



Internalization of character education in social studies learning at junior high school

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Abstract

To support effective learning, character-based learning support is needed. This study aims to analyze the internalization of character education in social studies learning in three schools on the suburban of Surabaya. A qualitative method with a case study approach was used for this study. Principals, social studies teachers, students, and parents were involved as informants. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with informants, observations in the school environment, and analysis of documents owned by teachers and schools. The results of this study found that the process of internalizing character education was designed by teachers in the learning planning in the teaching module, the implementation of learning in the classroom, and the evaluation carried out after learning. Some social studies teachers were able to implement the process of internalizing education in the learning planning in the teaching module, but there were also teachers who were unable to integrate it into the learning planning in their teaching module. Meanwhile, in terms of implementation, some teachers failed to integrate character education into the learning process, despite having written it in the teaching module. During formative evaluation, teachers were able to develop formative questions that integrated character education. Furthermore, there was collaboration with parents, although not always optimal. The main findings indicate that students who experience learning loss in elementary school will carry it into junior high school, thereby reducing the quality of their character. This research recommends strengthening the capacity of social studies teachers to internalize character education in their learning. Furthermore, schools must receive support from parents and the surrounding community.

Keywords: character education; social studies; suburban schools; internalization.

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INTRODUCTION

To develop and produce future students with pedagogical and moral qualities, the internalization of character education is necessary in learning (Arifin, 2024). Not all student character issues are positive, as some schools still experience problems in their implementation.

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This problem is not limited to schools with large student populations. Even small schools with small student populations and those located in the suburbs experience problems with character internalization. This problem also occurs in Surabaya, where these schools are further exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure. Teacher capacity is also a constraint due to the lack of access to technology to support learning. Another issue is the condition of students coming from poor families, resulting in a lack of parental support in learning (Neliwati et. al., 2023).

These conditions are certainly different from those of public or private schools in the city center, but they are considered popular by the community. Popular schools have adequate facilities, such as laboratories (science, social studies, computer science, and language). In addition to these facilities, popular schools also have a sufficient number of teachers with sufficient capacity. The differences in conditions between popular schools and schools in the suburbs certainly result in differences in learning implementation. Factors occurring in these suburban schools play a significant role in hindering learning outcomes and the integration of character education (Agustina & Rahaju, 2021). With the difficulty of meeting the basic needs of the learning process, suburban schools will also struggle if they have to integrate character education into their teaching (Musthafa, 2013).

The character of junior high school students in schools on the suburban of Surabaya also poses a challenge. According to teachers, some students still exhibit low character, primarily irresponsibility, a lack of discipline, and individualistic attitudes (Aswidar & Saragih, 2022). This low character is fundamentally influenced by the lack of role models in their home environment. Students live in slums and impoverished neighborhoods. Their lives are collective, with each other, resulting in no social boundaries between families. Teachers must be able to recognize this reality to integrate it into social studies learning at school (Pertiwi, 2019).

According to experts (Judrah et. al., 2024), character education is one way to build a better student personality. Previous studies related to the integration of character education have also been carried out by researchers in Indonesia and abroad. For example, research conducted by Pratiti (2019) showed that the findings of her research indicate that character education, if integrated into learning in schools, can support the development of social attitudes, empathy for the surrounding environment, and social concern. The process of internalizing character education in research conducted by Lickona (1996) showed that it can support the strengthening of social character in students who internalized it. Both studies show that internalizing character education in learning is important and primary to be implemented in schools. The urgency is to strengthen the positive character of students who are internalized by students and then carried until they graduate from school.

In shaping students' character in schools, teachers play a crucial role in internalizing character education in their learning. Social studies teachers not only transfer knowledge to students in class, but also ensure that character education is internalized. Teachers play a dual role in this: as facilitators in learning and as role models for their students. Teachers must be

creative in how knowledge can be effectively transferred and character education integrated into all students. Therefore, enjoyable and contextual learning, which can be derived from positive examples from teachers and students, can be optimally integrated. Research by Marhayani (2017) suggests that if teachers act as facilitators and role models are implemented optimally, students' character will improve and be internalized sustainably.

However, character education is not the only way to internalize character education in students. Students who spend only a quarter of their time at school also require support from others, namely parents and the surrounding community. According to Palkih & Wijaya (2023), students' lives are more often spent interacting with their parents and the surrounding community, including extracurricular activities that interest them. Parents and the community should not be neglected but should be deeply involved. Parental involvement is crucial because the earliest education is carried out by a mother, and students spend most of their time with their parents, so socialization from parents is the most common. Parental and community involvement cannot stand alone but must be comprehensive with character education policies in schools and classroom learning (Khotimah & Setyawan, 2024). This kind of collaboration in internalizing character education demonstrates that character matters are not just a school matter but a shared responsibility of parents and the community.

Character education is increasingly considered important by schools in Indonesia, including those in the suburbs of Surabaya. These schools have strived to internalize character education in classroom learning, including social studies. Learning that internalizes character education is one answer to the challenge of strengthening student character in schools. Schools have undertaken numerous initiatives to strengthen character education. Initial observations indicate that some schools have implemented a queuing culture upon entering the school or during other activities. This queuing culture is considered important because it will positively impact student character development in schools, despite various challenges in its implementation (Waruwu, 2024).

Each school faces its own obstacles and challenges in implementing character education. Obstacles can come from the teachers themselves, as some teachers lack the enthusiasm to innovate and internalize character education in their classrooms. This low enthusiasm stems from teachers' inability to internalize character education in their lessons. This can be attributed to their inability to develop lesson plans that integrate character education or their inability to implement it in the classroom. Furthermore, some teachers are also unable to integrate character education into the assessments they develop. These obstacles and challenges are also common in Surabaya, particularly in three schools located on the suburban of Surabaya that lack a favorable public image.

The three schools are Junior High School A in Wonokromo District, Junior High School B in Gayungan District, and Junior High School C in Lakrasantri District. These three schools face different challenges and obstacles. For example, Junior High School A serves students who come from poor families, with parents mostly working in the informal sector and having

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an uncertain income. With these challenges, the character issues that become problematic for students are related to low student discipline. School records still show that many students arrive late to school, with daily records showing that around 5 percent of students arrive late.

Not much different from the challenges faced by SMP A, SMP B also faces a similar challenge, namely the low level of student discipline. SMP B still has students who arrive late, and even some students still like to play truant or leave school early. Students who play truant have various reasons, such as boredom in class or not wanting to do schoolwork. Besides discipline, this indicates that SMP B students seem to have a low work ethic. SMP B's social studies teacher said that with this condition, students cannot compete with students from other schools, as they would lose if they had to compete for the acceptance of new students at the equivalent high school level. This concern is even stronger because the school has not recorded academic or non-academic achievements in various competitions for the past four years.

Junior High School C faces the same challenges as Junior High School A and Junior High School B. However, because Junior High School C is managed by an Islamic boarding school (Pesantren), discipline issues are less significant. The main challenge at Junior High School C is related to the lack of creativity and enthusiasm for work among its students. Creativity, which can be seen in the ability to create or develop something new, is under-recognized because students tend to simply complete assignments according to the teacher's or ustadz's instructions. Previously, preliminary research was conducted through a survey involving 20 teachers from each school. The survey asked participants to identify the student character traits that most often cause problems. Here are the results:

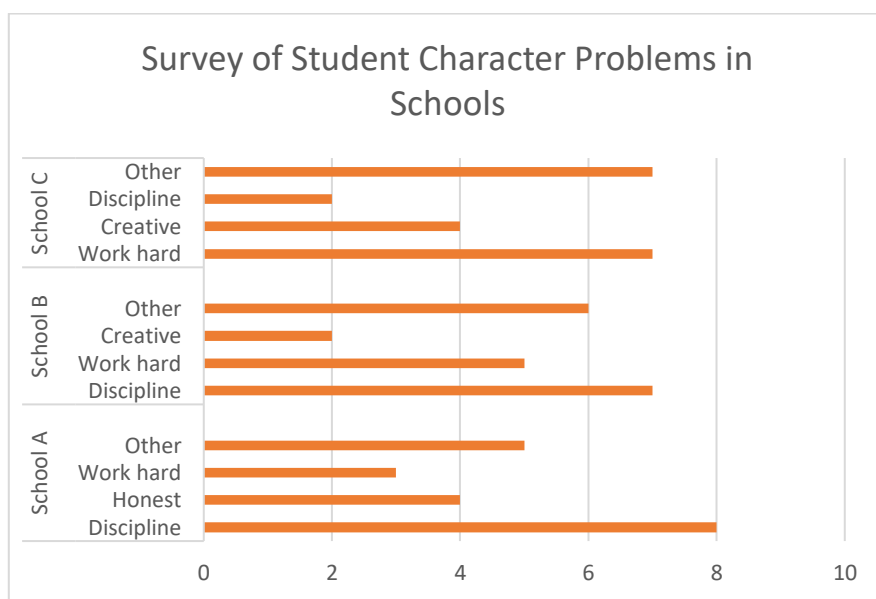


Figure 1. Student character problems in each school

Due to these challenges, it is important to study how students in schools in the suburbs of Surabaya are able to receive and implement character education in depth. Therefore, this study

was conducted to further examine how character education can be better implemented in social studies learning in junior high schools in the region. Through this research, it is hoped that appropriate strategies and suggestions can be identified to improve the quality of character education in social studies learning. Thus, in addition to gaining academic knowledge, students can also develop morally and become responsible and ethical citizens.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. This approach was chosen because it aimed to explain and describe the phenomenon of internalization of character education in three schools on the suburban of Surabaya, which were studied in depth. A case study approach can minimize errors, biases, and inaccuracies that may arise from researcher subjectivity. To obtain maximum results, in-depth interviews were conducted with informants at the three research locations. This study focused on analyzing the views and perceptions of principals, social studies teachers, students, and parents regarding the internalization of character education in schools.

The research was conducted in three locations: Junior High School A in Wonokromo District, Junior High School B in Gayungan District, and Junior High School C in Lakrasantri District. These three schools were chosen because they have relatively low accreditation scores of B or C, as determined by the National Accreditation Board for Elementary and Secondary Education (BANPDM). The uniqueness of these three schools is that they are located on the suburban of Surabaya and do not receive a favorable reputation from the community. All three schools face the same challenge, namely, the internalization of character education in learning. Junior High Schools A and B are private educational institutions that provide education using the national curriculum. Meanwhile, Junior High School C is a private Islamic boarding school-based educational institution that offers strengthening religious education.

The data collection techniques used were observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of related documents at the school. The research was conducted from March to July 2024. The initial observations were conducted under the guidance of the principals of each school. Observations were conducted at one grade level; thus, grade VIII was chosen. Observations were structured using a pre-designed observation instrument. After conducting the observations, the researchers distributed questionnaires to teachers to identify student character weaknesses in each school. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with social studies teachers to understand the social studies learning process for internalizing character education in students. Interviews were also conducted with several students and parents to determine their basic understanding of character education.

The research subjects were principals, social studies teachers, students, and parents from the three schools selected as research locations. The composition of the research subjects was as follows:

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Table 1. List of research subjects

No.	School Name	Headmaster	Teacher's	Parent's	Student's
1.	SMP A	1 (Mr. SA)	1 (Mrs. S)	1 (Mrs. TT)	1 (MVA)
2.	SMP B	1 (Mrs. BA)	1 (Mrs. T)	1 (Mr. SG)	1 (NKA)
3.	SMP C	1 (Mr. AR)	1 (Mrs. A)	1 (Mrs. W)	1 (MKA)

Interviews were recorded using a mobile phone, then transcribed into field notes. These field notes were then categorized and compiled into a research report. The data analysis technique used was based on the method developed by Miles et. al. (2020). In this analysis, data were first reduced, presented, verified, and summarized. During the reduction, the researcher created a matrix that categorized the findings in the qualitative data. In the simplest example, the researcher compared the principal's perspective on school policies for internalizing character education in students with the teacher's perspective on the implementation of social studies learning to internalize character education. They also sought common ground between the principals' and teachers' perspectives, along with those of parents and students, regarding the internalization of character education in learning. Each domain or group was then presented, and its interrelationships were identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning Crisis in Suburban Junior High Schools in Surabaya City

Challenges in the Post-Pandemic Learning Crisis

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought challenges to education, particularly in three schools on the suburban of Surabaya. Although these schools have implemented offline learning, many students in the 2024 academic year experienced learning loss during their elementary school years. Failure to achieve learning outcomes during elementary school results in students' abilities being reduced in junior high school. Furthermore, the character traits that should have been developed in elementary school are being lost due to the lack of strict supervision from the school. Students must face the reality that they lack strong character. Online learning is not only problematic during elementary school, but also continues into junior high school. This finding aligns with research by Iskandar et al. (2023), which states that students who experience learning difficulties at school due to a loss of knowledge and character will also be affected in subsequent classes or levels.

The learning loss experienced by junior high school students is not limited to a single level during online learning, specifically during elementary school. It also has consequences for students' academic development up to the next level, or junior high school. Research by Iskandar et al. (2023) found that the loss of knowledge during online learning during elementary school resulted in a significant decline in academic ability and character. This is evident in the difficulty many junior high school students still have with writing quickly, reading long texts, summarizing, and calculating complex numbers. Many students are lagging behind in their basic cognitive abilities, lacking critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Junior high school students should already have these skills. This gap requires swift intervention through school policies, strong teacher skills, and parental support.

Addressing this post-pandemic learning crisis requires more than simply shifting to face-to-face learning. Principals and teachers must be able to develop student-centered and contextual learning plans in accordance with the independent curriculum. These steps must be implemented systematically, structured, and comprehensively at each school. Once the learning crisis has been resolved, schools can integrate character education into their teaching.

Crisis in Social Studies Learning

The post-pandemic learning crisis is also accompanied by a social studies learning crisis in the three schools at the research location. In the three schools, none of the teachers have a social studies education background, only those from the same group, such as history and geography. There are even teachers with a background in arts and culture education. In addition to the problem of the diverse educational backgrounds of social studies teachers, some social studies teachers are elderly and unable to utilize technology for learning media. As experienced by Mrs. S (51), she teaches more through lectures and group discussions than by utilizing technology. This is because Mrs. S finds it difficult to operate a computer. Teaching efforts with lectures and group discussions are the lowest effort to address students' learning gaps.

According to Mrs. T (48), she also rarely or never uses technology-based learning media, due to limited facilities and infrastructure. Learning should now be designed to be more enjoyable, based on critical thinking and problem-solving with the help of technology. Internalization of character education to students can be done by utilizing technology, such as by delivering videos to support the strengthening of discipline, responsibility, and honesty. Projectors and laptops must be shared with other classes because the number available is very limited.

This is what exacerbates the social studies learning crisis in schools on the suburban of Surabaya. Starting with a limited number of teachers, teachers lacking the same educational background as those being taught, and low technology utilization by teachers. These conditions contribute to a weak leap toward achieving ideal social studies learning post-pandemic. Even achieving basic cognitive skills is already difficult, let alone other hopes for a more advanced education.

Problems Faced by Students at Junior High Schools on The Suburban of Surabaya City

Based on observations of students at three junior high schools located around Surabaya, many students' character traits still do not meet expectations in the process of implementing character values. Although these schools implement values derived from Islamic boarding school culture, their implementation is still inadequate. This is due to the impact of the learning system during the pandemic. During the pandemic, schools were unable to supervise and control students, creating obstacles in the process of implementing character education, which

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then led to students losing character. Although this occurred during elementary school, it resulted in students missing out on moments in junior high school and now. According to Mr. AR, the Principal of SMP C, post-pandemic problems cannot be solved in one generation alone, but must reach the generation that never experienced learning when the pandemic was just about to end.

The findings of this study essentially align with Dorn's (2020) research, which stated that the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption to the learning process because teachers were not interacting face-to-face with students, ultimately making it difficult for teachers to instill character education in students. Students who had previously experienced online learning tended to experience a decline in material comprehension due to the lack of strong teacher control and very limited social interaction, both of which are crucial for strengthening character education. Another study by Kuhfeld et. al. (2020) found a widening gap between schools with good learning capabilities, namely those capable of utilizing technology, and schools that lacked such capabilities due to limited resources and high student numbers. Another researcher, Kim (2020), recommended implementing alternative learning strategies for comprehensive recovery in each school, including the three schools on the suburban of Surabaya that served as the study sites. Schools must be able to strive for comprehensive recovery, both academic recovery and character recovery.

Another problem faced by students in the three schools on the suburban of Surabaya is the economic hardship experienced by most of the parents. They come from families with economic difficulties, as most of their parents work in the informal sector with uncertain incomes. This family's economic situation results in students being less enthusiastic about learning and even feeling inferior and ashamed. Internalizing character education requires active student participation. However, because they have psychological barriers such as inferiority and shame, this internalization process is not optimal. According to research by Kasingku & Mantow (2022), a family's socioeconomic status plays a significant role in shaping a student's character. Students from wealthier families typically have easier access to education and a supportive environment for positive development than students from lower-income families.

Internalization of Character for Junior High School Students in The Suburban of Surabaya City

Students at three schools have experienced a decline in character, which has become a challenge for the schools and their future. All three schools have made efforts to internalize character education for all students to improve their character. However, the schools face several challenges, such as limited school facilities and infrastructure, which contribute to the failure of this internalization. The infrastructure problem in question is the limited learning media owned by the school or developed by teachers. Furthermore, there is the problem of limited teacher ability to internalize character education, including the low ability of teachers

to develop interactive and contextual learning media. However, despite the two challenges faced by the schools, at least at SMP A and SMP B, the schools have made efforts to develop and strengthen the internalization of character education in the schools.

This study found that the internalization of character education in three schools was based on the characteristics or identities of the schools being developed. For example, SMP A, a public school, not a religious school with students from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, or in other words, a multicultural school, has developed the character of tolerance, democracy, and a spirit of nationalism. These developed characters are in accordance with the conditions of the students at the school, with the hope that students will not problematize religious and ethnic differences among them. Furthermore, SMP B has a very green school environment because of the many hardwood trees, such as mango trees, banyan trees, sapodilla trees, areca nut trees, and other flowering plants. For this reason, SMP B declared itself as an environmentally conscious school and developed the character of patriotism, environmental awareness, and responsibility. Meanwhile, SMP C, a religious-based school, developed the character of religiousness, discipline, and social awareness.

At SMP A, the school's identity places a strong emphasis on the value of togetherness, namely tolerance and showing respect for teachers and friends of different religions and ethnicities. Efforts to instill character values based on diversity at SMP A were undertaken in response to student character issues, particularly their low level of politeness and respect for educators. Therefore, these values are taught through daily activities that teach students to be tolerant, not only towards teachers but also towards fellow students and the rest of the school community.

The development of character education in SMP B cannot be separated from various other aspects, such as school identity, school culture, and community. Because SMP B prioritizes an environmentally conscious school, the character traits developed by the school include love of the homeland, environmental awareness, and responsibility. A school-based project supports the internalization of character, namely, separating organic and non-organic waste. This project began before the pandemic and resumed in the 2023-2024 academic year. Students are already accustomed to separating organic and non-organic waste.

SMP C, a faith-based school, develops religious, disciplined, and socially conscious character. To strengthen these characteristics, the school has established a policy of creating written school rules and posting them in every corner of the school. Symbols supporting the internalization of these characters are also installed. Furthermore, information is displayed in the form of infographics. Examples of infographic functions include the function and importance of praying on time, an infographic on the virtues of fasting during Ramadan, and an infographic on the virtues of helping others. The use of images or visual symbols, such as infographics, helps create an atmosphere that gradually shapes moral and ethical attitudes in students' daily lives. Therefore, the approach used at SMP C in utilizing visual symbols to support character education can be said to be effective, as it aligns with previous theories and

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research that emphasize the role of the school environment as a primary factor in shaping student character.

Internalization of Character Education in Social Studies Learning

Social Studies Learning Planning and Internalization of Character Education

In learning, lesson planning is one of the stages in designing how the learning process will be implemented. This lesson plan can also include the integration of character education that the teacher hopes to achieve in the lesson within the subject. Findings indicate that some teachers still fail to integrate character education into lesson planning. When teachers fail to integrate character education into lesson planning, it is certain that they will not integrate character education into the learning process, and so on.

However, some teachers have been able to integrate character education into their desired goals. Although in a very simple form, it has been integrated into lesson plans. By being able to integrate character education into lesson plans, teachers can provide guidelines for integrating character education into the learning process, both in the form of materials and assessments that will be used later. This aligns with Sudrajat's (2011) statement that character education must be regularly integrated into the curriculum, or at least within the learning process. This way, classroom learning becomes more in-depth and meaningful.

In practice, some teachers in rural schools are still unable to design learning that integrates character education. This is because teachers still lack an understanding of integrating character education into lesson planning. In developing character-based social studies lesson plans, teachers are expected to address not only cognitive aspects but also affective and psychomotor aspects. The results of this study's observations indicate that some teachers still use conventional methods, such as lectures, without implementing learning strategies that directly create character values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility. As emphasized by Lickona (1996), the process of internalizing character values must be carried out through direct learning and role models from educators.

Implementation of Social Studies Learning and the Challenges of Character Internalization

Observations at SMP C revealed that teachers' social studies instruction was still conventional, relying on lectures and student assignments. This lecture-and-assignment approach failed to internalize character education. Teachers' enthusiasm was low, and they simply neglected their teaching responsibilities. This lack of commitment to character education, as envisioned by Lickona (1996), was crucial for learning. This is because teachers failed to provide students with practical examples of how to internalize character education during instruction.

The lack of integration of character education into the learning process is not due to its absence in lesson plans. Teachers who include the integration of character education in lesson plans are also unable to implement it in the learning process. As seen during the analysis of

lesson planning documents and observations during the learning process at SMP A, teachers were unable to translate their lesson plans, which integrate character education, into the learning process. Furthermore, teachers still rely on memorization and textbooks. Junior high school students should be encouraged to think contextually so that issues related to character education can be analyzed together in the learning process. This is certainly not in accordance with the learning theory developed by Piaget (in Barrouillet, 2015), which states that students at the junior high school level must be able to think critically, contextually, and concretely.

In class, we still encounter passive students with low participation in class discussions. Many students lack the confidence to express their opinions in class. This presents a challenge for teachers in the learning process. If this occurs, teachers are required to engage in class discussions, with the initial process of inviting students to express their opinions, so that students can be active. Class discussions are expected to encourage students to be active, asking and answering questions from the teacher and their peers. Answers are expected to be correct, but they should not be lengthy or convoluted. If students are confident in answering or asking questions in discussions, they will be actively involved in the learning process.

During classroom observations, teachers were not using diverse and contextual learning media, such as utilizing technology for learning. At SMP C, some teachers were still unable to utilize technology as a learning medium, resulting in teacher-centric learning that only proceeded according to the teacher's abilities. The problem of not utilizing technology as a learning medium only occurred among older teachers who had not learned how to utilize technology. Meanwhile, younger teachers today are able to utilize technology for learning, including to support the internalization of character education in schools. According to Vygotsky in Nordlof (2014), effective learning requires social interaction and assistance from teachers in building a deeper understanding. Therefore, the process of internalizing character values in social studies learning must be supported by more innovative learning strategies and involve meaningful interactions between students and their learning environment.

Reflection on Social Studies Learning and Evaluation of Character Internalization

Reflection on social studies learning can be implemented through formative and summative assessments. When internalization of character education is not implemented at every meeting, reflection can be conducted at each meeting through formative assessments. Teachers develop evaluations by creating questions integrated with character education. One teacher at SMP A has developed this type of reflection. In addition to integrating formative questions, the teacher also observes students, noting changes in them. For example, whether students who initially bullied their peers of different religions have stopped doing so. This is important because student character is not just cognitive knowledge but also the behavior or social actions of students, both at school and at home, and in the surrounding environment.

At SMP B, teachers also provide students with opportunities to reflect at the end of each lesson. After reflection, teachers provide feedback on the reflections. Student reflections can

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range from feelings after participating in the lesson to brief formative questions to gauge students' understanding of the material presented. Positive feedback can take the form of supportive narratives or positive emoticons to encourage students to feel appreciated, thus encouraging them to study harder and improving their character.

When assessing teacher feedback, feedback from parents is also necessary. Are the changes students make also reflected at home? Or are they limited to school? Therefore, collaboration between schools and parents needs to be strengthened. This collaboration aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theory that the home and community environment also play a crucial role in shaping students' character. Therefore, collaboration between schools, parents, and the community is crucial.

CONCLUSION

After examining the internalization of character education, implemented in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of social studies learning in three schools on the suburban of Surabaya, it was apparent that challenges remain. These challenges can originate from both the teachers themselves and external parties. For example, teachers are unable to integrate character education into lesson planning because they still create pre-made templates, even though they do not align with the school's character. Furthermore, the lessons delivered by teachers are not contextualized, relying solely on lectures, textbooks, and assignments. As a result, students experience a more passive learning experience. Not all teachers provide feedback during learning reflections. To ensure the widespread implementation of character education internalization in Surabaya, the following recommendations are necessary: First, teacher training is needed to develop integrated character education learning plans. Second, schools need to support teachers' needs to develop contextual learning. Third, schools need to increase collaboration with parents to support contextual learning and to obtain feedback from parents. Fourth, there needs to be a character education evaluation instrument agreed upon by all teachers and the principal. This will ensure the successful internalization of character education in social studies learning. Because this study was limited to three schools on the suburban of Surabaya, future research is expected to be conducted across regions with more complex school problems.

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