Parental Views on Character Education Being Implemented in USA Elementary Schools

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The present study focused on exploring the views of parents regarding character education programs implemented in elementary schools in the USA. The sample comprised of parents in Florida, as it is one of the states where character education is mandatory. Florida's implementation of compulsory character education is particularly significant given its unique socio-cultural structure and population dynamics. Also as one of the most populous states in the USA with a diverse and evolving social structure, Florida's emphasis on character education is noteworthy. While there is existing research on teachers' perspectives, there is a lack of sufficient research on parents' beliefs in this regard. Recognizing the significance of parents' views and roles in shaping children's character development, this study investigated parental perspectives on various aspects of character education programs, including goals, content, teaching-learning processes, and evaluation. The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative, utilizing semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 11 parents. The findings provide insights into parents' views on goals, content, teaching-learning and evaluation processes of the character education programs. Parents in the study showcased a strong grasp of character education, emphasizing its importance, expressing satisfaction with schools addressing discrimination and highlighting the relevance of teaching foundational values, addressing negative behaviors, and praising the positive impact of character education programs, especially during challenging times like the pandemic.

Keywords: Character Education, Curriculum, Program Development, Parental Views

Introduction

Today, young people are faced with many problems that can be considered morally important. Character education plays a crucial role in fostering a functional society, especially in the context of increasingly disrupted families. It is essential for students to understand how to behave in school and classroom communities in order to succeed academically and morally. When students lack appropriate behavior, it becomes difficult for them to focus on their lessons, and their behavior can also hinder the progress of disciplined individuals. By teaching students to work together, negotiate, and resolve minor conflicts, teachers can allocate more time to teaching core academic subjects.

The process of developing moral character begins in the family and continues during school age, making it vital for the future of societies. However, it is important to be aware that unconscious, unprincipled, and unscheduled interventions may have unintended consequences, potentially leading to undesirable outcomes. Therefore, understanding the processes of acquiring values, the development of moral character, and current practices in character education is crucial for achieving the desired results.

It is important to note that Character Education is not a novel concept. The notion of schools imparting virtues has been present since the inception of formal education (O'Sullivan, 2004). Rather than being a mere slogan or a standalone course, Character Education is a mission deeply ingrained in the fabric of everyday school life. Schools serve as a platform where students can actively practice and embody these virtues, extending their impact beyond the confines of the educational setting (Milliren & Messer, 2009).

Indeed, the United States has made significant strides in the field of character education. Numerous states, in collaboration with both governmental and non-governmental organizations, have developed their own character education programs and successfully implemented them in schools.

These programs have been subject to evaluation studies to assess their effectiveness. As a result, many countries have adopted character education programs of American origin, recognizing their value and impact.

Examining the character education programs in the United States is indeed crucial for gaining insights and understanding best practices. By investigating their implementations and conducting interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents involved in these programs, valuable insights can be gained and shared with others interested in implementing similar initiatives. This exchange of knowledge and experiences can contribute to the development and improvement of character education programs worldwide.

Theoretical Framework

Education is the process of living and progressing through the continuous restructuring of knowledge and experience. Throughout history, many countries have had two primary goals for education. These goals are to help individuals become "intelligent" and "good citizens" (Lickona, 1993). There is no doubt about the importance of academic education, but the importance of raising good citizens is a necessity for the continuation of societies. Social, economic, political and technological changes in the world can sometimes negatively affect the society order and hinder the goal of raising good citizens. The role of education in fostering social responsibility and character development is crucial for the stability and progress of societies. Adaptability and relevance in education are key to addressing these challenges and ensuring that it continues to prepare individuals to be responsible and contributing members of society.

Developing good character traits is indeed a deliberate and ongoing process that involves teaching, leading by example, learning, and practice. Education plays a significant

role in this by providing the framework for "Character Education." By instilling virtues and positive habits, it contributes to the development of individuals who can become good citizens and positively contribute to their society. This process ensures that individuals have the moral and ethical foundation necessary for responsible and compassionate citizenship.

What is Character Education?

The Character Education Partnership's (Character Education Partnership, 2012) definition of formal character education aligns with the goal of fostering ethical, responsible, and caring young individuals by emphasizing universal values. Creating a safe, inclusive learning environment is central to this approach, where students can develop socially, emotionally, ethically, and academically.

Character Education, as described by Sarkadi, Casmana, & Rahmawati (2020), seeks to shape a nation by reinforcing values like honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, respect for achievement, effective communication, environmental consciousness, social responsibility, and individual responsibility. This holistic approach to education aims to nurture well-rounded citizens who can positively contribute to their communities and society at large.

Character education is vital in helping children understand and internalize ethical values while encouraging them to act upon these values. It fills a crucial gap in a child's development, as ethical decision-making is a skill that needs to be taught and reinforced. Dr. Thomas Lickona's approach to comprehensive character education not only imparts moral values but also fosters a positive moral culture within schools, creating a supportive climate for these teachings (Lickona, 2009). Furthermore, character education has the potential to address and prevent contemporary societal issues such as aggressive behavior, substance use, early sexuality, criminal

activities, and academic failures. By instilling positive personalities, social behaviors, and skills, it equips young individuals to become active and effective citizens in democratic societies. It plays a significant role in shaping responsible and compassionate members of society.

Character education is indeed not a quick fix, but rather a long-term approach to addressing the complex issues related to morality, ethics, and academic concerns. Its focus on developing knowledge, skills, and abilities empowers children to make thoughtful and responsible choices. By doing so, character education contributes to creating a safer and more morally grounded society and school environment. It's an investment in the future well-being of individuals and the community as a whole.

The impact of character education on various aspects of students' lives is supported by previous studies. It has shown positive effects such as reducing discipline referrals, improving school attendance (Devine, Ho Seuk, & Wilson, 2000), enhancing academic performance (Berkowitz & Haynes, 2007), and even contributing to better mental health (Cohen, 2006). These encouraging outcomes highlight the value of character education in preparing individuals to become leaders of tomorrow.

Additionally, the flexibility in implementing character education, as suggested by Skaggs and Bodenhorn, is crucial. Tailoring the approach to fit the unique needs and goals of each community allows for a more effective influence on students' behavior and character development, making it a valuable and adaptable educational strategy (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006).

Character Education in USA

From a historical point of view, there have been fluctuations in character education activities at certain times as a result of some political and ideological developments in USA. The changing socio-cultural conditions, including shifts in family structure due to phenomena like single-parent

families, same-sex marriages, adolescent pregnancies, and divorce, have presented challenges in imparting moral values to younger generations.

In response to these challenges, there has been a growing belief that schools should play a more significant role in character education. The transition from a religious emphasis on moral development to more secular approaches in the mid-20th century reflects the evolving nature of character education. These approaches aim to encompass all aspects of school life, involving not only educators but also parents and the broader environment to instill and reinforce moral virtues in the younger generation. This evolution highlights the adaptability of character education to meet the changing needs of society (Lickona, 1991).

The U.S. Department of Education's definition of "good character" includes a comprehensive set of values and social and emotional skills that are considered integral. This definition encompasses a wide range of qualities such as respect, responsibility, caring, justice, reliability, civic virtue, morality, honesty, empathy, social justice, courtesy, understanding, compassion, tolerance, problem-solving skills, teamwork, conflict resolution, sharing, cooperation, and a commitment to human rights. It also recognizes the importance of cultural awareness and appreciation as defining characteristics of "good character."

Moreover, the Department identifies five essential social and emotional competence groups, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, all of which incorporate and contribute to the development of these good character traits. This holistic approach ensures that character education encompasses a broad spectrum of values and skills that are essential for personal and societal well-being (U.S. u.s news, 2006).

The implementation of programs focusing on character education, virtue, morals, and values is a global initiative, beginning in kindergarten and continuing throughout an individual's educational journey. Many of these

programs have their origins in the United States. Some well-known programs include the "Giraffe Program," "Positive Action", "Caring School Community", "Hyde School," "Lions-Quest Program," and "City Montessori School."

In the United States, there has been a significant push for character education. With ongoing developments at the federal government level, by 2021, 18 states have made character education mandatory in public schools, and 18 states have enacted legislation promoting character education in schools. The remaining 14 states express support for character education without specific laws mandating it. The level of support and implementation of character education varies across the 50 states, reflecting the diverse approaches to this important aspect of education (Table 1)

Florida's implementation of compulsory character education is particularly significant given its unique socio-cultural structure and population dynamics. As one of the most populous (21 million) states in the USA with a diverse and evolving social structure, Florida's emphasis on character education is noteworthy. It's also commendable that despite its dynamic environment, Florida was recognized as the third-best state for K-12 education in 2021 (U.S. News & WorldReport 2021).

Florida's approach to character education, emphasizing nine core values including responsibility, citizenship, patriotism, courtesy, honesty, respect, self-control, cooperation, and tolerance, demonstrates a commitment to instilling these values in students (Florida Department of Education, 2002). In 2004, the requirement for school districts to develop and regularly update their Character Education Plans as part of their School Improvement Plans reflects the state's dedication to character education.

Table 1: Character Education Legislation in United States

Mandates		**Legislative Support**		**Support Without Legislation**	
Alabama	Nebraska	Arizona	Minnesota	Connecticut	New Hampshire
Alaska	New York	Colorado	Mississippi	Washington D.C	New Jersey
Arkansas	North Carolina	Delaware	Ohio	Hawai	New Mexico
California	S. Carolina	Iowa	Oklahoma	Idaho	N. Dakota
Florida	S. Dakota	Kansas	Oregon	Massachusetts	Vermont
Georgia	Tennessee	Louisiana	Pennsylvania	Missouri	Wisconsin
Illinois	Utah	Maine	Rhode Island	Montana	Wyoming
Indiana	Virginia	Maryland	Texas	Nevada	
Kentucky	West Virginia	Michigan	Washington		

The autonomy given to school districts to design their own character education programs while meeting legislative requirements allows for flexibility and adaptability. In a society facing challenges like crime and violence, teaching values and character in a meaningful way becomes crucial. The complex process of shaping morality and moral behavior underscores the importance of carefully developing and implementing character education programs based on proven techniques, ensuring that they have a positive impact on students and society.

Character Education and Parents

The family is the first school of virtue. It is where we learn to receive and give love. It is where we learn about commitment, sacrifice, and faith in something larger than ourselves. The emotional bond between parent and child deepens the impact of a parent's values and example. Parents are positioned to surround a child with a spiritual heritage that provides a vision of life's meaning and ultimate reasons to lead a good life. The family lays down the foundation on which all other formative institutions build. The family indeed plays a foundational role in shaping individuals' character and values. It's often considered the first school of virtue, where we learn not only about love but also about essential qualities such as commitment, sacrifice, and faith in something greater than ourselves. The emotional bond between parents and children enhances the influence of parental values and examples, providing a strong foundation for a child's understanding of life's purpose and reasons to lead a virtuous life. In this way, the family sets the stage upon which all other formative institutions can build, contributing significantly to the development of well-rounded individuals.

Indeed, the family plays a crucial role in the internalization and dissemination of societal rules, as well as in passing them down to future generations (Özensel, 2003). The values instilled within the family environment also

significantly impact children's communication and interaction skills with their surroundings. Parents' perspectives, approaches, and perceptions of character significantly influence the character education children receive at school and the character they will build in the future. Collaborative efforts between families, who are key influencers in children's character development outside of school, and schools to address students' needs and promote healthy character development are directly linked to the long-term success of character education.

Numerous studies have been conducted on character education, but research on parents' perceptions, knowledge, approaches, and expectations in this field is limited. This study is aimed to contribute to the literature and fill a significant gap through considering the opinions of parents. The more parents are involved in character education, collaborating as equal partners with schools and communities, the more successful character education programs become, leading to positive effects on children.

Research Methodology

In view of the research aims and the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative methodology was adopted to collect the participants' narratives of their views on character education programs and its implementation. Qualitative research allows for in-depth understanding and the capture of nuanced perspectives and experiences, making it a valuable choice for a study focused on participants' viewpoints and narratives. It enables researchers to gain insights into the complexities and subjective aspects of character education, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Participants

In this study, the sample comprised of parents in Florida, as it is one of the states where character education is

mandatory. The researchers utilized a purposeful sampling technique to select character education programs for inclusion in the study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting individuals, institutions, or objects that can provide the most relevant information based on the study's objectives (Yin, 2014). Initially, the researchers identified schools in Florida that implemented evidence-based character education programs by reviewing the "School Improvement Plans" available on their websites. Evidence-based interventions refer to practices or programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in producing desired outcomes when implemented. Therefore, for this study, schools implementing evidence-based character education programs such as Positive Action and Caring School Community were chosen. The selection of participants also followed a purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 2002), based on three criteria: being a parent of an elementary school student in Florida, having at least an associate's degree, and voluntarily participating in the study. By focusing on participants with a minimum level of education and a willingness to participate, the study aimed to ensure a certain level of educational background and engagement.

The recruitment of participants for this study followed a snowball sampling technique, as described by Naderifar et al. (2017). Each participant who volunteered to take part in the study was asked to suggest others who might also be interested in participating. This approach can help identify individuals with valuable insights on the topic being studied. It is particularly useful when seeking to understand a specific community or context. The process began by asking a simple question to participants, such as "Who might know the most about this? Who would you suggest I talk to?". As the process continued, the number of names or situations obtained grew, similar to a snowball effect (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In the end, the study consisted of eleven parents with children ranging from kindergarten to 5th grade. To protect the privacy and maintain confidentiality, participants were anonymized using codes (P1 to P11), which

is a common practice in research.

The demographic information form developed by the researcher consists of questions contains demographic information such as parents' age, gender, educational background and the grade of their children. Collecting demographic information from participants is indeed important for providing context and understanding the diversity within the group. Tables 2 and 3 can serve as useful references for presenting the participants' demographics and their corresponding codes, facilitating the organization and analysis of the research data.

Table 2: Participation Codes

Gender	Code	Education Level	Code
Male	M	Associate Degree*	AS
Female	F	Undergraduate	BA
		Masters	MA
		Doctor of Philosophy	PhD

***An undergraduate degree awarded after a course of post-secondary study lasting lasting two to three years. It is a level of qualification above a high school diploma and below a bachelor's degree.**

Table 3: Participant Demographics

Code	Age	Professional Identity	Grade of Student
P1-F-PhD	39	Assistant Professor	5.Grade
P2-F-BA	41	Social worker	5.Grade
P3-F-AS	35	Housewife	3.Grade
P4-M-MA	44	Engineer	4.Grade
P5-M-AS	47	Business	2.Grade
P6-F-AS	38	Customer Service	Kindergarten
P7-M-BA	41	Business	1.Grade
P8-F-BA	30	Bank teller	1.Grade
P9-F-AS	29	Lab Technician	4.Gade
P10-M-BA	45	Self-employed	Kindergarten
P11-K-PhD	40	Research Scientist	2.Grade

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for the present study was carried out with in-depth interviews which are particularly appropriate to gather detailed information about people's thoughts and behaviours (Seidman, 2013). A semi-structured interview was used. Semi-structured interviews, a form of qualitative research method, allow for a balance between structured and unstructured questions, offering participants the flexibility to provide unconstrained responses. In a well-implemented semi-structured interview, researchers can gather comprehensive and natural data. The interview plan, including the questions to be asked, provides a structured framework, but it remains flexible to adapt to the form and flow of the interview. This adaptability allows the interviewer to make minor adjustments to questions or use sub-questions to obtain more detailed and explanatory information from the participants, ensuring that the research questions are thoroughly addressed. Research questions were prepared and developed comprehensively and in accordance with the purpose of the research. Thus, if the semi-structured interview is implemented well, the most comprehensive and most natural data can be collected (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

The organization of interview questions into themes related to program development elements is a systematic approach that aligns with research objectives. This structured interview form ensures that the discussion remained focused on the key aspects of character education programs, such as objectives (goals), content, the learning-teaching process, and program evaluation. Also, the administrators of these schools were contacted and information was given about the subject and aim of the study and the contact numbers of the parents who could participate in the study were requested.

Examples of the open-ended in-depth questions (see Appendix) included in interview are as follows:

"What does the concept of character mean to you? How would you describe a person who shows good character?
If you were to design a character education lesson for your children, what would the topic be?

Do you feel like you are involved in the decision-making process at your school?

If you were to design a character education lesson for your children, what would the topic be?

What do you think are the most important values or character traits for Character Education?

Do you think the program support school-parent cooperation or parent involvement? etc.

An interview plan was prepared by determining the appropriate time periods in common with the participants. Meetings with parents were held on the mutually determined times in the fall semester of the 2020-2021 academic year, through Zoom, a remote, video and reliable program due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All of the interviews were conducted by the researcher. It is emphasized that participation is voluntary and that interviews will be conducted with the interviewees' consent for maintaining ethical standards and respect participants' autonomy.

All the 11 interviews were made by one of the authors of the present study, who is an experienced researcher, in the period from October to December 2020. Each individual interview lasted 30-45 minutes. The interviews took approximately 3 months. After each interview, a $20 Amazon Gift Card was provided to the participants to compensate for their time.

The data obtained from interviews were transferred to the computer and converted into written material. For the

purpose of analysis, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and emailed to the participants. The participants were asked to read their respective transcripts as a means of confirming their testimonials. This procedure also served data validation purposes (Mero-Jaffe, 2011).

All transcripts were analyzed in batch. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted as the method of data analysis. This is a method capable of guaranteeing richness and detail of analysis and thus particularly appropriate for understanding the participants' perceptions and uncovering their experiences (Brown & Stockman, 2013). During each of these batched analyses, two co-authors independently identified all segments in the transcripts that reflected any of the four topics: goals, content, teaching-learning process and evaluation; relevant segments were largely clustered around specific questions from the interview protocol. The two authors discussed any segment discrepancies until both authors agreed on the relevance of all segments to each topic. Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as being two directional, that is being performed both inductively and deductively (Fereday & Muir- Cochrane, 2006). Deductive manner was adopted during the coding phase of the analysis, which involved the identification of the sub-themes from initial themes. Within the segments of each topic, the two authors coded the data following an iterative qualitative coding process to identify emergent themes and ideas in the tradition of thematic analysis. This analysis strategy, which involves more than one investigator/researcher observing the same data, is described by Denzin (2009) as 'investigator triangulation' as a way of validating the analysis and the findings. This approach enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of the research process and its outcomes.

Results and Discussion

The incorporation of parent involvement as a crucial element in effective character education programs, as identified by Berkowitz & Bier in 2005, highlights the significance of understanding what works in promoting students' character development. Their study of 33 character education programs across the United States that demonstrated scientific evidence of effectiveness underscores the value of programs with positive impacts on various character outcomes, many of which involved parent participation, such as "Positive Action" and "Caring School Community."

So, in this study, the parents' views are investigated towards successful character education programs. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with the parents of the students who were educated in the schools where these evidence-based character education programs were implemented. Before the interviews, four core themes consist of elements of program development (Goals, Content, Teaching-Learning process, Evaluation) were identified by researchers. The thematic analysis, accompanied by supporting quotations from participants in Table 4, allows for a comprehensive exploration of these themes and subthemes, shedding light on the effectiveness of character education programs from the parents' point of view.

Table 4: Thematic analysis: themes, sub-themes, and units of meaning

Theme: Aims/Objectives	
Sub-themes	Units of meaning – some statement examples
Basic Approach Philosophy/Vision General Purposes Otcomes/Skills	*Character education is a learning process that enables students gain core ethical values to live in society peacefully (P8-F-BA).* *The values instilled in students mostly included issues pertaining to anti-bullying, anti-racism, anti-sexism, pluralism and diversity. They were encouraged to fight against racism, islamophobia, homophobia, misogynism, etc. (P11-K-PhD)*
Theme: Content	
Sub-themes	Units of meaning – some statement examples
Subject Area Units	*Respect for all kinds of lifestyles (Black, Latino, Muslim, Jewish, immigrant, LGBTQ, etc.). Ethical values are mostly common in all religious and secular traditions. But the most important one is to show humility and understanding for people whose lifestyles may not align with your own definition of social morality. Peaceful co-existence starts at acceptance of differences without trying to assert one single Truth that the majority believes in. (P11-K-PhD)* *'Diversity'. As a result of the ethnic diversity in the schools here, since children start to live together with children from different nationalities, religions and cultures from a young age, they grow up knowing and adopting the normality of diversity and the importance of loving and respecting everyone. And it plays a beautiful role in their human development. (P2-F-BA)*

	Theme: Teaching-Learning process
Sub-themes	Units of meaning – some statement examples
Components Tool and Materials In-service Training	*The schools involve parents in all sorts of things, from decision making, voting, fundraising, extra-curricular activities, to various kinds of volunteering jobs. (P3-F-AS)* *Schools are offering sessions for parents also for example "helping others in need". It is strange for me that i have never seen before. (P2-F-BA)* *Professional days are held at certain times in schools. Parents from various occupational groups share professional information with children. In addition to the professional information they give in their speeches, the parents also emphasize the characteristic features required to be successful. (P4-M-MA)*
Theme: Evaluation	
Sub-themes	Units of meaning – some statement examples
Assessment Program Evaluation	*…With the reinforcement of this sense of responsibility given at school in the family, he (my son) does all kinds of work, especially his homework and projects, without the need for help, and he has full courage and self-confidence in this matter. He even does not spare the support of those around him when necessary. (P9-F-AS)* *Puts things first. Emphasizing priorities. Self-discipline, like "firts* *do our homeworks than i can play". They (my twins) are talking about being proactive, self-management skills etc. (P7-M-BA)*

Goals

The distinction between character education and values education is important. Character education is centered around virtues, which are objective moral standards that go beyond time, culture, and individual choices (Lickona, 1997). This approach aims to nurture individuals with universal qualities, striving to create global citizens. In contrast, values education is often more localized, focusing on specific values within particular frameworks or cultures. The difference lies in the broader, timeless nature of character education and its emphasis on virtues that transcend local contexts.

This research divided "goals" as four different domains according to participants' views providing a framework for understanding their perspectives on character education.: Basic Approach Philosophy/Vision, General Purposes, Outcomes/Skills.

It's interesting to note that despite many parents not being aware of the specific names of the character education programs in their children's schools, they still possess an understanding of the concepts of "character" and "character education." One of the parents described character education by giving examples from her childhood time:

> *I didn't know character education when I was a student. Our teachers, our families were talking about: 'Don't lie', 'Be honest', 'Don't cheat'. What I know about character education now is what I saw from my children's school. Now I see that this education is given in a formal way in my children's school. For example 'honesty'. They focus academic honesty, 'don't cheat', 'dont copy'. I agree with school, honesty is so important and the school cover it (P2-F-BA).*

This example adds a personal and relatable dimension to the discourse, which can contribute to a richer understanding of the participants' views on character education. It suggests that character education is a concept

that can resonate with individuals even without detailed knowledge of specific programs.

Examples of other parents' definitions about "character" are as follows:

> *Character is expression of good moral values (P3-F-AS).*
>
> *Character has multiple levels what you express in your actions. Society acceptable, morally acceptable.. (P11-K-PhD).*

It's noteworthy that the majority of parents expressed an awareness of the character education efforts at school, even if they were not familiar with the program's name. The following two statements likely reflect this sentiment and highlight that parents recognize the significance of character education in their children's schooling:

> *To tell the truth, I don't know the name of the program. But I am aware of some of the events that school provide us including "character education" like father-daughter dance day, father- son football day. These sometimes take place in the morning before school starts, and sometimes in the evening after school. There is also a mindfulness program at my son's school. It's like mind clearing. My son told me about this program several times. Oh, and he's talking about his yoga program. It is also a kind of mind clearing within the scope of mindfulness. My son always talk about in positive way for these programs, I did not feel any negativity, I think he is satisfied (P1-F-PhD).*
>
> *I am not sure if they are specifically following any programs but what I observe from my child, his home room teacher chooses one ethical values every week such as respect, fairness, justice, citizenship, and responsibility etc. And she explains importance of these values with Social Studies fliers which supplied by school. They are studying role model character on important days like Presidents Day. For example George*

> *Washington and his known traits show students examples for being in good characters. While children are exploring heroes' lives, they also see the positive aspects of them. I can observe its positive effects on my kid (P6-F-AS).*

Content

The distinction between character education and values education becomes clearer when we consider the focus on behavior. Character education emphasizes the direct teaching of behavior, which makes it more comprehensive than values education. This makes character education more inclusive than values education (Williams, 2000). It recognizes that individuals may appreciate values emotionally but might struggle to translate these values into their daily actions.

The inclusivity of character education is related to its multi-faceted approach to character. It encompasses the moral dimension, addressing aspects like moral reasoning, moral behavior, moral identity, moral personality, moral emotion, and meta-moral characteristics (Berkowitz, 2002). Simultaneously, within the performance dimension, character education aims to develop various social and intellectual skills. This comprehensive approach helps individuals not only understand values but also effectively apply them in real-life situations.

Different character education programs usually have different content, but they generally focus on basic character traits and social emotional learning skills. In order to determine their views on the "content" of the character education programs being implemented in their childrens' school, the parents of the students were asked, *"If you were to design a character education lesson for your children, what would it be about? What do you think are the most important values or character traits for character education?"*. Parents answered this question by emphasizing almost the same character traits and values. Accordingly, "honesty" and "respect" take the first place. Some of the statements are as follows:

> *It would be honesty, sincerity and hard work. These three are very important to me. They also emphasize honesty at school. They focus more on academic honesty at school, like "not cheating". It's like copying someone's homework. I agree with that, academic honesty is also very important but it is necessary to adapt honesty to daily life (P2-F-BA).*

> *Respect and love to others would be the most important values for living in society peacefully (P6-F-AS).*

> *As humans, our resources are limited. Our life has a beginning and an end point. I think the most important character trait is knowing that one is responsible for one's actions. (P1-F-PhD).*

In addition, the parents emphasized bullying and peer bullying to character traits and stated that if they were to design a course on character education, they could add these topics to the content. The recognition of the need to address issues like bullying and peer bullying in character education programs indicates an awareness of the challenges children may face in their social interactions. These insights from parents can inform the development and enhancement of character education curricula to address not only foundational values but also the specific challenges children encounter in their daily lives. One example is as follows:

> *Programs need to be more effective on peer pressure and bullying. Peer pressure, bullying should be completely eliminated. No one should be pressured or pressured. Everyone should feel safe. Everyone should be related to each other. Character education should focus on the meaning of life. Helping the children to find meaning of life can have a positive impact on them. In the program that I would consider designing, I would think of doing*

> *studies that would raise awareness about the meaning of life for children (P10-M-BA).*

The recognition by two parents that character education should focus on anti-discrimination and anti-racist practices indicates a strong commitment to promoting inclusivity and combating prejudice within their children's schools. This highlights the importance of addressing contemporary societal issues within character education programs (P3&P7). In addition, participant who stated that the school-family cooperation is important, but above all, that the character begins to take shape in the family, expressed his views as follows:

> *I advocate the idea that parental development is key to character development in the family. Our children don't need us to be perfect; they need to see our effort and willingness to focus on our own progress. If parents have deeper values, character, and purpose, so will their children (P5-M-AS).*

The participant who emphasized the role of family in shaping character underscores the crucial influence of parents and family dynamics in children's character development. This perspective aligns with the idea that character education begins at home and is significantly influenced by the values and behaviors modeled by family members. It also emphasizes the importance of collaboration between schools and families in fostering positive character development in students.

Teaching-Learning Process

Effective cooperation between parents and schools has been found to contribute to students' academic achievement. Researchers such as Edwards & Alldred (2000), Henderson & Berla (1994), Richardson (2009), and Sanders & Sheldon (2009) have acknowledged the significance of a

strong positive bond between homes and schools in the development and education of children. Studies have also demonstrated that a positive school climate can be fostered through efforts to engage and collaborate with students' families. Therefore, it is evident that cooperation with parents and involving them in the decision-making process during the teaching-learning process are crucial for creating a positive school climate, which directly impacts the development of good character traits in students.

From the yearly "School Improvement Plans," it can be observed that schools primarily consider the compatibility of programs with their vision and philosophy when selecting the programs they will implement. Additionally, these programs should align with the school's needs. Parents, students, and teachers are the primary stakeholders of the school, and their participation in decision-making processes is crucial for the development of an education program. The question "Do you think you are involved in the decision-making process?" was posed to parents, and the majority of them indicated that members of the PTO (family-teacher organization) are involved in the decision-making process. The participants mentioned that they mainly collaborate with the PTO in activities related to character development.

> *The school communicates well with us. They provide us curriculums such as school improvement curriculum for parents and development curriculum for students. Some weeks there are morning meetings for parents. "What is the character trait of that month"? They let us to talk the same language at home. This benefits us, too, because being an adult does not mean completing character education. It also provides self-development for us." (P8-F-BA)*

The efforts made by character education programs and schools to involve parents through in-service training and additional resources for positive discipline, addressing

bullying, and managing risky behavior demonstrate a proactive approach to fostering character development in students. Participants typically described how schools inform them about events, activities etc., when asked about the events and training that school provides them. For instance, parents mentioned that schools have a newsletter that goes home to parents, often including character education information and chracater trait for the week or month. They also emphasized that schools are offering web sites, and mailing lists for letters and announcements, and they are routinely sending documents home with students. Thus, participants (P9&P2&P11) expressed that they feel involved, motivated, better equipped to reinforce character education

principles at home and can talk same language with school at home with their kids.

> *They've been on this feature for a long time. They are communicating with us. They publish newsletters and send home brochures showing what the week's lessons are. In these brochures, there is information about what we need to focus on at home, and what the children did at school that week ((P7-M-BA).*

In addition to those, some of the parents are complaining about not being more interactive in school due to the pandemic. They also claimed that if teachers and parents work together and give special attention to the practicing of these behaviors to their students or children, it will make great progress for students, apart from seeing it as a normal lesson.

Evaluation

Program evaluation is indeed the process of assessing the effectiveness of an implemented program and determining the extent to which educational goals are being

achieved. In this case, character education programs aim to instill positive character traits and values in students.

It's interesting to note that while the parents might not have detailed knowledge about the assessment and evaluation process of the character education program, they can observe the positive effects on their children. This observation-based understanding suggests that parents can recognize the program's impact through changes in their children's behavior and character. Their feedback and insights provide valuable qualitative data for assessing the effectiveness of character education programs. The examples of the views of the parents are as follows:

> *I have no idea about the evaluation process of the program, but over all, I am happy that the character education system is based on raising conscientious kids. However, it needs to be noted that I always lived in affluent neighborhoods and send my daughter to the best public schools by living in the best districts. Not every American kid is lucky enough to receive best education. Structural racism unfortunately in built in the system and it needs to be addressed at macro level even before we can talk about individual character education. The sole focus on character elides us tok ask more fundamental questions about the social and political conjectures that limit the life options that the kids from different backgrounds will have, which in turn will shape his personality. The crime rate is not high in some neigborhoods because the kids did not receive character education, they are high because of historical structural inequality and systemic racism that denies basic needs, human rights, good education, health services, etc. to certain populations. If any education for ethics should be given to American kids today, it should start with the history and perseverance of the structural inequality in this country. (P1-F-PhD)*

Participants also mentioned the importance of character education in the social and emotional development of children by promoting interpersonal relationships and positive thoughts. The recognition of the importance of character education in the social and emotional development of children is significant. Character education programs play a vital role in promoting interpersonal relationships and cultivating positive thoughts and behaviors in students. These programs contribute to a well-rounded education that not only focuses on academic achievement but also on the emotional and social well-being of students. It's clear that parents appreciate the positive impact character education has on their children's overall development.

> *Sometimes teachers talk about it at morning meetings. Sometimes they give composition homework about character traits. Other than that, I don't know how they evaluate it. But I have my own observations. I am a single parent living with my children. My kids are boys and we had trouble following the rules, but character education helps me a lot. I see that what they learned at school and what I support at home works for the good. Character education guides them. I am grateful for this training in these difficult times, because it is easier for me to correct them when they do something wrong and it is easier for them to understand (P8-F-BA).*

The emphasis on teaching children the value of "responsibility" through character education is commendable. Teaching responsibility from an early age can help children develop a strong sense of duty and accountability, which are essential qualities for personal growth and success. They also shared their experiences about responsibility. One of the examples is below:

> *My own observations are that huge success has been achieved in this regard. I can give my own child as the biggest example.*

> *His success in fulfilling his homework, the arrangement of his room and his belongings, and the responsibilities he took from school or other social environments is the best example of this education. Another important is 'diversity'! As a result of the ethnic diversity in schools, since children start to live together with children from different nationalities, religions and cultures from a young age, they grow up knowing and embracing the normality of diversity and the importance of loving and respecting everyone. They experience how to live happily and peacefully with all this diversity, which plays a very important role in their human development (P6-F-AS).*

The example provided by parents, illustrates encouraging children to do their own work and fulfill their responsibilities, highlights the practical application of character education concepts in daily life. It's clear that parents appreciate character education programs that instill this crucial value in their children and provide them with real-life experiences that reinforce it.

> *My child has been educated since primary school, emphasizing the importance of personal values such as sense of responsibility and courage. Children are given tasks such as growing plants and feeding animals at school, and they are raised with a sense of responsibility. In addition, within the framework of some club activities, they contribute to club expenses by selling things such as cookies and chocolate (P3-F-AS)*

> *Character education is quiding them. Even this struggling times i really appreciate what they need to do properly. It is easier tok correct them with character education (P2-F-BA).*

Conclusion

The recognition that parents have a significant and profound impact on their children's character development

is crucial. While schools and character education programs play an important role, the values and behaviors modeled by parents within the family setting are often the most influential in shaping a child's character. Many researchers have studied character education programs and teachers'or students' views on it but parental views remain largely unexplored. Therefore, this study explored parental views about character education. Exploring parental views about character education is essential because it provides insights into the broader support system surrounding a child's education and character development. Understanding how parents perceive character education, its effectiveness, and their level of involvement can help educators and schools tailor their programs to better align with parental values and expectations. This collaborative approach can lead to more holistic character development in students.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews with parents provide valuable insights into their perspectives on character education. Key takeaways include:

- Parents' Awareness: Parents in the study demonstrated knowledge about character education in general, even though they might not know the specific name of the program implemented in their children's schools. This indicates a broader understanding of character education as an important aspect of their children's education.
- Satisfaction with Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Approaches: Parents expressed satisfaction with their schools' approaches to addressing discrimination and promoting anti-racism within character education. This underscores the importance of addressing contemporary societal issues in character education programs.

- Emphasis on "Honesty" and "Respect": Parents consistently emphasized the character traits of "honesty" and "respect" as the most important values to be taught in character education. These foundational values are universally valued and essential for character development.
- Focus on Negative Behaviors: In addition to character traits, parents highlighted the importance of addressing negative behaviors like "bullying" and "peer pressure" in character education. This indicates a recognition of the challenges children may face in their social interactions and the need to equip them with the skills to navigate these situations.

Partnering with families in the education of children is a critical and mutually beneficial endeavor. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping their children's character, as they are their first teachers. The connection between character education and family involvement is integral to fostering socially positive development in students.

The recognition that character education programs should ideally involve partnerships with various stakeholders, including parents, is significant. Collaborative efforts among parents, schools, and the broader community can help ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that prioritizes ethical and moral values.

The U.S. Department of Education's emphasis on parental involvement in character education programs is a reflection of the importance of this partnership. It underscores the idea that character education is most effective when it's a collective effort that includes parents, educators, and other stakeholders working together to instill positive character traits in students.

Character education indeed goes beyond being an "add-on" and should be integrated comprehensively into the school culture. It involves a holistic approach that influences

various aspects of a student's life, from individual values and behaviors to their role in society. The involvement of all stakeholder groups, including parents, is essential for effective character education.

Parents serve as significant role models for their children, and their behavior and practices should align with the moral mission of the school. Their support, participation, and collaboration with schools in character education programs are vital for creating a consistent and impactful character education environment.

The parents' positive view of the evaluation process of character education programs is notable. Even though many parents might not have detailed knowledge about the specific assessment methods used in the programs, they observe the positive effects on their children's behaviors. This observation-based understanding highlights the practical impact of character education.

Parents' remarks that the programs help children make good choices in their behaviors at home, understand the difference between positive and negative options, and navigate these choices, are significant. This becomes particularly important during challenging times like the pandemic, where character education can provide valuable guidance and support to students in their decision-making processes.

The parents' recognition of the practical benefits and effectiveness of character education programs is a testament to the positive influence these programs can have on students' behavior and character development. It underscores the value of character education in helping students make informed and ethical choices in their lives.

While the current study provides valuable insights from a smaller group of participants, future research could benefit from examining larger samples of parents. A broader study could help draw a more comprehensive picture of the issues related to character education and parental

involvement in schools, further enhancing our understanding of the subject.

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Appendix

Interview Questions for Parents:

1. What does the concept of character mean to you?
2. How would you describe a person who shows good character?
3. Do you know anything about character education?
4. What do you know about the character education program that is being implemented at your child's school? (Do you know the name of the program?)
5. Do you feel like you are involved in the decision making process at your school?

6. If you were to design a character education lesson for your children, what would the topic be? What do you think are the most important values or character traits for Character Education?
7. Do you think the program support school-parent cooperation or parent involvement?
8. Do you have any opinion about assessing process for character education that is being implemented at your child's school?
9. What do you think about the effects of the character education program that is being implemented at your child's school on your child's character development?

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