

IMPLEMENTATION OF KINDNESS STRATEGY IN FORMING STUDENTS' CHARACTER AND MENTALITY IN SCHOOLSNazaruddin¹¹ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Yayasan Dakwah Islamiyah Lubuk Sikaping, Pasaman, Indonesia**Corresponding Author:**

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Abstract

Implementation Kindness Strategy in teaching and learning activities at school and their impact on character building and students' mental health. Kindness strategies are applied through various simple activities such as appreciation, cooperation, providing positive feedback, and modeling behavior by teachers as practitioners. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of participatory observation and documentation during the learning process. Data analysis was conducted thematically to identify changes in prosocial behavior, classroom atmosphere, and students' emotional states. The results of the study show that the implementation of Kindness strategy consistently resulted in increased empathy, cooperation, and a more positive classroom atmosphere. Furthermore, there were indications of improved psychological well-being, such as increased self-confidence, emotional calm, and students' ability to express appreciation. However, implementation faced challenges such as time constraints, established student habits, and a lack of institutional support. Overall, this study confirms that the kindness strategy is an effective and relevant approach to strengthening character education and student mental health, while also providing an empirical basis for developing more structured kindness programs in schools.

Keywords: Character Education, Kindness Strategies, Mental Health

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education plays a role in equipping students with an understanding of Islamic teachings and their values. Through this process, students are guided not only to understand but also to internalize and implement these values in their daily lives. The primary goal of this education is to develop a complete human being, a person with noble character, capable of fulfilling their responsibilities as a human being in this world.

Based on previous research, character education plays a significant role in helping students develop quality character. This is also consistent with previous research explaining that character education can also improve learning and academic achievement.

Character education has become a major focus in educational policy and practice in Indonesia due to its strategic role in shaping students' behavior, values, and mental strength in schools. Although the formal curriculum fundamentally addresses the goal of character development, numerous reports in schools indicate a discrepancy or mismatch between curriculum objectives and practice, including the practice of using punishment and rewards, which is not sustainable in fostering virtues such as empathy, responsibility, and caring.

The concept of the "Kindness Strategy" emerged as an intervention approach that emphasizes simple social actions (such as assistance, appreciation, and attention) as a systematic tool for internalizing character values and strengthening students' mental health. Recent research, including case studies in Indonesian schools and school-based interventions, shows that programs structured around kindness values (e.g., "Kindness Week," activities based on teacher-student empathy, or integration into digital learning) can improve students' psychological well-being, as well as their affective and social well-being. These findings provide an empirical basis for broader implementation efforts in elementary and secondary schools.

The application of the kindness strategy is rooted in character education theory and positive psychology, which emphasize the development of moral habits through repeated social practices, teacher modeling, and a supportive school environment. Furthermore, this approach aligns with the principle of internalizing values, which is more sustainable than strategies that rely solely on punishment and rewards, the effects and benefits of which are only felt in the short term. Therefore, research and practice that explore implementation procedures, mechanisms of behavior change, and their impact on students' character and mental dimensions are essential, including contextual studies in Indonesian schools with their diverse characteristics.

According to Sheikh Muhammad An-Naquib Al Atas, in his book, **The Concept of Education in Islam**, he explains that education, in English, means: "The process of producing and developing, referring to the physical and material." Education is a process of producing and developing, referring to the physical and material. Character development is a material form of teacher effort to produce students with character and noble morals.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach focused on real-life experiences during the implementation of the Teaching Practice Experience in schools. This approach was chosen because the research aimed to understand how kindness strategies are implemented in daily learning activities at school and to observe changes in students' behavior, character, and mental state through direct observation during classroom learning. This method allows the researcher to describe phenomena directly and naturally without excessive intervention and without the use of formal interview techniques.

The research was conducted in a classroom, in grade VIII of the Daruu Tahfiz Islamic Boarding School, Cangkiang Village, Ampek Angkek District, Agam Regency. The researcher acted as a teacher, actively designing and implementing various kindness-based activities, such

as providing positive reinforcement, collaborative learning activities during teaching and learning and problem-solving, practicing expressing appreciation to peers, and developing the habit of using respectful and gentle words. The entire learning process was directly observed, allowing the researcher to directly witness and record students' spontaneous responses, interactions, and changes in the emotional atmosphere in the classroom from day to day. The role of a practicing teacher provided the opportunity to engage naturally in classroom activities while observing the dynamics of student character comprehensively.

Data collection utilized two main techniques: participant observation and documentation. Observations were conducted throughout the learning process, each time the teaching and learning process was conducted. Data were recorded in the form of notes containing student behavior in the classroom, significant events that occurred during the learning process, student reactions to kindness activities, and indications of character or mental changes such as increased empathy, decreased bullying behavior among students, decreased aggressive behavior, or the emergence of habits of mutual assistance. These observations were conducted directly without interviews, so all information was obtained from students' actual behavior in the classroom.

In addition to observations, data were also collected through documentation, assignments, and study groups within the classroom. Students directly involved in the kindness program were also collected through teacher diaries during the learning process at school or internal class records. Researchers also used daily reflective journals, personal notes written after each lesson, to document experiences, obstacles, and successes of kindness activities, as well as initial analysis of student changes from day to day. These journals served as important data sources because they directly reflected the researchers' thoughts and interpretations during the teaching and learning process. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, repeatedly reading all observation notes, documentation, and reflections to identify important patterns. After collecting the data, researchers identified events, behaviors, and student responses that shared common meaning and grouped them into broad themes, such as increased empathy, improved group cooperation, changes in the classroom atmosphere to a more positive level, or challenges arising from the implementation of kindness strategies. These themes helped researchers develop a comprehensive picture of the impact of kindness implementation on students' character and mental well-being.

Using a descriptive qualitative method focused on field observation and documentation, this research aims to provide an authentic and in-depth picture of how kindness strategies can be directly implemented in learning and how they contribute to student character development and mental health, based on real-life experiences during teaching and learning activities at school, particularly during classroom interactions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the teaching and learning process at school, kindness strategies are consistently implemented in daily classroom activities, especially in eighth grade. These include expressing and giving appreciation, collaborative tasks that encourage mutual assistance, positive feedback exercises among students, and behavioral modeling by practicing teachers. Participatory observations and classroom documentation noted relatively rapid changes in classroom behavior and interactions between students during the teaching and learning process. Initially, when this method was implemented, the classroom atmosphere tended to be administrative and task-oriented. After several weeks of implementation, an increase was observed in the frequency of simple prosocial actions, such as students helping friends who were struggling, no bullying in class, saying thank you, praising friends for their hard work in each activity, and showing concern and empathy for friends and making a habit of saying thank you for receiving help or assistance. This phenomenon is reflected in this researcher's diary and group

assignment documents, which record collaborative interactions. These findings align with the results of studies on kindness interventions in schools, which noted improvements in social skills and caring after the program's implementation. Emotionally, there was a decrease in minor student conflicts such as teasing, bullying, and role-playing within groups, and a calmer and more conducive classroom atmosphere when short reflection activities, such as "peer appreciation" sessions at the end of lessons, were implemented. Practicing teachers reported a more conducive teaching atmosphere because students' attention to their peers' feelings increased focus and reduced disruptive behavior. These observational findings are consistent with studies of character education, which highlight that strengthening a school culture that supports kindness values contributes to a more positive classroom climate.

In addition to changes in social behavior, early signs of improved psychological well-being among students were observed, such as some appearing calm and confident when asked to speak in front of the class and in groups after receiving positive feedback from their peers. Reflective notes indicated that acts of appreciation from peers gave students a sense of belonging, thereby reducing performance anxiety in collaborative learning situations. These observational findings are supported by research showing a positive relationship between kindness practices and subjective well-being, or psychological well-being.

However, its implementation also faces challenges. First, due to time constraints and curriculum pressures, some teachers, including the researcher, who was still a student during the internship, were unable to allocate sufficient space for kindness-related activities outside of the completed syllabus. Second, some students were initially skeptical, and new habits required continuous repetition and reinforcement to become automatic. Third, support from school authorities, such as the principal or other subject teachers, varied; classes that received stronger support experienced faster change. These challenges were documented in detail in field notes and align with studies of character education program implementation that highlight the need for structural support and sustainability.

Observational and documented data during the teaching and learning process indicate that the implementation of kindness strategies demonstrated positive changes in prosocial behavior and classroom emotional climate, with indications of improved student psychological well-being. Sustainability and scalability of these effects will require frequency of intervention, institutional support, and integration of kindness activities into learning routines so that they are not perceived as "add-ons" separate from curriculum requirements.

The results of this study suggest that a simple act of kindness approach can be an effective tool for strengthening character education and supporting students' mental health in the daily classroom context. In theory, kindness strategies can be explained as the application of the principles of character education and positive psychology, which emphasize the strengthening of prosocial behavior through modeling, repetition, and social reinforcement. Findings of increased empathy, cooperation, and a more positive classroom atmosphere confirm that moral habits can be instilled if done consistently and in a structured educational environment. National literature on strengthening character education emphasizes the importance of teachers and school culture; findings from the field during the learning and teaching process indicate similar results, with teachers as role models and facilitators playing the most important role instilling kindness values.

Studies of kindness interventions in more formal educational contexts have also found similar effects on students' social skills and emotional well-being. This suggests that the effects demonstrated during the learning process are not coincidental, but rather consistent with patterns identified by other studies, namely that structured kindness interventions tend to increase students' socially responsible behavior and positive feelings in the classroom. At the same time, it is important to remember that many intervention studies use more robust designs, such as pre-post with a control group or mixed methods. Therefore, any causal claims should be interpreted cautiously in observational-descriptive teaching and learning research. Teaching

and learning findings should therefore be considered field evidence supporting the hypothesis of the effectiveness of kindness strategies and as a basis for further research that quantitatively tests their effectiveness.

Observed barriers to implementation, including curriculum load, the need for repetition, and varying institutional support, suggest that for long-term impact, kindness strategies must be incorporated into the school infrastructure, such as lesson plans incorporating character activities, consistent weekly schedules such as "Kindness Moments," and the participation of other teachers. Research literature and case studies reaffirm the importance of planning, teacher collaboration, and ongoing reflection in systematizing new practices in schools. The implementation of kindness strategies will be more effective if treated as part of a school-wide strategy for strengthening character, rather than as a temporary program implemented by teachers.

Observations of teaching and learning processes indicate benefits in students' psychological well-being, but these benefits should be complemented by more comprehensive measures of well-being, such as standardized well-being scales before and after the intervention. Several local studies have demonstrated that self-compassion, metta meditation, or kindness programs use valid instruments to measure psychological change; implementing such instruments in follow-up studies would certainly strengthen the empirical evidence. Furthermore, the role of parents and the social environment outside of school can also mitigate the program's impact; therefore, involving parents and the general community in the kindness-enhancing agenda is part of the implementation recommendations.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of kindness strategies in learning activities shows that simple, sustained acts of kindness can significantly impact students' character development and emotional well-being. Participant observations conducted during the learning process indicate that small acts of appreciation, mutual assistance, and positive feedback are sufficient to shift classroom interaction patterns to become more supportive and prosocial. This is reflected not only in the growth of empathy and cooperation, but also in a more positive classroom climate and a reduction in minor conflicts between students.

In addition to strengthening character, the implementation of kindness strategies appears to contribute to increased self-confidence, emotional calm, and psychological well-being in students. Many students become more confident speaking up, more comfortable in group work, and more open in expressing appreciation to peers. These findings support national literature confirming that virtue-based character education has a significant impact on classroom climate and student mental well-being.

However, all of this is highly dependent on supporting factors such as the availability of time, including teachers' readiness to model good behavior, and structural support from the school. Limiting factors such as class hours, ingrained habits among students, and programs that have not yet been institutionalized into the curriculum are important factors that need to be considered in long-term implementation.

This fieldwork study confirms that kindness strategies are a relevant and effective approach to strengthening character education while supporting students' mental health in the context of everyday learning. While the study is descriptive in nature and does not formally test causal relationships, the empirical basis provided by its findings is strong and can inform the development of further structured kindness programs in schools. For greater impact and potential sustainability, these programs should be integrated into school culture through regular planning, collaboration among teachers, and the use of more comprehensive evaluation instruments in future research.

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