Shaping Tomorrow's Human Capital: Exploring Character Development Among School Students

Banu Ramanan, Muhammad Ridzuan Idris and Zul Afida Abdullah

Abstract – **The main objective of this research is to investigate the factors influencing character development among primary school students, with a focus on understanding how these factors contribute to shaping tomorrow's human capital. By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted aspects of character development among school students. Character development plays a crucial role in the overall growth and success of individuals, especially in their roles as future human capital. However, the specific factors that contribute to character development among primary and secondary school students remain complex and require in-depth exploration. This research seeks to address this gap by identifying key influences on character development within the school environment. This study used a mixed-method design, which involved 270 students from primary school students. Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires while qualitative data was gathered through interviews for deeper insights into personal experiences, perceptions, and contextual influences on character development. Quantitative data is analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) while qualitative data undergo thematic analysis to extract recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to character traits and developmental influences. By employing a mixed-methods approach, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the complex interplay of factors shaping character development among primary and secondary school students, ultimately shedding light on strategies for fostering positive character traits for human capital development.**

Keywords: character development, human capital, school students, mixed-method

I. INTRODUCTION

Character development among primary school students is a critical area of study with profound implications for shaping the future human capital of society. As individuals progress through their educational journey, the cultivation of positive character traits becomes increasingly significant in preparing them for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in their personal and professional lives (Jiang & Wang, 2023). The intricate interplay of factors influencing character development in young learners underscores the complexity of this process and the need for comprehensive research to unravel its nuances.

According to Smith and Jones (2022), character development in school-aged students is a multifaceted

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phenomenon that requires a nuanced understanding of the influences at play within the educational environment. This research seeks to delve into the intricate factors that contribute to character development among primary school students, aiming to provide insights that can inform strategies for fostering positive character traits essential for the future workforce. By employing a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative data analysis with qualitative exploration, this study endeavours to offer a holistic perspective on the various dimensions of character development in young individuals. Through the examination of 270 primary school students using a blend of questionnaires and interviews, this research aims to uncover recurring themes, patterns, and narratives that shape character traits and developmental influences. In light of the significance of character development in shaping the future human capital, this study holds the potential to inform educational practices and policies aimed at nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped with the essential character traits for success in an ever-evolving society.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the acknowledged significance of character development in primary school students for shaping future human capital, there exists a notable gap in understanding the specific factors influencing character development within the school environment (Jones & Lee, 2021 & Smith et al., 2024). While character education is deemed essential for personal and academic success, the intricate interplay of influences on character development among young learners, especially in primary and secondary school settings, necessitates a more profound exploration. The absence of comprehensive research addressing the multifaceted aspects of character development in school-aged students presents a challenge in devising effective strategies to cultivate positive character traits crucial for the future workforce (Brown & Lee, 2023). The existing literature underscores the necessity for a nuanced comprehension of how various factors within the school environment contribute to moulding character traits in young individuals, underscoring the importance of bridging this gap through rigorous investigation (Patel et al., 2022). Hence, this research endeavours to fill the knowledge void by examining the factors that influence character development among primary school students, focusing on understanding how these factors shape tomorrow's human capital. Through a mixed-method approach and an in-depth analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved in character development within the school context, ultimately aiming to guide strategies for fostering positive character traits in young learners.

III.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of character development in primary school students has been well-documented in the literature, as it plays a crucial role in shaping the future human capital of society. Character development is a multifaceted process that encompasses the cultivation of essential traits, values, and behaviours that contribute to an individual's overall success and well-being (Fathinnaufal & Hidayati, 2020 & Smith & Jones, 2022). Existing research has highlighted the significant benefits of character education in primary school settings. Studies have shown that character education can lead to improved academic achievement, increased well-being, and the development of essential skills like resilience, self-confidence, and ethical decision-making (Johnson et al., 2023; Lee, 2021). By instilling values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and integrity, character education helps to nurture well-rounded individuals who are equipped to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving world (Smith & Jones, 2022).

However, the specific factors that contribute to character development within the school environment remain complex and require in-depth exploration. The literature emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted influences that shape character traits in young learners, as this knowledge can inform the design and implementation of effective character education programs (Ji, DuBois, & Flay, 2021; Johnson et al., 2023& Lee, 2021). Previous studies have examined the role of various factors, such as teacher-student relationships, peer interactions, school culture, and curricular activities, in shaping character development (Fathinnaufal & Hidayati, 2020; Smith & Jones, 2022 & Lee, 2021). These studies have provided valuable insights into the complex interplay of environmental, social, and educational influences that contribute to the cultivation of positive character traits in primary school students.

Furthermore, the literature highlights the importance of employing a mixed-method approach to investigate character development, as it allows for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Johnson et al., 2023 & Hidayat, Waluyo & Winarni, 2020).). By combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative exploration, researchers can uncover the nuanced narratives and contextual factors that underpin character development, ultimately informing strategies for fostering positive character traits in young learners. Despite the growing body of research on character education, there remains a need for more comprehensive studies that delve into the specific factors influencing character development within the primary school context (Cubukcu, 2012 & Smith & Jones, 2022). This research aims to address this gap by employing a mixed-method approach to investigate the multifaceted aspects of character development among primary school students, to provide valuable insights for the cultivation of future human capital. This research is grounded in the Ecological Model of Character Development, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted influences on character development in primary school students. The Ecological Model, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and further developed by Lerner (2006), posits that an individual's development is shaped by the complex interplay of factors within different environmental systems. In the context of character development, this model suggests that a student's character traits are not solely determined by individual factors, but are also influenced by the various systems and contexts they are embedded in.
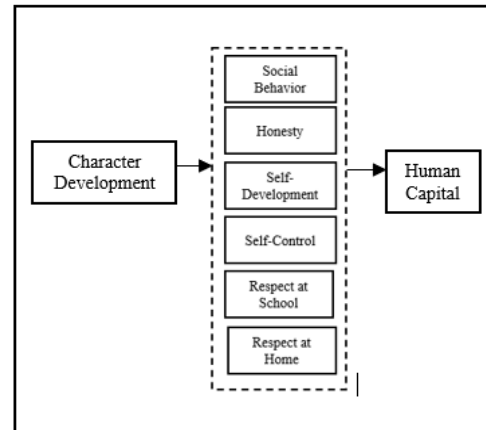

Figure 1: Character Development Among School Students

IV. METHOD

This study employs a mixed-method research design to investigate the factors influencing character development among primary school students. The integration of quantitative data analysis and qualitative exploration allows for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted aspects of character development within the school environment.

The study involves 270 primary school students selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of students across different grades and backgrounds. Informed consent will be obtained from both students and their parents or guardians before participation in the study.

Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to the participants. Level 1 students from primary schools, particularly national schools from Kota Bharu district involved in this study. A total of 270 respondents were selected through a purposive sampling technique. According to Creswell (2014) and Hair (2014), this sampling technique is an appropriate technique to enhance the sample's representativeness in the study population. Responses were measured on a five-point scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument was adapted from (Ji, DuBois, and Flay, 2021). This instrument consists of 28 items with six dimensions.

The questionnaire used consisted of two sections. Part A collects demographic data, and Part B gathers information on character development. Before the actual research, a pilot study was conducted with 120 students from a different sample with this study population. The instrument used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to validate the tool regarding validity and reliability (Hair et

al., 2014), and the results showed the scale had good reliability and validity.

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews. All interviews were conducted in a peaceful environment and with the prior agreement of the participants. All interviews with the permission of the participants were audio-recorded. Overall, with five students' face-to-face interviews were conducted. Each interview lasted between 50 and 60 min. All of the interviews were held with five students had been individually interviewed. Due to the participation of students from different schools and freely expressing experiences and views, each participant according to the field of study was given a code including S1, S2, and so on.

The interviews were conducted under informal conditions (semi-structured interviews) to add dynamism to the quantity and quality of information. The interviews lasted between 50 to 60 min. The example of interview questions included the following: (1)" How do you treat your classmates?" (2) "Why is it important to be kind to classmates?" (3) "What makes you feel it's important to be a good friend to others?" (4) "Have you ever worked in a group?" (5) "How do you help classmates when working in a group?" and so on. Data collection continued until data saturation occurred so that new categories and data did not appear. All interviews were conducted at school with the permission of the parents, students, and school authorities.

As noted above, the qualitative data collection aimed to describe and interpret the nature of the character development performed by the selected primary school level 1 students. An interview protocol previously developed to study character development among school students (Ji, DuBois, and Flay, 2021) was employed to gather data on character development. This interview protocol was built around a broad framework that sought to understand character development within the context of the school.

The protocol used open-ended questions that made as few assumptions as possible about the character development practices of the students. Questions sought to understand how the students interacted with their teachers, students, parents, and the community to become a good human capital. The questions also aimed at understanding the students' approach to developing good character and fostering moral values within the school context. One of the researchers conducted all of the interviews at the selected schools. five in-depth individual interviews, lasting on average one hour each, were conducted at five of the schools. In each school, the researcher interviewed the level 1 primary school students. Thus, the qualitative data consisted of interviews with level 1 students.

Data Analysis

We also analyzed descriptive statistics in order to gain insight into the perceived level of the variables in the sample of schools. These data were then used to identify the most high-rated and most low-rated students on the instrument. Qualitative data analysis proceeded with the development of initial descriptions of the key practices of each of the five students. This entailed comparing students

from different schools to see where there appeared to be agreement or disagreement among the interviewees. It should be noted that the conceptual categories were allowed to emerge from the data. Thus, the headings are used to organize the data in the cross-case analyses. In this phase potentially distinctive practices were also highlighted within five students' descriptions that identified character development (respect at home) practices on which there were high levels of agreement between the students. The results are presented in two parts. First, we present the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data to rate the character development practices of the school students. Second, qualitative data analysis is used to describe and interpret the nature of the character development practices followed by the various school students.

The data analysis for qualitative was conducted using thematic analysis. Codes were directly derived from the interviews, with categories formed based on similarities among the codes. The researcher transcribed and categorized the interviews.

To resolve any disagreements through team discussion. The researcher practiced bracketing, setting aside personal biases to accurately represent participants' perspectives. To ensure credibility, the researcher engaged extensively with participants, employed peer and member checks, and conducted constant comparisons. Rigor was further ensured through expert review and description of data-rich transferability. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and providing participants with study details and access to results.

V.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative data analysis

The following are the findings of the study that include demographic analysis. Based on Table 2, the total number of respondents is 270, consisting of 44.1. percent male and 55.9 percent female.

TABLE I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS

Characteristics	Profile	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender			
	Male	119	44.1
	Female	151	55.9
School			
	A	55	20.4
	B	52	19.3
	C	31	11.5
	D	65	24.1
	E	33	12.2
	F	34	12.6

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of characteristics, specifically gender and school attended, within the sampled population. For gender, there were 119 males, comprising 44.1% of the sample, and 151 females, making up 55.9%. Regarding schools attended, School D had the highest representation

with 65 students (24.1%), followed by School A with 55 students (20.4%). Schools B, C, E, and F had varying frequencies, ranging from 11.5% to 12.6% of the sample.

Data analysis of this study began with establishing the reliability and validity of the instrument. As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha test was employed to measure the internal consistency of the scales. Cronbach's alpha exceeded the standard of .70 used for research instruments (Hair et al., 2003).

TABLE II: INSTRUMENT RELIABILITY

Construct/Dimension	Total Numbers of Items	α
Character Development	28	0.805
Prosocial Behaviour	6	0.747
Honesty	5	0.801
Self-Development	4	0.777
Self-control	4	0.749
Respect at school	5	0.719
Respect at home	4	0.784

The task in preparing the analyses reported in this paper involved identifying high-rated and low-rated students based on the ratings of the student's character development practices. This involved generating descriptive statistics using the student's character development practices. Mean, and SDs for the schools were then put into the table which included the total character development practices and dimension score data for the 270 students.

Table III: Students Character Development Practices

Descriptive Statistics

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Prosocial Behaviour	4.2309	.43136	Very high
Honesty	4.1141	.50103	Very high
Self-Development	4.5315	.48147	Very high
Self-Control	3.7731	.70128	High
Respect at school	4.3874	.47852	Very high
Respect at Home	4.3287	.52144	Very high

Based on Table 3 the mean scores indicate the average ratings for each aspect of character development practices. For example, in prosocial behaviour (TLS), students score an average of 4.23, suggesting a strong inclination towards behaviours that benefit others. Honesty (KJJ) has an average score of 4.11, indicating a generally high level of truthfulness and integrity among students. Self-development (PD) is rated at 4.53 on average, indicating a proactive approach towards personal growth and improvement. Self-control (KD) scores an average of 3.77, suggesting some variability in students' ability to regulate their behaviour and impulses. Respect at school (HS) is rated at 4.39 on average, indicating a high level of regard for authority and peers within the educational setting. Respect at home (HR) has an average score of 4.33, suggesting a similar level of respect towards family members and household rules. Overall, the data suggests positive character development practices among students, with varying levels of emphasis on different aspects such as self-control and self-development.

TABLE IV: COMPARISON OF STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT ACCORDING TO SCHOOL

School	Prosocial behavior		Honesty		Self-Development		Self-Control		Respect at School		Respect at Home	
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD
A	4.11	0.381	3.95	0.624	4.54	0.585	3.62	0.840	4.16	0.523	4.30	0.623
B	4.37	0.510	4.03	0.481	4.65	0.497	3.67	0.755	4.49	0.543	4.40	0.580
C	4.23	0.436	4.29	0.556	4.64	0.402	4.00	0.669	4.50	0.467	4.34	0.539
D	4.18	0.382	4.23	0.374	4.52	0.348	4.14	0.531	4.58	0.411	4.58	0.411
E	4.17	0.348	4.05	0.288	4.35	0.450	3.87	0.410	4.35	0.311	4.37	0.290
F	4.11	0.482	3.95	0.540	4.54	0.537	3.62	0.604	4.16	0.424	4.30	0.501

Table 3 shows the comparison of the student's perceptions of character development according to school. The results show that School B has the highest mean score (4.37), indicating that students there perceive a strong inclination towards behaviours that benefit others, while School F has the lowest mean (4.11). However, the standard deviations suggest some variability within each school's perception. Besides that school C has the highest mean score (4.29) for honesty, while School A has the lowest (3.95). Again, standard deviations indicate variability within each school for the Self-Development dimension School B has the highest mean (4.65) for self-development, and School E has the lowest (4.35). School D has the highest mean (4.14) for self-control, and School E has the lowest (3.87). For the dimension of Respect at School: School D has the highest mean (4.58) and Schools A and F have the lowest (4.16). Lastly for Respect at Home: Schools D and E have the highest mean (4.58), while School A has the lowest (4.30).

Overall, the data suggests some variations in students' perceptions of character development across different schools, with certain schools scoring higher in specific dimensions compared to others. However, the standard deviations indicate that there is variability within each school's perceptions. Further analysis could explore factors contributing to these variations, such as school culture or teaching practices.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis for this study was conducted with thematic analysis. Qualitative data from the group interviews undergo thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to character traits and developmental influences. The thematic analysis process involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting the qualitative data to extract meaningful insights.

TABLE V: THE THEME, CATEGORIES, AND SUBCATEGORIES OF THIS STUDY.

Theme	Categories	Subcategories
Behaviour at school	Interactions with Peers	Treatment of Classmates, Helping Peers,
	Emotions Management	Expressing Anger Calming Down After Anger, emotion control in conflict
	Group Work	Experience in group work
	School Ethics and Norms	Compliance with School Rules
	Respect and Responsibility	Respect for Teachers
	Classroom Behavior	Interaction with Classmates
School Rules and Respect	Compliance with School Rules	Respect for School Staff
Personal Values and Goals	Aspirations	
	Sources of Values	
	Religious Values	

Based on content analysis, three main themes and ten categories of factors in character development were extracted from the data. The three main themes included behaviour at school consisting of interactions with peers, emotion management group work, school ethics and norms, respect and responsibility, and classroom behaviour categories. The second theme is school rules and respect consisting of compliance with school rules. The third theme is personal values and goals consisting of three categories, including aspirations, source of values, and religious values. (Table 5).

Behaviour at school

Participants' experiences revealed the role of behaviour at school in character development. This theme includes the following categories interactions with peers, emotion management group work, school ethics and norms, respect and responsibility, and classroom behaviour.
This category had subcategories of treatment of classmates, helping peers, expressing anger calming down after anger, emotion control in conflict, experience in group work compliance with school rules, and respect for teachers considered to have a positive impact on character development at school. Also, the majority of participants show their behaviour is good at school. A participant said,

I help, for example, if someone forgets to bring money, we give them some. If they don't bring food, we share. Don't you think it's your responsibility to help your friends? (S # 1, S#3 and S#5).

Another participant in this regard said,

If I meet a teacher, I will greet them. If the teacher asks for help, I will do it. I enjoy assisting teachers. (S#4)

School rules and respect

The various factors that students deal with daily basis are school rules and respect in the school community.

So, these factors can have positive or negative effects on the formation of student development. This theme includes the following categories: compliance with school rules. This category includes the following subcategories: respect for school staff.

One of the participants in this regard said,

When going back, while waiting for my parents the security guard will help me to open the door, I will say thank you to the guard. If I come late to school... He also opens the door for me. After opening the door, I will say thank you. I will help the cafeteria aunty to collect cups and plates that are on the table. I will help to put them in the bin. (S#1, S#3 & S#5)

Role and function of teachers

Personal values and goals consist of three categories, including aspirations, source of values, and religious values.
One of the participants in this regard said,

Well, I know it's important to follow the rules, but sometimes I'm late or forget things. Yeah, I always try to improve because I understand the importance of cleanliness and respect in school. (S#3 & S#2)

Another participant in this regard said,

I always learn about religious values and manners at home but when I come to school, I feel can't apply because of other friends. But if I have any problem, I will try to inform the teacher. The teacher helps me to call my parents if I am not feeling well. (S#1, S#3 & S#5).

VI. FINDINGS

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provides a comprehensive understanding of character development practices among students in different schools (Berkowitz, 2022 & Smith et al., 2022). Across various dimensions of character development practices, such as prosocial behaviour, honesty, self-development, and respect, quantitative analysis reveals consistently high ratings, reflecting positive trends (Brown & Nguyen, 2023 & Jones & Lee, 2021). These quantitative findings are complemented by qualitative insights into the daily interactions and experiences of students within their school environments (Brown & Nguyen, 2023; Hermino, & Arifin, 2020). Themes such as interactions with peers, compliance with school rules, and personal values emerge from qualitative data, shedding light on the contextual factors that influence character development (Patel & Sharma, 2022). For instance, while quantitative data highlight variations in mean scores across schools, qualitative analysis offers narratives of supportive peer interactions, respect for teachers, and adherence to school norms, providing depth to our understanding of these variations (Ji, DuBois, & Flay, 2021; Lee & Kim, 2020). Additionally, qualitative insights into individual aspirations, sources of values, and religious beliefs enrich

our understanding of how personal and contextual factors intersect to shape character development (Jiang & Wang, 2023). By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, educators and policymakers can glean actionable insights for promoting positive character development practices in schools, informed by both overarching trends and nuanced contextual factors (Choi & Park, 2021; Ji, DuBois, & Flay, 2021). This holistic approach enhances the relevance and applicability of the study's findings for educational practice and policy.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the factors shaping character development among primary school students, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this critical area. Through a mixed-method approach combining quantitative data analysis and qualitative exploration, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of character development practices within the school environment. The quantitative analysis revealed consistently high ratings across various dimensions of character development, indicating positive trends among students. Complementing this, qualitative insights delved into the daily interactions and experiences of students, shedding light on contextual factors influencing character development. Themes such as interactions with peers, compliance with school rules, and personal values emerged from qualitative data, enriching our understanding of this complex process. By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, actionable insights for promoting positive character development practices in schools can be gleaned, enhancing the relevance and applicability of the study's findings for educational practice and policy.

Limitation

However, this study has certain limitations. The sample size constraints and potential participant bias may have influenced the results. Additionally, the subjective nature of qualitative data interpretation poses challenges in ensuring objectivity. Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations through rigorous data collection and analysis procedures. Nonetheless, further research in this area is warranted to address these limitations and deepen our understanding of character development among school students.

Future Studies

For future studies, it is recommended to explore larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of findings. Longitudinal studies could also provide insights into the trajectories of character development over time. Additionally, comparative studies across different educational settings and cultural contexts could offer valuable insights into the variability of character development practices. Furthermore, exploring the effectiveness of specific interventions or programs aimed at fostering positive character traits could provide practical implications for educational practitioners and

policymakers. Overall, continued research in this area is crucial for informing evidence-based strategies to nurture the character development of future generations.

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