Evaluating Character Education Implementation in Elementary Schools : A Kirkpatrick Model Perspective

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the implementation of character education at SDN 015 Balikpapan Selatan using the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model, which comprises four levels: reaction, learning, behavior, and result. The research was motivated by the need to reinforce character values after the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a decline in students' positive behaviors due to prolonged online learning. A mixed-method approach with an explanatory sequential design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires from 89 students (grades II-VI), while qualitative data were obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data analysis employed a simple quantitative descriptive approach using Microsoft Excel to calculate percentage scores and categorize them into five levels (very high, high, moderate, low, and very low) based on the Kirkpatrick evaluation model. Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents were narratively integrated to support and enrich the findings. The findings revealed that the reaction stage achieved an average score of 90.87%, the learning stage 88.24%, and the behavior stage 88.07%, all within the very high category. At the result stage, character education was found to have a positive long-term impact on students' learning motivation, social behaviors, and engagement both at school and at home. The program successfully fostered student discipline, independence, empathy, and moral conduct. However, challenges remain in achieving consistent internalization of character values, particularly outside the school environment. Overall, the study concludes that character education at SDN 015 Balikpapan has been effectively implemented and significantly contributes to shaping students' character, although ongoing improvement is needed through more collaborative strategies involving both schools and parents.

Introduction

In the 21st century, the development of strong moral character is increasingly recognized as essential for personal, social, and national progress. Global education frameworks emphasize that academic excellence alone is insufficient to prepare students for the ethical and civic challenges of a rapidly changing world. As (Arthur, 2014) argues, the success of a nation lies not only in the intellectual capability of its people, but also in their moral integrity. This is especially relevant in the context of growing social complexity, technological disruption, and the widespread influence of digital media. The formation of character—once viewed as a family or community responsibility—has now become an integral mandate of formal education systems.

Character education is a deliberate and systematic effort to cultivate moral values such as honesty, empathy, discipline, and responsibility. Lickona emphasizes that effective character formation involves moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 2004). In Indonesia, this vision is reflected in the *Merdeka Curriculum* introduced in 2022, which places character education at the core of learning goals (Kemendikbud, 2022) This curricular reform aligns with international trends that view schools not only as academic institutions but as ethical communities. Despite these policy advances, schools face persistent challenges in ensuring the consistent internalization of character values, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past decade, research has documented rising trends in moral decline among students—evidenced by increased bullying, dishonesty, and disengagement (Mashlihuddin, 2018); (Setiawan et al., 2019). The pandemic exacerbated this problem by disrupting face-to-face learning, limiting opportunities for direct moral guidance, and increasing student dependence on unsupervised digital environments (Dwikurnaningsih et al., 2022). As schools returned to in-person learning, they were met with a new challenge: re-establishing behavioural norms and re-instilling values that had eroded during the long period of remote learning.

To address this, educational researchers have sought to evaluate the effectiveness of character education programs. However, much of the existing literature has focused on program inputs or short-term activities. The dominant approach has been the use of the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model to evaluate program structure and process (Suryadi & Wardani, 2024); (Heriyanto et al., 2024). While useful for formative analysis, CIPP often lacks the depth to assess actual character transformation in learners. Very few studies have applied the Kirkpatrick four-level evaluation model—which includes reaction, learning, behaviour, and result—to character education in primary school settings. This model has proven effective in evaluating training programs comprehensively (Kirkpatrick, 1998); (Alsalamah & Callinan, 2021), but its use in basic education, especially in moral and character development, remains limited.

This study addresses that gap. The scientific novelty of this research lies in its application of Kirkpatrick's model to evaluate a school-based character education program in an Indonesian primary school. By doing so, it contributes to both the methodology of educational evaluation and the practice of character education. Specifically, this study offers an evidence-based model to measure not only students' perceptions and understanding, but also behavioural transformation and long-term internalization of values—areas that are often difficult to assess systematically.

The research investigates the implementation of character education at SDN 015 Balikpapan Selatan, a school recognized for its commitment to values-based learning. The school integrates character development across academic and extracurricular domains, supported by school-wide cultural practices. Despite these efforts, post-pandemic inconsistencies in student behaviour and challenges in sustaining values outside the classroom indicate a need for systematic evaluation.

At SDN 015 Balikpapan, the implementation of character education has not yet reached its optimal impact. Although students are introduced to moral values in the classroom, their daily behavior still shows inconsistency in applying those values, especially in discipline, honesty, and emotional control. The long period of online learning during the pandemic has also affected students' habits and reduced opportunities for direct moral guidance, while collaboration between school and parents in reinforcing character at home

has not always been effective. These conditions indicate a gap between understanding and practice, making it important to further research and evaluate the effectiveness of character education in this context. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to assess the effectiveness of the character education program at SDN 015 Balikpapan through the lens of the Kirkpatrick model. The study aims to measure student reactions, learning outcomes, behavioural application, and long-term value internalization, while identifying both the successes and challenges of implementation. By doing so, it contributes to the scholarly discourse on character education and provides practical insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers seeking to strengthen values-based learning in primary education.

Research Method

This study employed an evaluative research design using the Kirkpatrick evaluation model to assess the implementation of character education at SDN 015 Balikpapan. The model comprises four sequential levels—reaction, learning, behaviour, and results—which collectively provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for evaluating educational programs (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). This research followed a formative approach, aiming to assess an ongoing program in order to support continuous improvement through both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

A mixed-method approach was applied with a sequential design in which quantitative data were collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative data to provide deeper interpretation. Quantitative data were collected to measure student responses at the reaction, learning, and behaviour levels, while qualitative data were used to enrich findings and explore the long-term outcomes at the result level. This approach was selected to provide both breadth and depth in evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

The study was conducted at SDN 015 Balikpapan from July to October 2024. Participants included students from grades II through VI, along with key stakeholders such as the principal, teachers, and parents involved in the character education program. Primary data were collected through questionnaires, structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Secondary data consisted of school records, activity reports, and supporting documentation related to character education implementation.

Quantitative data were gathered using Likert-scale questionnaires and structured observation checklists. These instruments were distributed to students, teachers, and parents to assess perceptions across the first three levels of the Kirkpatrick model. Consistent with (Sugiyono, 2013), this method facilitated reliable measurement of attitudes and experiences in a school-based setting. Observations were conducted during both classroom and extracurricular activities using rubrics that captured student engagement, instructional media, and value expression.

Qualitative data were obtained primarily to evaluate the result level of the model. Structured interviews were conducted with school leadership, teachers, students, and parents to assess the long-term influence of the program. Participant observation allowed the researcher to observe how values were expressed during school routines, such as flag ceremonies and project-based activities. In addition, document analysis was used to examine lesson plans, behaviour logs, school profiles, and evaluation reports, in accordance with (Sugiyono, 2013) approach to triangulation.

The research instruments included validated questionnaires, interview guides, observation forms, and document analysis protocols. Instrument validity was tested through expert judgment by two academic supervisors. The triangulation technique used in this study

involved both triangulation of techniques (questionnaires, interviews, observation, documentation) and sources (students, teachers, principal, parents), which ensured credibility and accuracy of the findings (Sugiyono, 2013).

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using Microsoft Excel. Likert-scale responses were converted into percentage scores and categorized into five levels: very low (0–19%), low (20–39%), moderate (40–59%), high (60–79%), and very high (80–100%) (Sugiyono, 2013). This classification facilitated interpretation of trends across each level of the Kirkpatrick model.

Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, as cited in (Sugiyono, 2013) This included processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Emerging themes were grouped based on consistency and frequency, offering deeper insights into the impact and sustainability of character education outcomes.

Specifically, success at each level was determined using percentage categories for quantitative data and narrative validation for qualitative findings. At the reaction level, responses reaching 60–79% were categorized as *high* and 80–100% as *very high*, which indicated that students perceived the character education program as relevant, beneficial, and engaging. Teacher and principal confirmations of student enthusiasm were also included as supporting evidence. At the learning level, students were considered successful if their understanding of values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy, and cooperation reached the *high* or *very high* category ($\geq 60\%$). Their ability to explain and discuss these values, along with observable skill acquisition, was further validated through teacher and principal assessments. At the behaviour level, effectiveness was defined by students consistently applying the character values in daily conduct and showing a reduction in negative behaviours, with teacher observations and school discipline records serving as supporting evidence. Finally, at the result level, success was indicated by students' intrinsic motivation to practice values naturally, improvement in academic performance, and the creation of a more positive school climate. These outcomes were reinforced by school-specific benchmarks, such as report card assessments of character, graduation requirements that included character evaluation, and strong community trust reflected in the high demand for student enrolment.

Results and Discussion

Reaction Stage

The reaction stage measured students' initial perceptions and satisfaction regarding the character education program. Table 1 shows that all indicators were rated in the "very high" category, with an average score of 90.87%. The highest-scoring indicator was the usefulness of character education in students' daily lives (94.38%), while the lowest was the ease of understanding the material (84.49%).

Table 1. Reaction Stage Evaluation (N=89)

Indicator	Score (%)
Ease of understanding character material	84.49
Relevance of material to daily life	88.31
Usefulness of character values	94.38
Enjoyment and enthusiasm for participation	94.16
Active involvement in character-related activities	89.44
Satisfaction with facilities	91.69

Satisfaction with teaching methods	91.69
Satisfaction with media used	92.81
Average	90.87

Qualitative data supported these findings. Teachers reported that students were consistently enthusiastic and active in character-related activities, particularly when learning was delivered through stories, games, or multimedia. For example, a fourth-grade teacher stated: *"The character education method suits the students' development well. They are enthusiastic, actively involved, and the material is very relevant to their daily experiences."* Observations confirmed high levels of engagement during lessons, with students eagerly participating in discussions and role-play exercises related to values like cooperation, empathy, and perseverance.

Learning Stage

This stage assessed students' cognitive understanding of character values and their ability to interpret and reflect upon them. Table 2 summarizes the findings, with a high overall score of 88.24%. Students demonstrated strong conceptual knowledge, although the lowest score (85.17%) indicated some challenges in applying values in real-life scenarios.

Table 2. Learning Stage Evaluation (N=89)

Indicator	Score (%)
Understanding core character values	91.01
Explaining the importance of moral values	87.87
Applying character values in real-life scenarios	85.17
Identifying values in challenging situations	88.31
Practicing responsibility at school	89.21
Applying values in daily life	87.87
Average	88.24

Teachers confirmed that students were familiar with values such as honesty, respect, discipline, and care, which were consistently embedded in class content and extracurricular activities. They described how values were delivered through textbooks and reinforced during school programs such as Scouting, environmental action, and cultural dance. Observations showed students responding positively to in-class moral discussions and participating actively in group projects.

Furthermore, supporting documents, including lesson plans and student workbooks, demonstrated structured value integration across learning domains. Teachers indicated that character development was included not only in thematic lessons but also in student-led reflection during project-based learning, which improved their moral reasoning skills.

Behaviour Stage

At the behaviour stage, students were evaluated on the degree to which they demonstrated character values in everyday actions. Table 3 reveals an overall average of 88.07%, with the highest indicator being respect for differing opinions (91.24%) and the lowest being emotional regulation (84.04%).

Table 3. Behaviour Stage Evaluation (N=89)

Indicator	Score (%)
Practicing moral values in daily life	85.84

Admitting mistakes honestly	88.31
Taking responsibility in tasks	87.87
Obeying school rules and routines	89.66
Active group participation	88.09
Offering help to others	88.09
Resolving conflict peacefully	89.44
Respecting differing opinions	91.24
Managing emotions	84.04
Overall personal growth	89.44
Perception of reduced negative behaviour	86.74
Average	88.07

Teachers reported observable changes in students' behaviour, including increased cooperation, punctuality, responsibility, and reduced incidents of conflict. Classroom observations showed students greeting teachers politely, maintaining cleanliness, and resolving disputes independently. These behavioural improvements were supported by school documentation, including conduct logs and semester report cards, which recorded improvements in students' attitudes and conduct.

Interviews with the head teacher and classroom instructors revealed that early post-pandemic challenges, such as tardiness and classroom conflict, had significantly diminished after two years of consistent character education.

Result Stage

This final stage assessed the long-term impact of character education on students' values and behaviour inside and outside school. Table 4 summarizes student self-reports (N=20), showing that all character indicators exceeded 75%, with environmental concern scoring highest (97.5%) and honesty lowest (77.5%).

Table 4. Result Stage Evaluation (N=20)

Character Value	Score (%)
Religious devotion	93.75
Integrity	90.00
Resilience	85.00
Independence	95.00
Creativity	88.75
Environmental concern	97.50
Social empathy	85.00
Honesty	77.50
Discipline	81.25

Interviews with students revealed that they were becoming more responsible, self-disciplined, and empathetic. Students shared how they had become more helpful at home, more punctual, and more focused in schoolwork. A sixth-grade student stated: *"I feel motivated to apply character values without being supervised because I realize their importance in becoming a better person."* Observations confirmed these claims, with students independently performing tasks such as preparing for lessons, resolving minor conflicts, and showing mutual respect.

Parents also confirmed significant positive changes in their children's behaviour at home, including better time management, increased responsibility, and improved manners.

The school's documentation—including student character assessments and incident reports—supported the claim of reduced disciplinary issues and a more harmonious school environment.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of character education at SDN 015 Balikpapan has been highly effective across all four levels of the Kirkpatrick evaluation model. The quantitative data showed high satisfaction and outcomes at each level—reaction (90.87%), learning (88.24%), and behaviour (88.07%)—supported by qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documentation. These findings indicate that character education at this school has generated meaningful improvements in students' understanding, behaviour, and overall disposition both in school and at home.

At the reaction level, students showed strong enthusiasm and engagement, indicating that the methods, materials, and media used by teachers were relevant and appealing. Teachers' statements and classroom observations confirmed that learners were highly motivated and involved, especially when character values were delivered through engaging formats such as stories, group discussions, and educational games. This aligns with findings from (Johnson et al., 2022) and (Dwikurnaningsih et al., 2022), who highlight that student engagement and early positive perception are critical to the success of character education programs. The active response from both students and teachers suggests that the program created a conducive emotional foundation for deeper value internalization.

At the learning level, students demonstrated a strong understanding of core character values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility. However, the slightly lower score compared to the reaction level suggests some students still struggled to articulate real-life applications of those values. This is consistent with (Ramadhan et al., 2022) who found similar declines in student performance across sequential stages of program implementation. The findings also reinforce (Azmy & Setiarini, 2023) and (Quinton et al., 2022) conclusion that the Kirkpatrick model is effective in assessing knowledge gains but requires complementary strategies to support value reflection and application. Observations and teacher interviews revealed that contextual learning—through thematic instruction and value-based extracurriculars—helped bridge theory and practice, though reflection-based learning could be further strengthened. (Fuentes & Sánchez-Pérez, 2024) emphasize the importance of fostering moral intent and ethical thinking in character learning—not just factual knowledge.

At the behaviour level, the study found that students had begun applying character values in daily school activities. Improved discipline, cooperation, and empathy were evident in teacher reports, behavioural records, and observation notes. Although self-regulation (e.g., emotional control) scored slightly lower, overall behavioural transformation was significant. These results are in line with (Heriyanto et al., 2024), (Murcahyanto & Mohzana, 2023), and (Zurqoni et al., 2018), who confirm that sustained and integrated character programs—supported by role modeling and structured activities—can effectively change student behaviour. Parents also observed behavioural improvements at home, highlighting the value of school-home collaboration. This echoes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) ecological theory and (Darling & Steinberg, 1993) views on parenting, which underscore the importance of consistent value reinforcement across school and family settings.

At the result level, qualitative findings revealed that character education has had a positive long-term impact. Students reported greater self-discipline, responsibility, initiative, and social awareness, with parents, teachers, and the principal validating these claims through observation and documentation. These outcomes support (Ferrara, 2019) findings that character education can reduce negative behaviour and enhance students' academic focus and

interpersonal relationships. They also align with (Velez, 2023), who emphasized that a structured character program can improve school climate and student motivation. The success of SDN 015 Balikpapan is rooted in its integrated approach, combining daily routines, extracurriculars, teacher modeling, and strategic planning—confirming the insights of (Arthur, 2014), (Puccino, 2019), and (Tuhuteru et al., 2023), who argue that character development is most effective when embedded within the school culture and supported by all stakeholders.

The use of the Kirkpatrick model itself proved to be a valuable evaluation framework, as also noted by (Alsalamah & Callinan, 2021) and (Chan et al., 2022). It enabled a thorough and sequential assessment from perception to behavioural impact, and the model's structure revealed specific areas where program implementation could be improved—particularly in ensuring consistent behavioural reinforcement and addressing gaps in moral application beyond the classroom. These findings affirm (Orchard & Reiss, 2024), who stress the relevance of integrating value-based evaluation models to address contemporary moral education issues.

Moreover, the school's success in fostering values like environmental care, tolerance, and cooperation reflects the importance of aligning character education with local and national culture, as emphasized by (Tohri et al., 2022) and (Wage INY et al., 2020). SDN 015 Balikpapan's programs—including Adiwiyata, Scouts, and cultural initiatives—helped internalize values through culturally meaningful practices. This approach contrasts with schools that apply character education without contextual relevance, which often results in superficial understanding and limited behavioural change.

While results are promising, the study could further emphasize the theoretical implications of the findings, including contributions to character education theory. The gradual decline in student scores from reaction to behaviour stages indicates a need for more reflective and student-centered instructional strategies. Some students also expressed difficulty remaining focused during sessions, suggesting the need for improved classroom management and more interactive delivery methods. These issues were reflected in interviews and observational data, confirming (Sugiyono, 2013) emphasis on triangulated data analysis for accurate educational evaluation.

In sum, the implementation of character education at SDN 015 Balikpapan has been successful in creating a positive learning environment, improving student understanding, and supporting behavioural transformation. However, the school must continue to refine its methods, strengthen home–school partnerships, and ensure ongoing professional development for teachers. The application of the Kirkpatrick model not only proved effective in evaluating the program but also offered practical insights for sustainable character development practices in primary education. At the broader level, these findings provide valuable evidence to inform national character education policies by demonstrating how systematic evaluation can identify program strengths and gaps, guide resource allocation, and promote accountability. The study highlights the need for integrating clear evaluation frameworks into policy design, ensuring that character education initiatives across schools are not only implemented but also continuously monitored for effectiveness and long-term impact.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the implementation of character education at SDN 015 Balikpapan using Kirkpatrick's four-level evaluation model. The results confirm that the character

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education program has been carried out effectively and has brought meaningful impact to students across all dimensions. At the reaction level, both students and teachers expressed highly positive responses, indicating that the program was well-accepted, engaging, and perceived as relevant. Such enthusiasm formed a strong foundation for the subsequent stages of learning and behavioural change.

The learning level revealed that students demonstrated a very high understanding of character values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and cooperation. These values were successfully integrated into both academic subjects and extracurricular activities, suggesting that the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers were effective. The behaviour level showed that students not only understood but also began applying these values in their daily school lives. Although the application was not yet uniform across all students, there was a visible improvement in positive behaviour, especially in the second year after post-pandemic classroom learning resumed. Teachers noted that students were becoming more disciplined, cooperative, and respectful in their interactions.

At the result level, the program's long-term influence was evident in both school and home settings. Teachers and parents reported improved student attitudes, indicating that the values taught in school were internalized and carried into the home environment. The findings affirm that when implemented systematically, character education can bring sustained behavioural and attitudinal shifts in students. However, the study also identified several areas that require further attention, such as consistency in application outside school and the need for stronger reinforcement of certain values, such as honesty. These insights suggest that while the program has achieved significant milestones, ongoing development is essential to ensure its long-term effectiveness and relevance.

Recommendation

1. **Schools**: Integrate character education into all subjects and extracurricular activities, while building structured collaboration with parents to ensure consistency between school and home.
2. **Teachers**: Apply creative and interactive teaching methods that engage students, and serve as consistent role models of the values being taught.
3. **Parents**: Act as positive role models in daily life and actively support character education at home through reinforcement of school initiatives.
4. **Researchers**: Conduct longitudinal studies to capture the long-term effects of character education, and employ more in-depth approaches to provide richer insights into its effectiveness and sustainability.

Acknowledgment

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