

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR ENHANCING GRADUATE QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. The quality of university graduates is increasingly determined not only by academic achievement but also by the integration of character values within institutional management systems. This study aims to analyze and develop an integrative model of character education management implemented in the Primary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD), Universitas Pakuan, Indonesia. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation processes of character-based education management. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving program leaders, lecturers, and students. Data analysis was conducted using interactive analysis techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that character education management in the PGSD Program is structured through three major pillars: academic excellence, professional ethics, and socio-cultural responsibility. The management model integrates character values into curriculum design, teaching-learning processes, co-curricular activities, and institutional governance. Strategic planning is aligned with the program's vision and outcome-based education (OBE) framework, while supervision is conducted through continuous monitoring of student performance and behavioral indicators. The study reveals that a systemic-integrative approach to character education management contributes significantly to the development of high-quality graduates who demonstrate pedagogical competence, moral integrity, collaborative skills, and community engagement. This research offers a conceptual framework for strengthening graduate quality through institutionalized character education management in higher education settings.

Keywords: character education management, graduate quality, higher education governance, primary school teacher education, outcome-based education

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The transformation of higher education in the twenty-first century requires universities not only to produce academically competent graduates but also individuals who demonstrate strong character, ethical integrity, and socio-cultural responsibility. Contemporary global education discourse emphasizes holistic graduate attributes encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). In this context, character education is no longer positioned merely as a complementary program but as an integral component of institutional governance and quality assurance systems (Berkowitz & Bier, 2020; Nucci et al., 2022).

Within teacher education institutions, the urgency of character education is even more pronounced. Pre-service teachers are expected to internalize professional ethics, pedagogical responsibility, and social commitment before entering primary education settings (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In Indonesia, reforms in higher education through Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and quality assurance mechanisms further demand alignment between curriculum design, institutional management, and graduate learning outcomes (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology [MoECRT], 2020). Previous studies have highlighted that effective educational management significantly influences institutional performance and graduate quality (Sa Ilis, 2022; Suchyadi, 2022).

The Primary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD) at Universitas Pakuan operates within this reform landscape. As a teacher preparation program, PGSD must ensure that graduates demonstrate pedagogical competence, professional ethics, collaborative skills, and local-cultural sensitivity. Integrating character education into institutional management becomes a strategic approach to strengthening these competencies systematically rather than fragmentarily (Suchyadi & Sunaryo, 2023).

Problem of the Study

Despite increasing recognition of character education, its implementation in higher education institutions often remains programmatic and symbolic rather than systemic. Many universities incorporate character values within course descriptions or extracurricular activities without embedding them into governance structures, strategic planning, and quality monitoring systems (Lickona, 2021; Nucci et al., 2022). This fragmented implementation leads to inconsistencies between institutional vision statements and measurable graduate outcomes.

In teacher education programs, the challenge becomes more complex due to the dual responsibility of academic mastery and moral-professional formation. Studies indicate that while curriculum reforms emphasize competence-based learning, limited attention is given to managerial mechanisms that ensure consistent character internalization across courses and institutional activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2021). Consequently, there remains a managerial gap between character education discourse and its institutional execution.

Research State of the Art

Recent scholarship has explored character education from multiple perspectives, including moral psychology (Berkowitz & Bier, 2020), civic and democratic education (UNESCO, 2021), and digital-era ethical literacy (OECD, 2021). In higher education contexts, research increasingly examines institutional governance models that integrate quality assurance, leadership, and value-based education (Sallis, 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, several studies have linked educational leadership and institutional culture with graduate quality outcomes (Suchyadi, 2022; Suchyadi & Sunaryo, 2023). These studies emphasize the importance of transformational leadership, collaborative culture, and systemic planning in achieving educational excellence. However, empirical investigations specifically focusing on **integrative character education management models within teacher education programs** remain limited.

Gap Study & Objective

Although the literature acknowledges the importance of character education and quality management in higher education, three critical gaps can be identified. First, most studies focus on pedagogical strategies rather than institutional management systems as the analytical unit (Nucci et al., 2022). Second, research in developing-country contexts, particularly within Southeast Asian teacher education programs, remains underrepresented in international publications (UNESCO, 2021). Third, limited studies conceptualize character education management through a systemic-integrative framework linking planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation within OBE-oriented institutions (MoECRT, 2020; Sallis, 2022).

Addressing these gaps is essential to contribute both theoretically and practically to educational management scholarship. A structured model of character education management could strengthen institutional coherence and ensure measurable graduate quality outcomes. This study aims to analyze and develop an integrative model of character education management implemented in the Primary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD), Universitas Pakuan. Specifically, the study seeks to: Examine the planning mechanisms of character education within institutional strategic frameworks. Analyze implementation strategies integrating character values into curriculum, teaching, and co-curricular activities. Evaluate supervision and monitoring systems supporting character-based graduate outcomes. Formulate a systemic-integrative framework that contributes to strengthening graduate quality in teacher education institutions. By articulating an institutional management perspective, this research intends to provide a conceptual contribution to higher education governance literature and practical guidance for character-based quality assurance systems in teacher education.

METHOD

Type and Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design. A qualitative approach was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of institutional processes, managerial practices, and contextual dynamics related to the implementation of character education management within the Primary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD) at Universitas Pakuan. Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to understand complex social phenomena through participants' perspectives and institutional realities (Creswell & Poth, 2022). The case study design was chosen because the research focuses on a bounded system—namely, a specific teacher education program within a particular institutional setting. Case study research is particularly appropriate when investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2021). In this study, the bounded case is defined by the organizational structure, governance system, and character education policies implemented in the PGSD Program. The design aimed to generate a systemic-integrative model of character education management by examining planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation mechanisms embedded in institutional governance structures.

Data and Data Sources

Data were derived from both primary and secondary sources to ensure methodological rigor and triangulation. Primary data were collected from key institutional stakeholders directly involved in character education management, including: Head of the PGSD Program, Quality assurance unit representatives, Lecturers responsible for curriculum development, Student representatives. These participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their strategic roles in planning and implementing character-based educational policies. Secondary data included institutional documents such as strategic plans (Renstra), curriculum documents aligned with Outcome-Based Education (OBE), academic guidelines, internal quality assurance reports, meeting minutes, and program evaluation reports. Document analysis provided insight into the alignment between institutional vision, character values, and graduate learning outcomes. The integration of multiple data sources strengthened construct validity and allowed cross-verification of emerging findings (Creswell & Poth, 2022).

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using three primary techniques:

[1] In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives regarding planning mechanisms, curriculum integration, monitoring systems, and institutional policies related to character education management. This format allowed flexibility while maintaining alignment with research objectives.

[2] Participatory Observation

Observation was conducted during academic meetings, teaching-learning processes, and selected co-curricular activities. The purpose was to examine how character values were enacted in real institutional practices rather than merely articulated in formal documents.

[3] Document Analysis

Institutional documents were systematically reviewed to identify policy alignment, curriculum design patterns, evaluation instruments, and character indicators embedded within governance systems. Document analysis enabled tracing the consistency between declared institutional values and operational procedures. The use of methodological triangulation enhanced credibility and minimized subjective bias (Yin, 2021).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an interactive and iterative process. The study adopted a thematic analysis framework involving four stages:

1. **Data Condensation**, Transcribed interviews, observation notes, and documents were organized and reduced into meaningful analytical units.
2. **Data Display**, Information was categorized into matrices and thematic clusters reflecting planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation dimensions.
3. **Thematic Coding and Pattern Matching**, Codes were developed inductively and then compared with theoretical constructs from character education and educational management literature.
4. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification**, Emerging interpretations were continuously verified through triangulation and member checking to ensure credibility and confirmability.

This analytical process enabled the identification of structural patterns and the formulation of a systemic-integrative model of character education management within the PGSD Program. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility (triangulation and member validation), transferability (thick description), dependability (audit trail), and confirmability (reflexive documentation) criteria, consistent with contemporary qualitative research standards (Creswell & Poth, 2022).

RESULTS

Planning Model of Character Education Management

The findings indicate that character education management in the Primary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD), Universitas Pakuan, is systematically embedded within institutional strategic planning documents. Character values such as integrity, responsibility, collaboration, professionalism, and socio-cultural awareness are explicitly integrated into the program's vision, mission, and learning outcome statements aligned with Outcome-Based Education (OBE).

Strategic planning mechanisms include annual academic coordination meetings, curriculum review workshops, and internal quality assurance audits. Character indicators are incorporated into course learning outcomes (CLOs), assessment rubrics, and graduate profile descriptors. This structured alignment demonstrates that character

education is positioned not as an extracurricular supplement but as an institutional commitment embedded within governance structures.

Implementation Mechanisms

The implementation of character education operates through three integrative dimensions:

1. Curriculum Integration; Character values are embedded across pedagogical courses, microteaching practices, and field experience programs (PPL).
2. Academic Culture Development; Institutional routines promote discipline, academic honesty, collaborative learning, and reflective practice.
3. Co-curricular and Community Engagement Activities; Students participate in community-based programs emphasizing service learning and local cultural literacy.

Observational findings reveal that lecturers serve as role models, reinforcing character values through instructional practices and feedback systems. The integration is not confined to formal learning but extends to daily academic interactions.

Supervision and Evaluation System

Supervision mechanisms include continuous monitoring through performance-based assessments, reflective journals, peer evaluations, and institutional quality audits. Character-based indicators are incorporated into teaching evaluations and field practice assessments.

The internal quality assurance unit (LPM) plays a strategic role in ensuring alignment between declared character objectives and measurable student outcomes. This systemic supervision contributes to the development of graduates who demonstrate pedagogical competence alongside ethical and professional dispositions.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings demonstrate that character education management within the PGSD Program reflects a systemic-integrative governance model. This aligns with contemporary perspectives emphasizing that educational quality is inseparable from institutional coherence and leadership-driven culture (Fullan, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Unlike fragmented character initiatives reported in prior studies (Nucci et al., 2022), the PGSD model integrates planning, implementation, and evaluation within a unified quality assurance framework. This supports the argument that character education becomes effective when embedded into institutional systems rather than isolated pedagogical interventions (OECD, 2021).

Furthermore, the results corroborate the notion that graduate quality in teacher education requires both competence and moral-professional identity formation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The integration of service learning and reflective practice strengthens socio-emotional and ethical capacities, echoing findings from global frameworks on social and emotional skills development (UNESCO, 2021).

In the Indonesian higher education context, this model complements studies highlighting the relationship between institutional culture and graduate quality improvement (Suchyadi & Sunaryo, 2023). However, this research extends previous work by articulating a structured management model rather than focusing solely on leadership or cultural variables.

Novelty and Contribution

This study offers three primary contributions:

1. Theoretical Contribution; It proposes a systemic-integrative framework linking character education management with institutional quality assurance systems. This moves beyond pedagogical discourse and positions character education within governance theory.
2. Empirical Contribution; It provides evidence from a teacher education program in Indonesia, contributing to the limited Southeast Asian representation in international educational management literature.
3. Practical Contribution; It formulates an operational model connecting strategic planning, curriculum integration, supervision mechanisms, and graduate outcomes within an OBE-oriented institution.

By conceptualizing character education management as an institutional governance framework, this research advances contemporary discussions on holistic graduate development (OECD, 2021; Sallis, 2022).

Implication and suggestions

Institutional Implications

Higher education institutions should institutionalize character education through:

1. Integration within strategic planning documents
2. Alignment with internal quality assurance standards
3. Clear graduate character indicators linked to measurable outcomes

Leadership plays a pivotal role in sustaining coherence between institutional values and operational practices (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Policy Implications

National higher education policymakers should provide explicit guidelines for embedding character-based indicators within accreditation and OBE systems to ensure standardization across institutions.

Pedagogical Implications

Lecturers require professional development programs to strengthen value-based pedagogy and reflective instructional practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Directions for Future Research

Although this study provides a comprehensive qualitative exploration, several avenues remain open: Quantitative Model Validation: Future research may employ SEM-PLS or structural modeling to test the relationship between character education management and measurable graduate performance indicators. Comparative Institutional Studies Multisite studies across teacher education institutions would enhance generalizability. Longitudinal Design Tracking graduates over time could determine the sustainability of character-based competencies in professional teaching practice. Digital Character Education Governance; Future studies may explore how digital transformation influences character education management in higher education environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of character education management within the Primary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD) at Universitas Pakuan and formulated a systemic-integrative model linking character development with institutional governance and quality assurance mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that character education becomes effective when embedded within strategic planning, curriculum alignment, academic culture, supervision systems, and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) frameworks. Rather than functioning as a supplementary moral initiative, character education in this context operates as an institutionalized management system that coherently connects planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes. The proposed model confirms that graduate quality in teacher education is not solely determined by pedagogical competence but by the integration of professional ethics, socio-cultural responsibility, collaborative capacity, and reflective practice within institutional structures. The alignment between character indicators, curriculum design, and internal quality assurance mechanisms strengthens outcome consistency and enhances institutional accountability. This systemic coherence differentiates the model from fragmented character education approaches commonly reported in higher education settings. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to educational management literature by positioning character education within governance and quality assurance discourse rather than limiting it to pedagogical strategies. Empirically, it provides evidence from an Indonesian teacher education program, expanding global scholarship on holistic graduate development in emerging higher education contexts. Practically, the study offers a replicable institutional framework that may guide higher education institutions seeking to integrate value-based education into measurable quality systems. In conclusion, character education management, when institutionalized through strategic governance and OBE alignment, functions as a transformative mechanism for strengthening graduate quality in teacher education institutions. This positioning supports broader global calls for higher education systems that cultivate not only academic excellence but also ethical and socially responsible professionals prepared to address complex educational challenges.

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