaining character education as a core component of the educational process. However, the findings also reveal that the level of implementation varies across schools, suggesting that institutional commitment must be accompanied by consistent practice to achieve optimal results.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified that limit the effectiveness of character integration. One of the primary challenges is the limited instructional time available for character-focused activities, as teachers are often required to prioritize academic achievement and curriculum targets. This finding is consistent with research that highlights the tension between academic demands and character education in school settings. As a result, character values are sometimes integrated implicitly rather than explicitly, which may reduce their impact on students' behavior.

In addition, differences in students' family backgrounds present another significant challenge. The findings indicate that students who receive consistent reinforcement of responsibility and empathy values at home tend to demonstrate stronger character development compared to those who do not. This observation aligns with ecological systems theory, which explains that child development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems, including family, school, and community. The lack of alignment between these systems may hinder the effectiveness of character education, highlighting the importance of involving parents and families in the character development process.

Another critical issue identified in this study is the inconsistency in integrating character values into lesson planning. While some teachers explicitly incorporate responsibility and empathy into their instructional design, others rely on incidental or implicit integration. This inconsistency suggests a gap in teachers' understanding or preparedness in implementing character-based learning. Continuous professional development is essential in enhancing teachers' instructional competence, including their ability to integrate character education effectively. Therefore, providing clear guidelines, training,

and support for teachers is crucial in ensuring more systematic and consistent implementation.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the notion that the integration of responsibility and empathy in elementary education requires a holistic, sustained, and context-sensitive approach. The interaction between classroom practices, teacher behavior, and institutional support creates a dynamic environment that facilitates character development. However, achieving optimal outcomes requires stronger alignment between curriculum design, instructional practices, and external factors such as family involvement and educational policy. By addressing these challenges and strengthening existing practices, schools can enhance their role in developing students who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and empathetic individuals.

D. Conclusions

This study concludes that the integration of responsibility and empathy character values in elementary school learning activities is both essential and feasible when implemented through a holistic and systematic approach. The findings demonstrate that character education is most effective when embedded within daily classroom practices, supported by teacher modeling, and reinforced through school-wide programs. Responsibility is cultivated through structured tasks, clear expectations, and consistent routines that encourage students to develop discipline, independence, and accountability. Meanwhile, empathy is fostered through collaborative learning, social interaction, and a supportive classroom climate that promotes respect, understanding, and cooperation among students.

The study also highlights the crucial role of teachers as both facilitators and role models in shaping students' character. Their behaviors, attitudes, and instructional strategies significantly influence how responsibility and empathy are understood and internalized by students. In addition, student-centered learning approaches such as cooperative learning and contextual teaching provide meaningful opportunities for students to actively practice these values in real-life situations, thereby strengthening the process of character internalization.

However, the integration of character values is not without challenges. Limited instructional time, variations in students' family backgrounds, and inconsistencies in lesson planning hinder the optimal implementation of responsibility and empathy in classroom learning. These challenges indicate the need for stronger alignment between curriculum design, teaching practices, and external support systems, including family involvement.

In conclusion, integrating responsibility and empathy into elementary education requires continuous, intentional, and collaborative efforts among teachers, schools, and families. By strengthening these efforts, schools can create learning environments that not only promote academic achievement but also foster the development of socially responsible,

empathetic, and morally grounded individuals who are well-prepared to face the complexities of modern society.

E. Acknowledgement

Author should present list of acknowledged gement at the end. Any financial or nonfinancial support for the study should be acknowledged.

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