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Analysis of Character Education Programs for Developing Students' Morals in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Character education within the educational system shapes moral and ethical values, contributing to the development of a generation that possesses honesty, responsibility, courage, faith, piety, and a high sense of dignity. This study aims to examine the influence of character education on the moral formation of students at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung, focusing on aspects of discipline, responsibility, honesty and empathy. Through a qualitative approach with a case study design, data was collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and observations of students' behaviour. The results show that the implementation of character education at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung has a positive impact on students' moral development. The character education programme, which involves activities such as congregational prayer, collective prayer, extracurricular activities and collaboration with parents, has improved students' discipline, honesty, responsibility and empathy. The research also emphasises the importance of collaboration between school, home and community in supporting students' character building. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of a more practical character education model, in accordance with Indonesia's socio-cultural conditions, as well as supporting a holistic education policy, creating students who are not only smart but also moral.

Informasi Artikel

Kata Kunci:

Program
Pendidikan
Karakter;
Pembentukan
Moral Siswa;
Sekolah Dasar

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan karakter dalam sistem pendidikan membentuk moral dan etika yang berkontribusi dalam melahirkan generasi yang memiliki kejujuran, tanggung jawab, keberanian, keimanan, ketakwaan, dan martabat yang tinggi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh pendidikan karakter terhadap pembentukan akhlak peserta didik di SDN 13 Pagar Gunung, dengan fokus pada aspek kedisiplinan, tanggung jawab, kejujuran, dan empati. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan guru serta observasi terhadap perilaku siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi pendidikan karakter di SDN 13 Pagar Gunung memberikan dampak positif dalam pembentukan akhlak siswa. Program pendidikan karakter yang melibatkan kegiatan seperti salat berjamaah, doa bersama, dan peduli lingkungan juga melalui program ekstrakurikuler, serta kolaborasi dengan orang tua, telah meningkatkan kedisiplinan, kejujuran, tanggung jawab, dan empati siswa. Penelitian ini juga menekankan pentingnya kolaborasi antara sekolah, rumah, dan masyarakat dalam mendukung

pembentukan karakter siswa. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi untuk pengembangan model pendidikan karakter yang lebih praktis, sesuai dengan kondisi sosial budaya Indonesia, serta mendukung kebijakan pendidikan yang holistik, menciptakan siswa yang tidak hanya cerdas tetapi juga bermoral.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is a major component in the education system that aims to shape the morals and ethics of students. Character education aims to form a permanent character of the nation's children, namely having honesty, responsibility, courage, strong faith, piety, and high dignity (Dhori & Nurhayati, 2022). This is in line with previous studies that state character education is a process in shaping values, attitudes, and behaviours that are important to make someone a moral, responsible, and ethical individual (Aziz et al., 2023).

The implementation of character in education begins with teaching, which provides an understanding of the difference between good and bad things through the learning system. In addition, habituation also has an important role, where good things are done repeatedly until they finally form strong habits and result in character building (Siregar et al., 2018). Character education in the micro context focuses on a comprehensive approach at the education unit level (Huri & Marwanto, 2019).

In this case, character education at the primary school level plays a very crucial role. In the citation of Yanuardianto et al. (2024) stated that the development of Islamic character from an early age is very important, especially at the primary school level because children are at an important stage of development where they easily absorb values and actions from their environment. So, religious and moral education becomes a strong foundation for building a solid character. school, home, and community have a very important role in shaping a person's character. The three interact and support each other in building good values and behaviour in individuals. A person's character is influenced by the education and parenting received from parents at home. The character is formed through what is learnt at school, in the family environment, and in the

community (Dalyono & Lestariningsih, 2017; Darna et al., 2023). From the three parties involved, it can be concluded that educational institutions have a very important role in the formation of student character values. This is in accordance with the purpose of character education to form moral and responsible individuals in the future (Purba, 2024). One of the goals of character education is to improve the quality of the educational process itself and its output, which is expected to form noble character or morals in an integral and balanced manner (Gunawan et al., 2020).

Several previous studies have concentrated on the establishment of character education curricula at different levels of education with the aim that students' character development is in line with Indonesia's noble values. Among the studies referred to are the research findings conducted by Salo (2023), the development of students' independent character can be achieved through self-development, which is integrated into subject learning and school culture. A similar study was presented by Sauri & Sanusi (2025), highlighting that the process of character building in students is carried out through the integration of character values into learning and extracurricular activities, the habituation of positive behaviors, role modeling, motivation, and guidance.

The study conducted by Lee & Huang (2021) broadly examines the importance of self-development integrated into teaching and school culture as a strategy for fostering independent character. Similarly, a more recent investigation by Zhao et al. (2024) specifically analyzes the correlation between students' affection for their school and its implications for nurturing strong moral character within them.

In a related study, Zynuddin et al. (2023) explored the effectiveness of character education programs in schools, encompassing explicit instruction, role modeling, and the cultivation of a moral community. These elements were shown to not only contribute to the development of individual moral character but also to reinforce students' sense of national identity.

Sakti et al. (2024), through the focus of their research, argue that character formation is more effective when it incorporates multiple approaches, including integration into academic subjects, extracurricular activities, habitual positive behavior, teacher role modeling, as well as the provision of guidance and motivation. In contrast, the research conducted by Sahinkayasi & Kelleci (2023) emphasizes that moral and character education must be approached through various dimensions, such as curriculum integration, school culture, modeling, and structured opportunities for practical application.

What distinguishes the present study from previous research is its focused emphasis on the development of students' moral character through various school-based programs at the elementary level such as congregational prayers, extracurricular activities, and collaboration with parents. These initiatives have significantly contributed to improving students' discipline, honesty, responsibility, and empathy. The findings underscore that character development must be designed as a holistic process involving all components of the educational ecosystem, including the role of teachers, adaptive curricula, and a supportive learning environment that fosters moral and ethical formation. This is

particularly crucial in addressing global challenges and the moral decline among younger generations.

However, there are still few studies that investigate the direct influence of character education on students' moral formation in primary schools. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of character education on the moral development of students at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung, especially in the aspects of discipline, responsibility, honesty, and empathy, as well as to provide recommendations for improving character education programs in elementary schools.

In addition, this research is expected to contribute to the development of character education models that are more practical and in accordance with the socio-cultural conditions of Indonesian society. Given the important role of schools in shaping students' character, the results of this study are expected to provide a stronger foundation for educational policy making. All levels of education should implement character education for the purpose of building students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also have character.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the influence of character education on the moral formation of students at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung. Case study analysis is important to apply in research that analyzes character education programs in elementary schools because this approach allows researchers to dig deeply into the context, process, and dynamics of program implementation in a real environment. Case studies provide a holistic understanding of how character values are instilled, the challenges faced, and supporting and inhibiting factors that may not be revealed through quantitative methods. In addition, case studies allow researchers to capture the perspectives of various parties such as teachers, students, and parents, so that the results are richer in the information analyzed and the research findings will be more contextual.

This research was conducted at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung, located in Pagar Gunung sub-district, Lahat district, South Sumatra province, from February to April 2025. The main data sources were students and teachers, obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers and direct observation of students' behaviour.

The instruments used included semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' experiences related to the implementation of character education and direct observation to assess changes in students' attitudes and behaviours, such as discipline, honesty, responsibility and empathy. Because in analyzing the pattern of character development of students in elementary school that involves contextual and subjective values (such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy), semi-structured interviews allow respondents to explain their own experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of character education practices in schools. This method is good because it uses an open-ended question guide, but it can still explore the informant's answers more deeply. This is important because students' characters are formed from various factors (environment, school culture,

family, and other) that cannot be explored with just closed-ended questions. Data collection was conducted in two stages: first, interviews with teachers regarding the implementation of character education, and second, observations of students' behaviour inside and outside the classroom. The collected data were analysed using qualitative analysis with content analysis techniques to identify the main themes and relationships between character education and students' moral formation.

To ensure the validity of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews and observations. The flow of this research design starts from preparation, data collection, data analysis, to triangulation to gain a more thorough understanding of the influence of character education on student morals at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung.

Table 1. Research Design of Character Education in SD N 13 Pagar Gunung

Research Steseps	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative with case study design
Research Topic	The influence of character education on the moral formation of students at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung
Research Location	SDN 13 Pagar Gunung, Pagar Gunung sub-district, Lahat district, South Sumatra province
Research Time	February – April 2025
Main Data Source	Students and teachers
Data Collection Method	1. In-depth interviews with teachers about character education 2. Direct observation of student behaviour (discipline, honesty, responsibility, empathy)
Research Instruments	1. Semi-structured interviews with teachers 2. Direct observation of students
Data Collection Stages	1. Interviews with teachers regarding the implementation of character education 2. Observation of student behaviour inside and outside the classroom
Data Analysis	1. Qualitative analysis using content analysis techniques to identify main themes 2. Identify the relationship between character education and students' moral formation
Validity of Findings	Data triangulation (comparison of interview and observation results) to ensure the validity of findings
Research Design Flow	1. Preparation 2. Data collection 3. Data analysis 4. Triangulate data to gain a thorough understanding

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Result

The implementation of character education at SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung is carried out by integrating character values in daily life through routine activities such as congregational prayer and prayer together in the morning, incorporating character education in academic subjects, organising extracurricular activities that support character values such as scouts, sports and arts, and involving parents in supporting student character building. In addition to rewarding students who show positive attitudes and providing educational sanctions for students who make mistakes, with the role of teachers as role models in applying character values and implementing child-friendly school programmes that create a safe, comfortable and supportive environment for student character development, all of which aim to form students who are academically intelligent and have good character as preparation for the challenges of life in the future. The findings were confirmed through the results of interviews with teachers of SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung who were respondents in this study regarding the integration of character values in academic subject content such as congregational prayer, joint prayer, caring for the environment, the impact of which has increased student discipline, honesty, responsibility, and empathy including through other extracurricular activity programs.

An interview with a teacher respondent with the initials HR on Monday, March 3, 2025 regarding the implementation of congregational prayer as a program to develop students' spiritual character at SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung, revealed that:

"Congregational prayer is an effective means to familiarize students with time discipline and improve children's spirituality. The habit of praying after prayer, honesty is reflected in sincere intentions and sincerity in carrying out worship according to guidance. In practice, it is not only forming a habit of worship, but also a process of learning character values in a real and consistent manner. With direct involvement in these activities, students are guided to become honest, responsible, courageous, faithful, pious, and dignified individuals, all of which are very important in shaping the character of a strong nation."

The habituation of character development that reflects other spiritual values such as the habit of praying together after the learning process carried out by students, according to the Principal of SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung who was interviewed on Monday, March 3, 2025.

"The joint prayer that we routinely do every day after completing teaching and learning activities is not only limited to religious activities, but also part of fostering students' character. Through joint prayer, we make it a habit for the children to be grateful for the knowledge they have gained, reflect on their actions for one day, and ask for protection and convenience for the next days. Indirectly, this activity forms the character of honesty, because students are trained to pray with a sincere heart. Then, there is responsibility, because they are aware that prayer is part of an obligation that must be carried out in a disciplined manner. Then courage also grows, especially for students who are trusted to

lead prayers in front of their friends. Most importantly, this joint prayer strengthens their faith and piety to God. This is the main foundation of good character. With strong faith, children will find it easier to distinguish between right and wrong, as well as maintain their behavior in daily life. Ultimately, all of this shapes students into dignified individuals, who uphold moral, spiritual, and social values in their lives."



Figure 1. Habit of Praying with SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung After Learning

The results of the interview regarding the habit of caring for the environment applied at SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung were obtained through the information of the respondent teacher with the initials RH on Wednesday, March 5, 2025 as follows.

"The form of habituation of caring for the environment carried out by students at SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung is part of the student character development program. Of course, in our school, students are accustomed to caring about their environment such as keeping the classroom and school environment clean every day. There is a daily picket schedule, clean Friday activities, and a program to plant and care for plants in the school yard. We also provide education on the importance of protecting the environment through lessons and thematic activities. The activities do look simple, but the impact is huge. For example, honesty is practiced when students are asked to be responsible for picket duties. They must be honest whether they have carried out their cleanliness picket duties or not. Therefore, caring for the environment reflects honesty in students' actions. For example, not littering or not pretending to care only when under surveillance."



Figure 2. Habituation of Environmental Care for Students

Likewise, the development of student character through the scouting extracurricular program, one of the Scout coaches at SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung who is also a respondent to this research, was confirmed on Saturday, March 22, 2025 through the initials MR:

"The implementation of extracurricular activities such as Scouting activities which are carried out every Saturday afternoon also makes a great contribution to shaping the character of students at SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung. In scouting activities, children are trained to be independent, cooperative, and responsible. This is very helpful in forming their positive character." Not only in the school environment, but it can continue to the environment where they live. Through intense collaboration between school and home, the values taught in schools through these extracurricular programs can be continued and strengthened in the family environment."



Figure 3. Scout Extracurricular Program

Character development that is habituated through school programs such as congregational prayers and joint prayers, including personal care for the environment and children's participation through educational activities in extracurricular activities make students learn to be used to being honest and responsible which can be attached to the child's personality for a long time. That is why the value-based programs implemented at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung have proven to be effective in instilling moral and social values that are important for the development of students' character.

B. Discussions

This study aims to investigate the effect of character education on students' moral formation at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung. Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that character education in this school has a significant influence on the moral formation of students. The following are the main findings based on observations and interviews:

1. The Effect of Character Education on Student Discipline

Discipline is behaviour that is in accordance with existing rules or regulations, with the aim of achieving the desired results ([Azis & Saleh, 2023](#)). One of the important principles in character education is discipline, which can influence student behaviour both inside and outside school. This is in accordance with previous research which states that character education greatly influences student discipline in the classroom ([Widianti et al., 2024](#)).

The educators at SD Negeri 13 Pagar Gunung have the same perspective regarding the application of character education in the classroom and in other school activities that contribute to improving student discipline, students who previously often arrived late or violated the rules, now show more orderly behavior as a reflection of the impact of the implementation of character development applied in schools. Interestingly, students can improve their learning outcomes by instilling other discipline values, such as responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and so on. Therefore, the source of discipline in the world of education is closely related to the extent to which students obey the rules, both for themselves and for others ([Maulana & Sari, 2024](#)).

This change can also be seen in the increase of students' attendance in class. According to the data collected, character education has improved student attendance rates at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung. Students are starting to realise more how important it is to be disciplined during the learning process, which will ultimately result in better academic quality. This supports previous research that says discipline is very important in the process of student character building. Education is not just about applying rules and punishments; it is more about teaching values such as discipline, integrity, and responsibility ([Wahid, 2018](#)).

According to [Holzer et al. \(2022\)](#), Disciplined students tend to have better self-control, are able to manage time effectively, and show diligence in completing academic tasks. This supports [Spiegel et al. \(2022\)](#) findings, which emphasizes that discipline in the world of education cannot be separated from the extent to which students are able to obey the rules for the good of themselves and others.

This increase is also reflected in the data on student attendance in the classroom which shows a positive trend after the implementation of the character education program at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung. Students begin to understand the importance of being on time and participating in learning activities with full responsibility. This phenomenon strengthens the opinion [Morales-Verdejo \(2025\)](#), which states that education is not only about the application of rules and sanctions, but rather an effort to form awareness of moral values such as integrity, discipline, and responsibility through a humanistic learning process. Basically, discipline is an important indicator in the success of character education. The implementation of holistic, integrative, and consistent character education in elementary schools is not only able to improve student discipline, but also supports academic achievement and the formation of a sustainable wholeness of character.

2. Improving Students' Honesty in Learning and Daily Life

Honest behavior can be the basis for students to develop into good individuals ([Hariandi et al., 2020](#)). Honesty, as one of the very important character values in character education, greatly influences students' behavior in their education and social relationships. According to educators at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung, students are increasingly showing honest behavior every day. They dare to admit mistakes in individual and group tasks.

Some students who were previously reluctant to disclose mistakes in their assignments are now starting to acknowledge the mistakes and ask for help when facing difficulties in completing assignments. This shows that they are beginning to understand the importance of honesty in building better relationships with friends and teachers. The inculcation of honest behavior as a good impact of fostering students' character in school is important as the basis of students' social life because only with truth or honesty can people understand each other, and helping each other will not happen without this understanding ([Fahmi et al., 2022](#)). This theory shows that students increasingly understand how important honesty is as one of the character traits that must be maintained both in the educational environment and in daily life. The success of the learning process is not only measured by the achievement of students' grades, but more importantly the extent to which teachers are able to instill the principles of honesty and morality in students' daily lives ([Tuturop & Sihotang, 2023](#)).

The results of the study show that students increasingly show honest behavior, such as daring to admit mistakes in individual and group tasks, in line with the theory of character education put forward by [Liang et al. \(2025\)](#). He stated that character education is a conscious effort to instill good virtues for individuals and society. Honesty, as one of the core virtues, is the foundation in forming moral and responsible individuals. This finding is also reinforced by [Allgaier et al. \(2015\)](#)'s statement with [Langa \(2013\)](#), which explains that individuals go through a gradual process of understanding and applying moral principles. When students begin to admit mistakes and ask for help, they show a progression from the conventional stage to the postconventional, where action is driven by universal moral principles such as honesty and responsibility ([Chang, 2022](#); [Li et al., 2014](#)).

In addition, the social learning theory of the [Bjørnskov \(2021\)](#) It also explains that human behavior is learned a lot through observation and imitation. The school environment, especially teachers as models, plays an important role in instilling the value of honesty through example. [Nocon et al. \(2022\)](#) Through its sociocultural theory, it also emphasizes that moral learning and development occur in a social context. Interaction between students and teachers, as well as between peers, creates a space that allows for the internalization of positive values such as honesty ([Ji et al., 2021](#); [Mitkidis et al., 2023](#); [Silvia et al., 2014](#)). Thus, the success of instilling honesty in the context of education is inseparable from the integration between character approaches, moral development, and social processes that occur in the learning environment.

3. Responsibility in Learning and School Activities

By looking at student behaviour both inside and outside the classroom, it can be concluded that character education has a positive impact. This is especially true for the value of responsibility (Liu et al., 2020). In completing tasks, students are now more confident. In addition, they are increasingly involved in group activities, sharing ideas openly and working together with their friends to achieve a common goal. This can be seen in the execution of group tasks that are more organised and focus on effective cooperation (Banicki, 2014).

Student participation in extracurricular activities such as sports and scouts has also increased. Students not only attend with discipline, they are also more committed to the tasks assigned in these activities (Rusdianto & Elizar, 2024). They became more aware of the importance of their position in teams and organisations, and this resulted in a greater sense of responsibility towards the work they do. In addition, students actively participated and cooperated in the gotong royong activities and cleaning the school grounds.

Further interpretation shows that character education not only shapes the cognitive aspect, but also actually shapes students' social attitudes and behaviors (Wahlers et al., 2024). When students become more confident in completing assignments, it signifies a growing sense of personal responsibility for their academic obligations. Active involvement in group work and extracurricular activities such as sports, scouting, and mutual cooperation, reflects a shift from individualistic to collaborative. This shows that the value of responsibility is not only applied in the context of classroom learning, but also permeates the social life of students (Anderson et al., 2021).

The tendency of students to be present in a disciplined manner, actively share ideas, and maintain commitment to group and organizational tasks shows that character education has helped them understand their role in the wider community. This means that students do not only carry out their duties because of their obligations, but because of an awareness of the importance of their contribution to mutual success. This shows that the responsibility instilled through character education has developed into a mature form of social responsibility (Schaumberg & Mullen, 2017; Smith & Embry, 2023). Thus, character education that is carried out consistently is able to create a sustainable and holistic change in attitudes, shaping students into responsible individuals not only academically, but also in social life.

4. Improving Empathy in Students' Social Interaction

The success of the character development program makes students more empathetic to their peers. By understanding the feelings of others and acting accordingly, a person will be more accepted in society. One of the character values that is built in themselves and the habits of students who participate in congregational prayer programs, joint prayers, caring for the environment and being active in extracurricular activities is the awakening of student morals such as empathy. This study found that character education at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung helps students understand the feelings of others. Students are

now increasingly aware of the situation of their friends, both those who are experiencing emotional and academic difficulties.

Students now show more concern for friends who are facing problems. Many students volunteer to come and provide moral support when their friend is sick. In addition, they also offer help, such as bringing errands or accompanying their friends to provide encouragement. These actions show that students are increasingly aware of the importance of empathy in social interactions, so that the potential for *bullying* can be avoided (Nirmala & Huda, 2023). As previous research has suggested, examples of character education behaviors that demonstrate empathy, such as helping a friend who is facing problems, defending a friend who is being insulted or bullied, helping to solve a friend's problem, or simply listening to a friend's story, are good ways to show empathy.

5. Validity of Findings through Data Triangulation

To triangulate the data, the results of interviews with teachers and observations of student behaviour were compared. This triangulation process showed that there was congruence between the data obtained from the interviews and what the students saw. The results show that character education at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung has a positive impact on students' moral formation. The application of this triangulation method is in line with previous studies, Triangulation of methods involves comparing information or data obtained through various methods.

Table 2. The Effect of Character Education Students Moral Formation

Aspect	Description Influence	Estimated Influence (%)
Discipline	The improvement in student discipline can be seen from more students arriving on time, obeying class rules, and completing assignments in a more organised manner.	30%
Honesty	The increase in honesty can be seen from students who are more willing to admit mistakes and not cheat. They understand the importance of being honest in social and academic relationships.	25%
Responsibility	Students are more confident in completing tasks and are involved in group activities as well as extracurricular activities, such as sports and scouts.	20%
Empathy	Students more often show concern for friends who are facing problems and provide moral support, and help friends in need.	15%
Validity of Findings (Data Triangulation)	The triangulated data shows the correspondence between interviews and observations, confirming that character education has a positive impact on students' moral formation.	10%

The following table, which has been adapted to SDN 13 Pagar Gunung, summarises the impact of character education on students' moral formation based on the results of observations and interviews. Total Impact of Character Education on Moral Formation at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung adalah 90%. This table illustrates the impact of character education on students' moral formation at SD Negeri13 Pagar Gunung, which is based on data obtained through observations and interviews at the school.

CONCLUSIONS

Character education has a very important role in shaping students' morals and ethics, which aims to produce individuals who are moral, responsible and have good ethics. This research shows that the implementation of character education at SDN 13 Pagar Gunung has a positive impact on students' moral formation, especially in the aspects of discipline, responsibility, honesty and empathy. Through various character education programs, such as congregational prayers, joint prayers, extracurricular activities and parental involvement, students begin to show more disciplined, honest, responsible and empathic behaviour. This positive influence can be seen in students' increased discipline in complying with school rules, increased honesty in completing assignments, and increased participation in school activities and social interactions that show empathy towards others. The results of this study also support the importance of collaboration between school, home and community in shaping students' character, as effective character education involves various parties. Thus, character education does not only focus on academic intelligence, but also on the formation of noble morals to face the challenges of life in the future. In addition, this study suggests that character education programmes should be implemented more widely and systematically, not only in primary schools but also at all levels of education. Consistent and sustainable implementation is expected to create students who are not only intelligent, but also have good character, ready to face global challenges with solid morality.

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