

Building character together: The synergistic role of parents and communities in shaping school values

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Abstract

Character education is pivotal in fostering moral and ethical values among students. This study uniquely examines the synergistic impact of parental and community involvement in character education within schools, distinguishing itself by exploring their intertwined contributions in diverse socio-economic contexts. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis across three schools. The findings reveal that parental involvement, including reinforcing values at home and participating in school activities, significantly enhances students' moral development. Complementarily, community engagement through mentorship, local resources, and partnerships enriches character-building efforts. This combined approach addresses gaps in the literature by highlighting the dynamic interplay between home and community, which collectively supports students' moral development more effectively than isolated efforts. Despite its potential, challenges such as differing values, limited time, and communication gaps remain barriers to optimal collaboration. This research emphasizes innovative strategies to align parental and community contributions, offering theoretical insights and practical recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance character education outcomes.

Keywords: Character education, parental involvement, community engagement, moral development, collaborative education, qualitative study, educational partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Character education is a foundational element in cultivating moral and ethical values among students, preparing them to navigate complex societal challenges. While schools play a crucial role as the primary sites for formal education, their efforts in character-building cannot achieve maximum impact in isolation. The active involvement of parents and the broader community is pivotal in creating a holistic educational ecosystem that fosters students' character development (Susanto et al., 2022).

Extensive research underscores the benefits of character education in improving behavioral and academic outcomes (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005). Furthermore, parental involvement has been shown

to enhance student motivation and learning outcomes (Epstein et al., 2018), while community engagement contributes to enriched learning environments and social support (Villanueva et al., 2024). However, existing studies often treat these two forms of involvement independently, leaving a significant gap in understanding their combined effects. This study addresses this gap by investigating how parental and community involvement synergistically contribute to the effectiveness of character education.

The necessity of addressing parental and community involvement together stems from their intertwined influence on students. For instance, parents reinforce values at home while community members provide mentorship and resources, creating a seamless continuum of character education that bridges home, school, and society. As (Thomas et al., 2022) emphasize, collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities are essential to instill consistent moral and ethical foundations in students. Yet, there is limited empirical evidence exploring how these collaborations specifically affect character education.

This research aims to examine the synergistic impact of parental and community involvement on character education in schools. It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does parental involvement influence the character education of students at school?
2. What roles do community members play in supporting character education initiatives?
3. What challenges arise in fostering effective collaboration among parents, community members, and schools?

The findings of this study hold implications for educators, policymakers, and researchers by shedding light on collaborative strategies that enhance character education outcomes. For educators, this research offers insights into aligning efforts between parents and community members to reinforce character-building initiatives. For policymakers, it provides evidence to inform the design of inclusive educational frameworks that integrate family and community participation. Finally, for researchers, this study fills a critical gap in the literature by examining the combined impact of parental and community involvement, offering a foundation for future empirical exploration.

Material and Method

2.1 Materials

The materials for this study were drawn from three primary schools located in urban and suburban areas, each characterized by diverse socio-economic contexts. These schools were selected purposively to capture a wide range of experiences in implementing character education programs. The selection criteria included the schools' active engagement in character education initiatives, the presence of well-established collaborations with parents and community organizations, and socio-economic diversity. These criteria were chosen to ensure the findings provide meaningful insights into different contexts, reducing the risk of bias associated with homogeneity. Participants in this study included 15 teachers, 20 parents, and 10 community members. The teachers were selected based on their extensive experience in character education and their ability to provide rich, informed perspectives on strategies used to engage parents and communities. Parents were chosen from active members of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) or those with a demonstrated history of involvement in character education-related activities. Community participants included representatives from local non-profit organizations, religious leaders, and volunteers actively contributing to character-building initiatives in schools. These selection criteria aimed to ensure that participants had relevant experiences and insights, enhancing the credibility and transferability of the findings.

2.2 Data collection procedures

To achieve the research objectives, a multi-method qualitative approach comprising in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis was employed. This triangulated approach ensured a robust and comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants (Creswell and Poth, 2016). To mitigate social desirability bias, the interviews emphasized confidentiality and the use of neutral, non-leading questions. For example, instead of asking, “How do you contribute to character education effectively?” participants were asked, “Can you describe your experiences with character education initiatives?” This allowed for authentic and candid responses. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent.

Participant Observations

Observations were carried out during school activities such as workshops, parent-teacher meetings, and character-building events. These observations provided direct insights into real-life interactions and the dynamics of collaboration between stakeholders. Field notes captured details such as participant behaviors, non-verbal cues, and the overall atmosphere of the events (Nnunduma and Hussein, n.d.)

Document Analysis

Relevant school documents, such as PTA meeting minutes, newsletters, and reports on community engagement, were reviewed to complement the primary data. This provided a deeper understanding of the formal structures supporting character education initiatives and helped to triangulate findings from interviews and observations (Mulianti, Sulisworo, et al., 2023).

2.3 Data analysis procedures

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed these steps:

Familiarization

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and field notes and documents were thoroughly reviewed. This process allowed the researcher to immerse themselves in the data and identify preliminary ideas.

Initial Coding with NVivo

NVivo software was utilized to systematically code the data. The use of NVivo ensured consistency and transparency in the coding process, as the software allowed for organizing and managing large datasets efficiently (Shi et al., 2023). Codes were generated inductively, reflecting recurring ideas and significant patterns in the data. For instance, the code “Parental Reinforcement of Values” emerged from repeated references to parents’ roles in reinforcing character education at home.

Theme Development

Codes were organized into broader themes that addressed the research questions. For example, the themes “Parental Engagement in Character Education” and “Community Support for Moral Development” were derived from the initial codes. NVivo’s visualization tools, such as word trees and cluster maps, were used to ensure themes were coherent and well-supported by the data.

Validation and Triangulation

To enhance the rigor of the analysis, findings from interviews were compared with observations and document reviews. Any discrepancies were re-examined to ensure accurate and reliable interpretations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The findings from this study reveal three overarching themes that encapsulate the impact of parental and community involvement in character education: (1) The Role of Parental Involvement, (2) The Impact of Community Engagement, and (3) Challenges in Collaborative Efforts. These themes are further divided into sub-themes to provide a detailed exploration of the data.

a. The Role of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a cornerstone of effective character education. Parents contribute by reinforcing values taught at school and by actively participating in school-led programs. This theme is divided into two sub-themes for clarity.

1) Reinforcement of Values at Home A consistent finding across interviews and observations was the importance of parents reinforcing values at home. Teachers emphasized that when parents engage in regular communication with educators and align their efforts with school objectives, the outcomes are significantly more impactful. For instance, Respondent 3, a teacher with over a decade of experience, stated:

“Parents who stay in touch with us and regularly ask about their child’s progress in character-related activities tend to have children who show stronger moral development.”

This alignment not only ensures that students receive consistent messages about moral and ethical values but also strengthens the connection between home and school environments. Document analysis further supported this finding, with PTA meeting minutes highlighting frequent discussions on strategies for reinforcing values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility. Moreover, parents who consistently model these values at home create a powerful learning environment for their children. A parent (Respondent 6) noted:

“We always make sure to discuss the moral lessons our children learn at school and try to apply them in daily life. It’s a way to ensure they don’t see these lessons as just theoretical.”

2) Participation in School Programs Parental participation in school-organized activities plays an equally vital role in character education. Through workshops, parent-teacher meetings, and volunteer programs, parents actively engage in building a cohesive educational framework for their children. Respondent 7, a parent, shared:

“I often volunteer during school events because I want my child to see the importance of community service and giving back. It’s not just about teaching these values but also demonstrating them through actions.”

Observations during events such as character-building workshops revealed that parental involvement boosts not only the success of these programs but also fosters a sense of community among families. Parents’ active presence sends a strong message to students about the importance of shared values and collective responsibility.

b. The Impact of Community Engagement

Community engagement complements parental involvement by offering external support and broader resources that enhance character education initiatives. This theme encompasses two key sub-themes.

1) Support from Local Organizations and Religious Leaders Community organizations, including local non-profits and religious groups, play an instrumental role in character education by providing mentorship and additional resources. Respondent 12, a community leader, highlighted:

“We collaborate with the school to host after-school programs that focus on character development. It’s a joint effort where we bring in speakers and mentors to guide the students.”

Such collaborations were observed to significantly enrich the character education curriculum, particularly in providing real-world applications of the moral lessons taught in classrooms. Document analysis of newsletters revealed that partnerships with local organizations often included mentorship programs, career talks, and community service projects, all of which reinforced the values of empathy, integrity, and accountability. Additionally, religious leaders contribute by offering moral guidance that aligns with both cultural and educational objectives. A teacher (Respondent 4) shared:

“Religious leaders have helped our students understand the deeper meanings of values like respect and compassion, providing a perspective that we as teachers cannot always offer.”

2) Promoting Social Responsibility and a Sense of Belonging Community engagement fosters a sense of belonging among students while encouraging them to take on social responsibilities. Respondent 5, a teacher, observed:

“When students see community members actively involved in school activities, it motivates them to contribute positively and reinforces the idea that character education isn’t confined to the classroom.”

Field observations showed that community involvement in projects like neighborhood clean-ups or fundraising events creates tangible opportunities for students to practice the values they learn at school. This hands-on approach helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, cultivating a stronger sense of civic duty in students.

c. Challenges in Collaborative Efforts

Despite the many benefits of parental and community involvement, several challenges hinder the realization of their full potential. These challenges are categorized into three sub-themes.

1) Differing Expectations and Values One of the primary challenges identified was the difference in values and expectations among parents, community members, and schools. Respondent 10, a teacher, stated:

“Not all parents share the same values regarding what should be emphasized in character education, which can create conflicts.”

Such conflicts often arise when the moral priorities of schools, such as promoting equality and inclusivity, differ from the values emphasized by certain families or community groups. These discrepancies can lead to inconsistencies in the moral messages received by students, causing confusion and reducing the overall effectiveness of character education initiatives.

2) Limited Time and Resources Time constraints faced by working parents and resource limitations for community organizations were frequently cited as barriers to effective collaboration. Respondent 8, a parent, remarked:

“I want to be more involved, but my job doesn’t allow me the flexibility to attend meetings or

volunteer regularly.”

Similarly, community leaders pointed out that while they are eager to support schools, limited funding and personnel often restrict the scope of their involvement. Document analysis confirmed this, with meeting minutes revealing recurring discussions about the need for additional financial and human resources to sustain collaborative programs.

3) Communication Gaps Lack of effective communication among schools, parents, and community members was another major barrier. Respondent 15, a community leader, explained:

“Sometimes we don’t know what the school needs or what the parents expect from us. Better communication channels could help us work together more effectively.”

Observations of meetings and events showed that miscommunication often resulted in missed opportunities for collaboration. For example, a planned mentorship program had to be postponed due to misunderstandings about scheduling, highlighting the need for clearer and more consistent communication strategies.

The findings illustrate the interconnected roles of parents and community members in character education. While their contributions are distinct parents providing reinforcement and participation, and communities offering broader support their collaboration creates a comprehensive and impactful character education framework. However, challenges such as differing values, limited resources, and communication gaps underscore the need for schools to establish more robust strategies for aligning these efforts.

3.2 Discussion

This study explored the collaborative roles of parents and communities in character education, revealing significant insights into their synergistic effects and the challenges in aligning their efforts. The findings enrich both theoretical and practical understanding of character education, advancing frameworks such as (Epstein et al., 2018) model of overlapping spheres of influence and filling gaps in empirical literature on collaborative approaches.

The results affirm and extend (Epstein et al., 2018) model, which posits that collaboration among families, schools, and communities enhances student outcomes. While the model emphasizes the additive benefits of stakeholder collaboration, this study demonstrates how synergy between parents and communities specifically amplifies the impact of character education. For example, the integration of parental reinforcement at home and community mentorship provides a continuum of moral education that bridges students’ experiences across different settings (Moreira et al., 2023). While Epstein’s model outlines ideal conditions for collaboration, this study adds a critical layer by examining the complexities of implementing these partnerships in diverse educational contexts. The findings underscore the importance of addressing misaligned values and communication barriers to achieve the full potential of stakeholder collaboration (Sarah et al., 2023).

This study also contributes new insights to the existing literature on character education. While prior research has established the individual benefits of parental involvement (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005; Dyson et al., 2023) and community engagement (Xu et al., 2023) this study extends these findings by focusing on their combined influence. Specifically, it highlights how collaborative efforts between parents and communities create unique opportunities for moral and ethical development. For example, when parents actively reinforce values at home while community organizations provide mentorship and resources, students experience a seamless integration of character education across multiple domains (Mulianti, Sulisworo, et al., 2023). This interconnected approach ensures that lessons taught at school are consistently reinforced, making the moral development process more robust and impactful (Chen et al., 2023). Moreover, this study provides a detailed examination of the mechanisms driving effective collaboration, such as regular communication and co-led initiatives,

offering actionable guidance for integrating efforts between schools, families, and communities (Villanueva et al., 2024).

The findings also have significant practical implications for improving collaborative efforts in character education. One major challenge identified was the lack of effective communication between schools, parents, and community members (Goh et al., 2023). To address this, schools can implement structured communication channels that facilitate alignment among stakeholders. Regular joint meetings, for instance, can provide a platform for discussing shared goals, addressing challenges, and updating progress. Such meetings can be supplemented with digital tools, such as dedicated school apps or messaging platforms like WhatsApp, to ensure real-time communication and feedback (Qazi and Mtenzi, 2023). By establishing clear and consistent communication channels, schools can bridge gaps between stakeholders, reducing misunderstandings and enhancing collaboration (Nawab and Sharar, 2022).

Another challenge identified was the differing values and expectations among stakeholders, which often led to inconsistencies in character education. Schools can address this issue by organizing workshops that bring together parents, community members, and educators to collaboratively define shared values and goals (Williams et al., 2003). These workshops can foster mutual understanding and create a unified vision for character education. Additionally, cultural sensitivity training for teachers and community leaders can help them navigate diverse value systems, ensuring that collaboration respects the cultural and moral backgrounds of all stakeholders (Berlian and Huda, 2022). By prioritizing value alignment, schools can mitigate conflicts and create a cohesive framework for character education (Joseph and Efron, 2005).

Resource limitations and time constraints were also cited as barriers to effective collaboration. To overcome these challenges, schools can adopt more flexible volunteering models that allow parents and community members to contribute according to their availability (Kim et al., 2023). For example, remote mentorship programs or weekend events can accommodate working parents who may otherwise struggle to participate. Similarly, partnerships with local businesses and organizations can provide financial or in-kind support for character education initiatives, alleviating resource constraints. Such collaborations not only enhance the scope of programs but also strengthen the relationship between schools and their surrounding communities (Saputra and Budimansyah, 2022).

In addition to addressing challenges, the study offers insights into how schools can enhance synergy in collaborative efforts. One effective strategy is designing co-led initiatives that involve parents and community members in both planning and execution (Sarah et al., 2023). For instance, parents and community leaders can co-facilitate workshops on topics such as empathy, responsibility, and civic engagement, ensuring that the perspectives of all stakeholders are represented (Alvarez Gutiérrez et al., 2022). Schools can also create mentorship networks that pair students with community leaders who can provide consistent guidance and serve as role models (Opara et al., 2023). These initiatives not only reinforce the values taught at school but also build stronger relationships among stakeholders, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for students' character development (Mulianti, Sulisworo, et al., 2023).

Theoretical and practical contributions from this study extend beyond addressing challenges. By refining (Epstein et al., 2018) model to include interactional dynamics and barriers to collaboration, this study provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding stakeholder involvement in character education (Sarah et al., 2023). It suggests that future theoretical models should account for the complexities of aligning diverse values, addressing communication gaps, and leveraging the unique contributions of each stakeholder group (Stray et al., 2024). From a practical standpoint, the findings offer concrete steps for schools to create a more integrated and effective character education system. For instance, by combining parental reinforcement at home with community mentorship, schools can create a holistic educational environment that supports students' moral and ethical growth (Mulianti, Sulisworo, et al., 2023).

While the findings are robust, this study acknowledges certain limitations that could be addressed in future research. The focus on three schools within specific socio-economic contexts may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings. Expanding the scope of research to include a broader range of schools and cultural contexts could provide deeper insights into how collaborative approaches vary across different environments (Govindarajoo et al., 2023). Additionally, the study primarily relied on the perspectives of adults teachers, parents, and community members without incorporating the voices of students. Understanding students' experiences and perceptions of parental and community involvement could provide a more holistic view of the impact of collaborative efforts on character education. Finally, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of these collaborations, offering insights into their sustained impact on students' character development (Mehari et al., 2024).

In summary, this study advances the theoretical and empirical understanding of collaborative approaches in character education. By emphasizing the synergistic benefits of parental and community involvement, it contributes to the refinement of Epstein's (2018) model and addresses gaps in existing literature. The findings also offer practical strategies for overcoming challenges and enhancing stakeholder collaboration, providing a roadmap for schools to optimize their character education programs (Karwur et al., 2022). By bridging communication gaps, aligning values, and leveraging stakeholder resources, schools can create a cohesive and supportive environment that nurtures students' moral and ethical growth. These contributions underscore the importance of an integrated approach to character education, one that embraces the collective efforts of families, communities, and educational institutions (Zulela et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the influence of parental and community involvement on character education in schools, highlighting the critical role these stakeholders play in shaping the moral and ethical development of students. The findings revealed that active parental engagement, such as reinforcing values at home and participating in school activities, significantly enhances character education outcomes. Community involvement, particularly through local organizations and religious leaders, provides additional support and resources, enriching the learning experience and helping to instill positive character traits in students. However, the research also identified several challenges, including differing values, time constraints, and communication gaps, which can hinder effective collaboration.

The contributions of this study lie in its examination of the synergistic effects of parental and community involvement, providing a more integrated understanding of their combined impact on character education. The results support Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence, suggesting that when parents, schools, and communities work together cohesively, they create a holistic educational environment that promotes character growth in students.

Despite its valuable insights, the study faced limitations related to its sample scope and reliance on self-reported data, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to include a more diverse range of schools and gather perspectives directly from students to provide a comprehensive view of the impact of stakeholder involvement on character development.

In conclusion, fostering strong partnerships between parents, community members, and schools is essential for effective character education. By addressing the challenges of collaboration and leveraging the strengths of each stakeholder group, educators can create a supportive environment that nurtures the character and values of students, preparing them to be responsible and ethical members of society. This research underscores the importance of an integrated approach to character education, one that embraces the collective efforts of families, communities, and educational institutions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Y. Y conducted the research and formulated the issue. M. D. E. helped to develop the theoretical framework and evaluate the research methods. N. R. A. evaluated the results that have been done. N.

N helped to improve this article. All authors have contributed to the writing of this article.

DECLARATION

The authors of this study certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The dataset generated during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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