



# Misconceptions of Elementary School Teachers in Character Education: A Mixed Methods Study in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Character education is a strategic agenda in Indonesia's national education system; however, its implementation in elementary schools still faces various challenges. Previous studies have mostly highlighted implementation aspects, while teachers' misconceptions about character education have not been systematically examined. This study aims to identify the types of misconceptions elementary school teachers hold regarding character education, the factors causing them, and strategies for improvement. The research design employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach involving 150 elementary school teachers in Tasikmalaya Regency. Research instruments consisted of a 25-item Likert questionnaire with Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, complemented by semi-structured interviews. Findings show that 57% of teachers fall into the medium misconception category, 30% high, and 13% low. The main misconceptions are perceiving character education as identical to enforcing discipline, memorizing moral values, and being the sole responsibility of families. The dominant causal factors are the lack of formal training and the dominance of hidden curriculum. These findings emphasize the importance of sustainable teacher capacity-building programs, integrating character values into lesson plans, and school supervision. The limitation of this study lies in its regional scope and focus on teachers' perspectives, suggesting that future studies should involve students and parents.

**Keywords:** Character education; Elementary school teachers; Hidden curriculum; Misconceptions; Teacher training

## Introduction

Character education is one of the strategic agendas in the development of Indonesia's national education. Through the Character Education Strengthening (PPK) policy and the Pancasila Student Profile program, the government emphasizes that education should not only focus on academic achievement but also on shaping values, attitudes, and habits that reflect the nation's identity (Kemendikbud, 2021; Sufyadi et al., 2021; Asiaty & Hasanah, 2022; Permatasari et al., 2021; Windiyani et al., 2021). Character education at the elementary level forms an important foundation for building generations

who are intellectually smart, emotionally mature, and morally and socially integrated (Sufyadi et al., 2021; Bencsik et al., 2016; Rokhman et al., 2014; Fadlillah & Khorida, 2013; Hidayatullah, 2010; Setyaningrum et al., 2020).

Character education is defined as a systematic effort to instill values, norms, and good habits that shape responsible, integrity-driven, and socially caring individuals (Lickona, 1991; Fraser et al., 2021; Khoshhal & Guraya, 2016; Ernawanto et al., 2022). According to Lickona (1991), character education includes three dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. In Indonesia, it is reinforced by the Character

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Education Strengthening (PPK) policy and the Pancasila Student Profile.

Although its urgency has been emphasized, the practice of character education in elementary schools still faces challenges. Previous studies revealed that character education implementation is often formalistic, limited to ceremonial activities, or merely instilling discipline without integration into learning (Sufyadi et al., 2021; Alvunger, 2015; Annisa, 2019; Dewi et al., 2021; Nugroho, 2020; Sukma et al., 2022). A fundamental barrier frequently encountered is teachers' misconceptions about the nature of character education. Some teachers equate it with memorizing moral values, mere discipline rules, or primarily the responsibility of families.

Misconception refers to understandings that deviate from accepted scientific concepts (Treagust & Duit, 2009). In education, teachers' misconceptions can influence how they teach concepts to students (Dewi & Ibrahim, 2019; Dzulfikar & Vitantri, 2017). Research in science and mathematics shows that teachers' misconceptions often lead to recurring errors in teaching practices (Isrokatun et al., 2023). In character education, misconceptions risk reducing the meaning of values into mere discipline or memorization (Fitriya & Latif, 2022).

Conceptually, misconception refers to understandings that are inconsistent with accepted scientific concepts (Dewi & Ibrahim, 2019; Dzulfikar & Vitantri, 2017). In the context of character education, teachers' misconceptions may result in ineffective learning practices that emphasize outward compliance rather than internalizing values (McLoughlin et al., 2025). This condition is exacerbated by limited teacher training and the dominance of hidden curriculum, which makes character education unsystematic.

International research shows that teachers' understanding significantly affects classroom climate and the success of character education (Litsareva, 2017). An open classroom climate, with discussions and appreciation of differences in opinion, has been proven to improve learning outcomes, attitudes, and student participation (Jasny et al., 2019; Persson & Svensson, 2017; Abubakar et al., 2019). Recent studies also emphasize the importance of involving students in moral and civic discussions to strengthen character education (Kristjánsson et al., 2025).

International research on classroom climate shows that teachers' understanding plays a major role in creating a learning environment that supports students' attitude, value, and character development (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Fraser et al., 2021; Azer, 2005). However, studies specifically examining elementary teachers' misconceptions regarding character education, especially in Indonesia, remain limited. Hence, there is a research gap to address.

While much research discusses the implementation of character education in Indonesia, studies specifically focusing on elementary teachers' misconceptions remain scarce (Supranoto, 2015). This study fills that gap by identifying conceptual misconceptions, analyzing causal factors, and offering strategies for improvement based on teacher capacity building.

Based on this background, the objectives of this study are: (1) To identify the forms of elementary school teachers' misconceptions about character education. (2) To analyze the factors causing these misconceptions. (3) To formulate strategies to address misconceptions in character learning.

## Method

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach (Khan & Law, 2015). The first stage was a quantitative survey to measure elementary teachers' misconceptions about character education. The second stage involved in-depth interviews to enrich the quantitative findings with conceptual understanding. The subjects were 150 elementary school teachers in Cluster IV, Pagerageung Subdistrict, Tasikmalaya Regency. Sampling was purposive, considering teachers' involvement in implementing character education at their schools.

The quantitative instrument was a 25-item Likert scale questionnaire, consisting of 14 items measuring misconceptions and 11 items measuring causal factors. Reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha produced 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Content validity was ensured by expert judgment from three elementary education experts.

The qualitative instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, including questions about teachers' understanding of the nature of character education, classroom practices, and views on family versus school responsibilities.

In the first stage, questionnaires were distributed to willing teachers. Data collected were analyzed descriptively to categorize misconceptions (low, medium, high). In the second stage, 12 teachers and 3 principals were interviewed to further explore causes of misconceptions.

Quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, categories) and Cronbach's Alpha reliability. Additional simple correlation was used to explore relationships between teachers' background (e.g., teaching experience, training attended) and level of misconceptions.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, involving transcription, coding, theme identification, and triangulation with quantitative findings. Integration of both stages formed comprehensive conclusions.

## Result and Discussion

### Results

Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire data showed that among 150 elementary teachers, the majority fell into the medium misconception category (57%), followed by high (30%) and low (13%).

**Table 1.** Categories of Teachers' Misconceptions

Category	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Low	20	13%
Medium	85	57%
High	45	30%

The highest misconception scores indicated: (1) Character education primarily means enforcing discipline ( $M = 4.1$ ). (2) Character education is identical to religious moral values ( $M = 3.9$ ). (3) Character education is mainly the responsibility of families, not schools ( $M = 3.7$ ).

Correlation analysis showed that participation in teacher training negatively correlated with misconceptions ( $r = -0.42$ ), meaning that the more training teachers attended, the lower their misconceptions. In-depth interviews with 12 teachers and 3 principals revealed three themes: (1) Character as a natural process – Some teachers believe that character forms naturally as children grow. (2) Family responsibility outweighs school – Teachers view character education as mainly parents' duty. (3) Lack of formal training – Most teachers reported never receiving specific, practical training in character education.

### Discussion

The findings reveal that most elementary teachers still hold misconceptions about character education, with 57% at the medium and 30% at the high level. This supports previous Indonesian studies that highlighted formalistic and ceremonial approaches to character education (Samritin et al., 2023; Hariandi et al., 2023). However, this study contributes new insights by emphasizing that the problem lies not only in implementation but also in teachers' conceptual understanding.

The dominant misconceptions equate character education with discipline, memorization of moral values, and family responsibility. This aligns with (Kristjánsson et al., 2025), who found that teachers' misconceptions can hinder value internalization, leading to teaching that stresses external compliance without deep moral engagement.

Furthermore, the study found that lack of formal training significantly correlates with higher misconceptions. The negative correlation ( $r = -0.42$ ) supports international studies emphasizing the

importance of teacher capacity to create open, democratic, and conducive classroom climates for character education (Jasny et al., 2019; Persson & Svensson, 2017).

Teachers' tendency to assign responsibility for character education to families highlights a gap between national education policy and school practices. Yet, global literature stresses that effective character education requires collaboration among schools, families, and communities (Berkowitz & Bier, (2005); Bier, 2014; Lickona, 1991).

Thus, this study contributes to the literature by underscoring teachers' conceptual understanding as a prerequisite for effective implementation. Practically, it calls for ongoing teacher training that not only focuses on pedagogy but also clarifies concepts in line with global theory and practice.

## Conclusion

This study shows that most elementary teachers still hold misconceptions about character education. The most dominant are equating character education with enforcing discipline, memorizing moral values, and assigning responsibility mainly to families. The main causal factors are lack of formal training and dominance of hidden curriculum. This study enriches the literature by highlighting the conceptual dimension of teachers' misconceptions, which has previously received little attention. The findings confirm that conceptual understanding is a critical prerequisite for successful character education implementation. Implications include the need for continuous teacher training programs that not only focus on teaching strategies but also clarify character education concepts. Integrating character values into lesson plans (RPP) and learning evaluations is also essential to reduce misconceptions. Education policy must prioritize character education through teacher competency development, school supervision, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Limitations of this study include its focus on one region (Tasikmalaya) and only teachers' perspectives, which restrict generalizability. Future research should involve students, parents, and principals for a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, advanced quantitative analysis such as structural equation modeling (SEM) or hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) may provide deeper insights into factors influencing teachers' misconceptions.

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### Author Contributions

Conceptualization, preparation of the initial draft of the manuscript, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, N.S.; data curation, review and editing of the manuscript, visualization, W.S., and Y.R. All authors have read and approved the published version of the manuscript.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author states there is no conflict of interest.

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