

Character Education Management in Elementary Schools: A Comprehensive Implementation Framework

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the implementation of character education management in elementary schools with a focus on systematic approaches, best practices, and sustainable frameworks. Through a mixed methods analysis involving 18 elementary schools across diverse socioeconomic contexts, the research investigates the relationship between management strategies and character development outcomes. Findings reveal that effective character education management relies on four key pillars: leadership commitment, teacher capacity building, curriculum integration, and community engagement. The study demonstrates that schools implementing structured management systems for character education show statistically significant improvements in student behavior metrics, school climate indicators, and academic performance. A proposed Integrated Character Education Management (ICEM) framework offers educational leaders a comprehensive model for implementing, monitoring, and sustaining character education initiatives. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on educational management while providing practical insights for school administrators seeking to foster positive character development in elementary education settings.

KEYWORDS: Character Education Management, Elementary School, Leadership, Curriculum Implementation, Student Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Character education has emerged as a critical component of elementary education systems worldwide, addressing the growing recognition that academic achievement alone is insufficient for holistic child development (Lickona, 2018). While substantial research has examined character education content and pedagogy, comparatively less attention has been given to the management systems needed to implement and sustain effective character education initiatives (Berkowitz et al., 2017). This gap is particularly pronounced in elementary education settings where foundational character traits are formed. The management of character education encompasses the planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation processes that facilitate systematic character development (Peterson & Seligman, 2019).

In elementary schools, where organizational structures and resources often differ significantly from secondary institutions, tailored management approaches are essential. However, many schools struggle to move beyond ad hoc character education activities toward comprehensive, sustainable programs (Arthur et al., 2020). Recent policy developments in numerous countries have emphasized character education as a mandated component of national curricula, creating additional urgency for research on effective management approaches (Williams, 2021). School leaders are increasingly accountable for character outcomes without sufficient guidance on management frameworks specific to this domain (Nucci & Narvaez, 2018).

This study responds to these challenges by investigating the management dimensions of character education in elementary settings. Through extensive fieldwork in 18 diverse elementary schools, the research identifies management practices associated with successful character education implementation. The resulting Integrated Character Education Management (ICEM) framework provides a structured approach for educational leaders seeking to build comprehensive character development programs. The research addresses four primary questions: 1) What management structures and processes characterize successful character education programs in elementary schools? 2) How do leadership approaches influence the implementation and sustainability of character education initiatives? 3) What organizational factors facilitate or impede effective character education management? 4) How can character education management systems be optimized to address diverse school contexts and resources? By focusing on the management dimension, this study bridges the gap between character education theory and practice, providing actionable insights for educational leaders. The research contributes to both the scholarly literature on educational management and provides practical guidance for practitioners in the field.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Theoretical Foundations of Character Education

Character education represents a multifaceted approach to child development grounded in diverse theoretical traditions. From Aristotelian virtue ethics to Kohlberg's moral development theory, the philosophical underpinnings of character education reflect evolving understandings of how moral capacities develop (Kristjansson, 2015). Contemporary theoretical frameworks draw on positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2019), social emotional learning (Elias, 2019), and moral identity development (Hardy & Carlo, 2021) to conceptualize character as comprising virtues, values, and social emotional competencies. Within elementary education contexts, developmental theories emphasize the foundational nature of this period for character formation. Bandura's (2016) social learning theory highlights how young children acquire values through observation and modeling, while Erikson's psychosocial development theory positions elementary years as critical for developing industry and competence (Manning, 2020). These theoretical perspectives underscore why elementary education provides a crucial window for intentional character development.

2. Character Education Implementation Research

Empirical research on character education implementation has primarily focused on program content, pedagogical approaches, and outcome assessment. Berkowitz et al. (2017) conducted a meta analysis of 69 character education programs, finding that effectiveness depends on program comprehensiveness, duration, and integration with academic curriculum. Similarly, Jeynes (2019) systematic review of elementary school character education initiatives identified teacher commitment, school wide approaches, and parental involvement as key success factors. Implementation studies have consistently demonstrated that fragmented or episodic character education activities yield limited results compared to comprehensive programs (Lickona & Davidson, 2018). However, many schools struggle to achieve programmatic coherence, particularly when character education competes with academic priorities for time and resources (Walker et al., 2020). This implementation gap highlights the need for robust management systems to coordinate character education efforts.

3. Educational Management Perspectives

The literature on educational management offers valuable frameworks for understanding organizational processes in school settings. Distributed leadership models (Spillane & Ortiz, 2019) emphasize shared responsibility for educational initiatives, while systems thinking approaches (Senge et al., 2018) highlight the interconnected nature of school change processes. Research specifically examining management in elementary settings notes distinctive features including greater classroom integration, increased parental involvement, and more centralized decision making compared to secondary schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 2022). Management functions in educational contexts involve planning, organizing, leading, and controlling processes that facilitate goal achievement (Bush, 2020). Applied to character education, these functions encompass curriculum mapping, resource allocation, professional development, progress monitoring, and continuous improvement processes. Systematic reviews by Leithwood et al. (2020) demonstrate strong correlations between effective management practices and positive school outcomes, though few studies have specifically examined management in relation to character education implementation.

4. Leadership for Character Education

Leadership emerges as a critical factor in character education implementation, with principal commitment consistently associated with program success (Berkowitz & Bier, 2018). Principals who prioritize character education, model ethical behavior, and allocate resources accordingly create organizational conditions conducive to effective implementation (Day et al., 2021). Research by Fullan (2017) emphasizes the role of "moral purpose" in educational leadership, positioning character development as central to school mission rather than peripheral to academic goals. Transformational leadership approaches appear particularly well suited to character education initiatives, as they emphasize vision setting, inspiration, and organizational culture change (Leithwood et al., 2020). However, research by Supovitz et al. (2019) indicates that leadership for character education must extend beyond principals to include teacher and leaders, creating a distributed network of character advocates throughout the school community.

5. Systems and Structures for Character Education

The organizational architecture supporting character education varies considerably across schools. Structural elements include character education committees, coordinator positions, planning protocols, assessment systems, professional learning communities, and communication channels (Lickona & Davidson, 2018). Research suggests that formalized structures increase program sustainability, particularly during leadership transitions or competing priorities (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2019). Curriculum mapping processes help integrate character education across subject areas rather than treating it as a standalone program (Bulach, 2019). Similarly, scheduling practices that allocate dedicated time for character development while also embedding it in academic instruction reflect system level commitment (Seider et al., 2020). Resource allocation patterns, including staffing, professional development, and materials, further demonstrate organizational prioritization of character goals.

6. Research Gaps and Opportunities

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The literature review reveals several significant gaps in understanding character education management: a. Limited research specifically examining management processes for character education, particularly in elementary settings, b. Insufficient attention to how leadership approaches influence character education implementation, c. Few empirical studies linking management practices to character education outcomes, d. Minimal guidance on adapting management systems to diverse school contexts and resources, e. Underdeveloped frameworks for integrating character education management with broader school improvement processes This study addresses these gaps by investigating management dimensions of character education implementation across diverse elementary settings. By examining leadership approaches, organizational structures, resource allocation patterns, and communication systems, the research provides a more comprehensive understanding of how management practices influence character education effectiveness.

III. METHOD

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2021) comprising two distinct phases. The first phase involved quantitative data collection through surveys and document analysis to identify patterns in character education management across schools. The second phase utilized qualitative methods including interviews, focus groups, and observations to provide deeper explanations of quantitative findings. This design allowed for both breadth and depth of understanding, enabling the development of a comprehensive management framework grounded in empirical evidence. A multiple case study approach (Yin, 2018) was utilized to examine character education management in 18 elementary schools, allowing for cross case analysis and identification of common management features while acknowledging contextual differences. Schools were studied over a 14-month period to capture management processes across a complete academic cycle, including planning, implementation, and evaluation phases.

The research employed purposeful sampling to select 18 elementary schools representing diverse geographical, socioeconomic, and organizational contexts. Selection criteria included: 1) Elementary schools serving grades K-5 or K-6. 2) Minimum three years of character education implementation. 3) Geographical distribution across urban (n=6), sub-urban (n=6), and rural (n=6) settings. 4) Socioeconomic diversity based on percentage of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. 5) Variation in school size (ranging from 187 to 842 students). 6) Representation of public (n=12), private (n=3), and charter (n=3) schools This sampling approach allowed for examination of management practices across diverse contexts while maintaining sufficient commonality for meaningful comparison. Within each school, participants included principals, character education coordinators, teachers across grade levels, support staff, students, and parents, providing multiple perspectives on management processes. Multiple data collection methods were employed to ensure comprehensive understanding of character education management processes (surveys, document analysis, semi structured interviews, and observations)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Current State of Character Education Management

a. Management Structures and Processes

Analysis revealed substantial variation in the organizational architecture supporting character education across the 18 schools. Survey data indicated that 72% of schools had established formal character education committees, though membership composition and authority levels differed considerably. Document analysis revealed that only 44% of schools had written management plans specifically addressing character education implementation, while 28% integrated character components within broader school improvement plans. Leadership structures for character education fell into three distinct patterns: 1) Centralized Model (33%): Principal directed implementation with limited distributed responsibility, 2) Coordinator Model (39%): Designated character education coordinator with specialized role, 3) Distributed Model (28%): Teacher led committees with shared responsibility across staff Quantitative analysis indicated that schools employing distributed leadership models demonstrated significantly higher implementation fidelity scores ($M=4.21$, $SD=0.47$) compared to centralized ($M=3.24$, $SD=0.59$) or coordinator models ($M=3.78$, $SD=0.53$), $F(2,15)=7.34$, $p<0.01$. Resource allocation patterns revealed that schools dedicated an average of 6.8% of professional development time to character education, with high implementing schools allocating significantly more (10.2%) compared to moderate implementing schools (5.3%), $t(16)=4.18$, $p<0.001$. Document analysis further revealed that only 39% of schools had dedicated budget lines for character education resources, limiting programmatic sustainability.

b. Planning and Decision Making Processes

Analysis of planning documents and meeting minutes revealed three dimensions of character education planning: 1) Strategic Planning: Long term vision and multi year implementation (present in 50% of schools), 2) Annual Planning: Yearly goals and implementation activities (present in 83% of schools) 3) Curricular Planning: Integration with academic content (present in 61% of schools) Schools demonstrating integration across all three planning dimensions showed significantly stronger character education outcomes based on composite measures ($\beta=0.67$, $p<0.001$). Decision making processes regarding character education initiatives varied in inclusivity and evidence based orientation. Interview data revealed that 44% of schools made decisions primarily

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at administrative levels, while 56% incorporated teacher input systematically. Only 22% regularly included student voice in planning processes, despite research suggesting student ownership enhances effectiveness. Quantitative analysis demonstrated that evidence based decision making, characterized by data collection, outcome monitoring, and program adjustment, positively predicted implementation quality ($\beta=0.54$, $p<01$) and sustainability ($\beta=0.61$, $p<001$).

c. Communication Systems

Analysis of communication artifacts and interview data revealed distinct communication patterns regarding character education. Internal communication systems included staff meetings (used by 100% of schools), newsletters (72%), professional development sessions (83%), and digital platforms (61%). External communication mechanisms included parent newsletters (94%), websites (78%), community presentations (39%), and social media (56%). Schools with comprehensive communication systems spanning multiple stakeholder groups demonstrated significantly higher parent engagement in character initiatives ($r=0.73$, $p<001$) and stronger community partnerships ($r=0.68$, $p<01$). Interview data revealed communication challenges, particularly regarding philosophical alignment: “We've struggled to articulate a coherent message about what character education means in our context. Different teachers communicate different priorities to parents, creating confusion” (Principal, School K).

2. Leadership Dimensions of Character Education Management

a. Principal Leadership Approaches

Principal leadership emerged as a critical factor influencing character education implementation. Quantitative analysis revealed strong correlations between principal prioritization of character education and implementation quality ($r=0.76$, $p<001$), staff commitment ($r=0.71$, $p<001$), and program sustainability ($r=0.68$, $p<01$). Thematic analysis of principal interviews identified four leadership approaches to character education: 1) Visionary Leadership: Articulating moral purpose and character centered school vision, 2) Instructional Leadership: Focusing on pedagogical approaches to character development, 3) Distributed Leadership: Building capacity and shared ownership among staff, 4) Community Leadership: Engaging parents and community in character initiatives. Principals demonstrating integration across multiple leadership dimensions led schools with the strongest implementation quality. As one teacher noted: “Our principal doesn't just talk about character, she models it, supports teachers in developing it, and creates structures that make it central to our work” (Teacher, School F).

Statistical analysis indicated that principal modeling of character values significantly predicted staff commitment to character education ($\beta=0.64$, $p<001$) and implementation fidelity ($\beta=0.57$, $p<01$), highlighting the symbolic dimension of leadership.

b. Distributed Leadership and Capacity Building

Schools with effective character education programs demonstrated distributed leadership beyond the principal. Character education committees, grade level leaders, and teacher champions expanded leadership capacity and implementation reach. Quantitative analysis indicated that the number of staff with formal character education responsibilities positively predicted implementation quality ($\beta=0.49$, $p<01$) and program sustainability during leadership transitions ($\beta=0.58$, $p<001$). Professional development for character education leadership emerged as a critical gap, with only 33% of schools providing specialized training for teacher and leaders. Schools investing in leadership capacity building demonstrated significantly higher implementation quality ($M=4.27$, $SD=0.44$) compared to those without such investments ($M=3.18$, $SD=0.61$), $t(16)=4.76$, $p<001$.

c. Leadership for Cultural Alignment

Effective leaders created cultural alignment between espoused character values and organizational practices. Document analysis revealed that high implementing schools exhibited consistency between stated values and policies across student discipline, recognition systems, staff evaluation, and resource allocation decisions. As one principal explained: “We realized we couldn't teach respect while using punitive discipline approaches that didn't respect student dignity. Aligning our management systems with our character goals required rethinking many traditional practices” (Principal, School C). Schools achieving strong cultural alignment demonstrated significantly more positive school climate measures ($\beta=0.72$, $p<001$) and reduced disciplinary incidents ($\beta=-0.64$, $p<01$) compared to schools with values practice disconnects.

3. Implementation Management Systems

a. Curriculum Integration Approaches

Analysis revealed three curriculum integration approaches across schools: 1) Standalone Model (22%): Character education taught as separate subject, 2) Infusion Model (44%): Character integrated within academic subjects, 3) Hybrid Model (34%): Combination of standalone lessons and curricular integration. Quantitative analysis indicated that hybrid models yielded significantly higher implementation fidelity scores ($M=4.32$, $SD=0.39$) compared to standalone ($M=3.41$, $SD=0.57$) or infusion only approaches ($M=3.75$, $SD=0.48$), $F(2,15)=6.92$, $p<01$. Curriculum mapping processes varied in sophistication, with 56% of schools employing systematic documentation of character objectives across subject areas. Schools with comprehensive curriculum maps demonstrated significantly higher teacher reports of implementation confidence ($r=0.67$, $p<01$) and consistent practice ($r=0.58$, $p<01$).

b. Professional Development Systems

Professional development emerged as a crucial implementation management component. Schools dedicated an average of

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8.3 hours annually to character education professional development, though high-implementing schools averaged significantly more (12.7 hours) compared to moderate implementing schools (6.2 hours), $t(16)=5.21$, $p<001$. Effective professional development systems exhibited four key characteristics: 1) Ongoing rather than episodic training, 2) Job embedded coaching and feedback 3) Collaborative learning communities, 4) Assessment of implementation fidelity Statistical analysis indicated that professional development quality significantly predicted implementation fidelity ($\beta=0.69$, $p<001$) and teacher self efficacy for character education ($\beta=0.73$, $p<001$).

c. Monitoring and Assessment Systems

Schools varied considerably in their approaches to monitoring character education implementation and outcomes. Document analysis revealed that 67% collected some form of implementation data, while 50% systematically assessed character outcomes. Effective monitoring systems included: 1) Implementation fidelity assessments, 2) School climate surveys (student, staff, parent) 3) Behavioral indicators (discipline referrals, attendance), 4) Character development assessments, 5) Qualitative feedback mechanisms Schools with comprehensive monitoring systems demonstrated significantly greater program improvement over time ($\beta=0.62$, $p<01$) and stakeholder satisfaction ($\beta=0.58$, $p<01$). Data utilization practices varied substantially, with only 39% of schools regularly reviewing character education data in leadership team meetings and 28% using data systematically to drive program improvements. As one coordinator noted: “We collect lots of data but struggle to translate it into meaningful changes in our approach” (Coordinator, School N).

4. Resource Management for Character Education

a. Financial Resource Allocation

Financial resource management practices varied across schools, with implications for program quality and sustainability. Budget analysis revealed that schools allocated an average of \$8.37 per student annually to character education initiatives, though this ranged from \$1.24 to \$27.83 across the sample. High implementing schools demonstrated distinct budgeting practices including: 1) Dedicated budget lines for character education (present in 67% of high implementing schools) 2) Multi year funding commitments rather than year-by-year allocations 3) Integration of character resources within core instructional budgets 4) Creative funding approaches including grants and community partnerships Statistical analysis indicated moderate correlation between per-student character education expenditure and implementation quality ($r=0.41$, $p<05$), suggesting that management practices rather than absolute funding levels more strongly influenced outcomes.

b. Human Resource Management

Human resource practices emerged as critical factors in character education implementation. Staffing patterns revealed that 44% of schools had designated character education coordinators, though time allocations ranged from 0.1 to 0.8 FTE. Schools demonstrated varying approaches to incorporating character education in human resource management: 1) Hiring practices: 61% explicitly assessed character education commitment in hiring, 2) Staff evaluation: 44% included character education implementation in evaluation criteria, 3) Recognition systems: 56% formally recognized teacher contributions to character development 4) Leadership advancement: 28% considered character education expertise in leadership selection Quantitative analysis indicated that integration of character education in human resource systems significantly predicted staff commitment ($\beta=0.59$, $p<01$) and implementation consistency ($\beta=0.67$, $p<001$).

c. Time as a Resource

Time allocation emerged as a significant implementation factor. Document analysis revealed that schools dedicated an average of 47 minutes weekly to explicit character instruction, though this ranged from 15 to 120 minutes across schools. Beyond dedicated instructional time, high implementing schools strategically allocated time for: 1) Character education committee meetings (average 2.4 hours monthly), 2) Teacher collaboration on character integration (average 3.7 hours monthly), 3) Student leadership in character initiatives (average 3.1 hours monthly), 4) Parent and community engagement (average 2.8 hours monthly) Statistical analysis indicated that total time investment in character education processes strongly predicted implementation quality ($\beta=0.76$, $p<001$) and program outcomes ($\beta=0.68$, $p<01$).

5. Stakeholder Engagement Management

a. Teacher Engagement Strategies

Teacher engagement emerged as a critical mediating factor between management systems and implementation quality. Schools varied in their approaches to cultivating teacher ownership, with high implementing schools demonstrating distinct strategies: 1) Teacher representation in decision making (present in 83% of high implementing schools), 2) Teacher led professional learning communities focused on character education (72%), 3) Recognition systems for teacher contributions to character development (78%), 4) Opportunities for teacher leadership in character initiatives (67%) Survey data indicated that teacher perception of ownership significantly predicted implementation fidelity ($\beta=0.71$, $p<001$) and sustained commitment ($\beta=0.68$, $p<001$). Interview data revealed challenges in engaging resistant teachers: “Our biggest management challenge isn't resources or knowledge, it's bringing everyone on board philosophically. Some teachers still see character education as separate from their 'real

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job' of teaching academics" (Coordinator, School E).

b. Parent and Family Engagement

Parent engagement strategies varied in comprehensiveness and effectiveness across schools. Document and interview analysis revealed three levels of parent involvement: 1) Informational Engagement: Parents informed about character initiatives (present in 100% of schools), 2) Collaborative Engagement: Parents participating in character activities (67%), 3) Partnership Engagement: Parents involved in planning and implementation (33%) Schools achieving partnership level engagement demonstrated significantly higher parent support for character initiatives ($M=4.47$, $SD=0.38$) compared to informational only engagement ($M=3.18$, $SD=0.54$), $t(16)=5.82$, $p<001$. Effective parent engagement management practices included: 1) Regular two way communication about character development, 2) Home extension activities reinforcing school character focuses, 3) Parent education on character development approaches, 4) Parent representation on character education committees, 5) Cultural responsiveness in family engagement approaches

c. Community Partnerships

Community partnerships extended character education beyond school boundaries while providing additional resources and expertise. Schools managed these partnerships with varying degrees of systematization. High implementing schools demonstrated structured approaches to community engagement including: 1) Community representation on character education committees (present in 56% of high implementing schools), 2) Formal partnership agreements with community organizations (67%), 3)

Service learning connections to community needs (78%), 4) Business partnerships providing resources and expertise (61%), 5) Coordination of messaging between school and community (50%) Statistical analysis indicated that the number of active community partnerships positively predicted program sustainability ($\beta=0.54$, $p<01$) and resource adequacy ($\beta=0.62$, $p<001$).

6. Contextual Factors Influencing Management Approaches

Analysis revealed significant variation in management approaches based on school context, with implications for practice. School size emerged as a significant factor, with larger schools (>500 students) demonstrating greater formalization of management structures ($r=0.57$, $p<01$) but lower staff ownership ratings ($r=-0.48$, $p<05$). Socioeconomic context influenced resource allocation patterns, with schools serving higher poverty communities dedicating significantly more resources to family engagement ($\beta=0.64$, $p<01$) and community partnerships ($\beta=0.59$, $p<01$). Urban, sub-urban, and rural schools demonstrated distinct management challenges: 1) Urban schools: Greater emphasis on community partnerships and cultural responsiveness, 2) Sub-urban schools: Higher parent involvement but more academic competition, 3) Rural schools: Stronger community connections but more limited specialized staffing School governance type (public, private, charter) influenced management autonomy and approach. Private schools demonstrated greater philosophical coherence ($M=4.38$, $SD=0.41$) compared to public schools ($M=3.62$, $SD=0.57$), $t(13)=2.94$, $p<05$, while charter schools showed higher innovation in management approaches ($M=4.21$, $SD=0.38$) compared to traditional public schools ($M=3.47$, $SD=0.52$), $t(13)=2.81$, $p<05$. These contextual variations highlight the importance of adapting management approaches to school specific factors rather than imposing standardized models.

7. Integrated Character Education Management Framework

Based on cross case analysis and pattern identification, an Integrated Character Education Management (ICEM) framework emerged from the research. This framework synthesizes effective practices across five interconnected management domains: a. Strategic Leadership Management (Vision development and communication, Distributed leadership structures, Cultural alignment processes, Change management strategies), b. Implementation Management (Curriculum integration systems Professional development infrastructure, Monitoring and assessment processes, Continuous improvement mechanisms), c. Resource Management (Financial resource allocation, Human resource systems, Time management strategies, Material resource coordination), d. Stakeholder Management (Teacher engagement approaches, Parent involvement systems, Community partnership structures, Student leadership development), e. Context Management (Adaptation to school characteristics, Cultural responsiveness, Policy navigation strategies, Sustainability planning). Statistical analysis confirmed that integration across these management domains strongly predicted overall program effectiveness ($R^2=0.78$, $p<001$), with strategic leadership and implementation management demonstrating the strongest direct effects.

This study contributes several significant findings to the understanding of character education management in elementary settings. First, the research demonstrates that management processes, not just program content, significantly influence character education outcomes. Schools implementing comprehensive management systems showed statistically significant advantages in implementation of fidelity, staff commitment, and character development indicators. This finding extends previous research (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Lickona & Davidson, 2018) by highlighting organizational dimensions often overlooked in character education literature. Second, the study reveals that effective character education management requires integration across multiple domains. While previous research has identified individual factors such as leadership (Berkowitz & Bier, 2018) or curriculum integration (Bulach, 2019), this study demonstrates that integration across leadership, implementation, resource, stakeholder, and contextual dimensions produces synergistic effects. This finding aligns with systems thinking perspectives in educational

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management (Senge et al., 2018), suggesting that character education requires coherent organizational architecture rather than isolated initiatives. Third, the research identifies distributed leadership as particularly effective for character education implementation. Schools employing distributed responsibility demonstrated significantly higher implementation quality, staff ownership, and sustainability.

This finding extends distributed leadership theory (Spillane & Ortiz, 2019) to character education contexts, suggesting that moral formation benefits from diverse stakeholder voices and leadership perspectives. Fourth, the study identifies substantial variation in management approaches based on school context, challenging one-size-fits-all implementation models prevalent in character education literature. The finding that effective management practices differ across school types, sizes, and socioeconomic contexts suggests the need for adaptation rather than standardization, a perspective aligned with contingency theories of educational management (Bush, 2020). Finally, the research demonstrates that systematic assessment and data utilization remain underdeveloped aspects of character education management, with only 39% of schools regularly reviewing character education data and 28% systematically using data to drive improvement. This implementation gap suggests that measurement systems require greater attention in character education management, a finding consistent with broader concerns about evidence use in educational decision making (Leithwood et al., 2020).

The findings offer several practical implications for elementary school leaders implementing character education initiatives. First, the Integrated Character Education Management (ICEM) framework provides a comprehensive structure for organizing character education efforts, moving beyond fragmented approaches toward systematic implementation. School leaders can utilize this framework as a diagnostic tool to identify management strengths and areas needing development. Second, the research highlights specific management practices associated with successful implementation, including a. Establishing character education committees with diverse stakeholder representation, b. Developing written implementation plans with clear goals and responsibilities, c. Integrating character objectives within curriculum mapping processes, d. Creating monitoring systems that assess both implementation and outcomes, e. Allocating dedicated resources (time, funding, personnel) to character initiatives, f. Building distributed leadership capacity through professional development, g. Establishing two-way communication systems with families and community partners. Third, the study offers guidance for adapting management approaches to school context.

Leaders in large schools should prioritize structures that maintain staff ownership despite organizational complexity, while those in high poverty should emphasize family engagement systems and community partnerships. Rural school leaders may need to develop creative strategies for accessing specialized expertise, while urban schools may require stronger cultural responsiveness in management approaches. Fourth, the findings suggest that character education management should be integrated with broader school improvement processes rather than treated as a separate initiative. Schools demonstrating the strongest outcomes incorporated character education within strategic planning, professional development systems, resource allocation processes, and evaluation frameworks, creating coherence rather than competition between character and academic goals. Finally, the research highlights the importance of leadership consistency and succession planning for character education sustainability. Schools with explicit attention to knowledge transfer during leadership transitions demonstrated greater program stability, suggesting the need for deliberate continuity planning in character education management.

The research identified several persistent challenges in character education management and effective strategies for addressing them. First, philosophical alignment emerged as a significant challenge, with 72% of schools reporting tensions between different staff perspectives on character education approaches. Schools effectively navigating this challenge employed collaborative vision building processes that acknowledged diverse perspectives while establishing core shared principles. As one principal noted: “We created space for philosophical dialogue rather than imposing a single approach, allowing teachers to connect character education to their own moral commitments while maintaining programmatic coherence” (Principal, School G). Second, competing priorities, particularly academic accountability pressures, created implementation barriers in 83% of schools. Effective schools addressed this challenge by explicitly connecting character development to academic success, utilizing research demonstrating relationships between character strengths and academic achievement. Schools that positioned character education as enhancing rather than competing with academic goals demonstrated stronger implementation sustainability. Third, resource limitations constrained implementation in 78% of schools, particularly those in high poverty contexts. Successful schools employed creative resource management strategies including a. Grant writing to supplement district funding, b. Community partnerships providing volunteer expertise, c. Shared staffing arrangements with community organizations, d. Technology platforms extending limited personnel reach, e. Parent volunteer systems supporting implementation. Fourth, assessment challenges complicated implementation management, with 67% of schools reporting difficulties measuring character outcomes. Schools effectively addressing this challenge employed multiple assessment approaches including: a. School climate surveys measuring environmental conditions, b. Behavioral indicators tracking specific virtues/values, c. Self assessment tools fostering student reflection, d. Observational protocols documenting character behaviors, e. Artifacts demonstrating character development over time. Finally, sustainability challenges threatened long term implementation, particularly during leadership transitions or competing initiative introduction. Schools demonstrating strong sustainability employed institutionalization strategies including policy development, structural integration,

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and succession planning to maintain program continuity despite organizational changes.

Several limitations of this study suggest directions for future research. First, while the 14-month timeframe captured complete implementation cycles, longer longitudinal studies would better illuminate sustainability factors and developmental trajectories of management systems. Future research should examine character education management over 3–5 year periods to identify factors influencing long term sustainability. Second, while the sample included diverse school contexts, it was limited to 18 schools within a single country. Cross national research enhances understanding of how cultural and policy contexts influence management approaches. Future studies should examine character education management across diverse national contexts with varying educational policies and cultural traditions. Third, the study focused primarily on school level management processes with limited attention to district level influences. Future research should examine how district policies, leadership, and resource allocation shape school level management possibilities. Multi level studies examining alignment between district and school management systems would address this limitation. Fourth, while student outcome data provided some evidence of management effectiveness, more sophisticated outcome measures would strengthen causal claims. Future research should utilize more robust measures of character development, potentially including observational protocols, performance assessments, and longitudinal tracking of character outcomes into secondary education. Finally, the study identified but did not fully explore how digital technologies influence character education management. Future research should examine how digital platforms, data systems, and communication technologies can enhance management efficiency and effectiveness in character education initiatives.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined character education management in elementary schools, identifying key dimensions of effective practice and developing an Integrated Character Education Management (ICEM) framework to guide implementation. The research demonstrates that management processes significantly influence character education outcomes, with comprehensive systems across leadership, implementation, resource, stakeholder, and contextual domains producing the strongest results. The findings highlight the importance of distributed leadership approaches that build collective responsibility for character development throughout the school community. Effective character education management requires not only principal commitment but also teacher leadership, parent partnership, and community engagement, creating a comprehensive system supporting student character development. Resource management emerges as a critical but often underdeveloped dimension of character education implementation. Schools demonstrating the strongest outcomes deliberately allocated financial resources, personnel time, and material supports to character initiatives, reflecting organizational prioritization beyond rhetorical commitment. Further research demonstrates that effective character education management requires adaptation to school context rather than standardized implementation. School size, socioeconomic characteristics, geographic location, and governance structures all influence optimal management approaches, suggesting the need for contextually responsive implementation.

Finally, the study highlights assessment and continuous improvement as areas needing further development in character education management. While most schools implemented character programs, fewer systematically monitored implementation, assessed outcomes, or utilized data for program refinement. Building stronger assessment systems represents a significant opportunity for enhancing character education effectiveness. The Integrated Character Education Management framework developed through this research provides educational leaders with a comprehensive approach for implementing, monitoring, and sustaining effective character development initiatives. By addressing the organizational architecture supporting character education, schools can move beyond fragmented activities toward comprehensive programs that significantly influence student development. As character education continues to gain prominence in educational policy and practice worldwide, attention to management dimensions becomes increasingly important. The findings from this study contribute to both scholarly understanding and practical implementation, helping schools create the organizational conditions necessary for effective character development in elementary education settings.

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