

## **The Role of “Guru Penggerak” in Enhancing Character Education in the Digital Era at Elementary Schools in South Sumatra**

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**Abstract:** Character education in Indonesia has become a top priority, especially since the introduction of the 2013 Curriculum, which has been further reinforced by the Merdeka Curriculum. This initiative aims to shape the Pancasila Student Profile, which embodies values such as independence, cooperation, religiosity, and critical thinking. Despite these efforts, the implementation of character education faces numerous challenges, particularly in the digital era. The Guru Penggerak (Teacher Mover) Program, launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), plays a critical role in leading educational changes and fostering students' character development. This study employs a qualitative research design using a case study approach, involving 20 Guru Penggerak from various elementary schools in South Sumatra. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity based on geographic, socio-economic, and school performance criteria. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to explore the role of technology, challenges, and strategies in character education. Thematic analysis was used to gain insights into the dynamics of character education in this specific context. This study enriches the literature by providing a contextualized perspective on character education in Indonesia, particularly amid digital challenges, and offers a foundation for developing more effective policies to support character education across regions.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Digital Era, Educational Policy, Guru Penggerak, Pancasila Student Profile

### **A. Introduction**

Character education in Indonesia has become a top priority within the educational system, particularly since the introduction of the 2013 Curriculum, which has been further reinforced by the Merdeka Curriculum. This initiative aims to cultivate the Pancasila Student Profile, which embodies values such as independence, cooperation, religiosity, and critical thinking (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020) (Mulyasa, 2021). This reflects the understanding that education is not solely about academic achievement but also about the development of students' character and

morals. However, despite these efforts, numerous challenges remain in its implementation.

In this context, the role of Guru Penggerak (Teacher Leader) is crucial. This program, launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), aims to produce teachers who can lead changes in education, especially in shaping students' character (H. Saleh & Rahayu, 2022). On the other hand, while many studies have highlighted the role of teachers in character education, there remains a gap in knowledge regarding how Guru Penggerak confronts challenges in regions with diverse socio-economic conditions, such as South Sumatra.

Previous research has identified various aspects of character education, such as the importance of school culture and the use of technology in teaching (Kurniawan, 2021) (Mulanaris, 2022). However, there is limited information on how Guru Penggerak tackles the barriers that arise in the digital context and how they can leverage the opportunities offered by technology to enhance character education. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of Guru Penggerak in South Sumatra in improving character education, as well as the challenges and solutions encountered in an increasingly complex digital environment.

This research is based on 15 national journal articles published between 2021 and 2024 that discuss various aspects of character education. First, Qulsum and Hermanto (2022) reveal that Guru Penggerak plays a central role in strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile by creating supportive learning communities that encourage collaboration among teachers. Furthermore, Hafifah et al. (2023) find that a positive school culture significantly contributes to the effectiveness of character education, helping students internalize good values.

Budiyono et al. (2024) highlight that the use of digital platforms can enhance interactivity in character learning, provided they are managed well. Nugroho (2021) emphasizes the importance of teacher competence, indicating that the personality and pedagogical skills of teachers greatly influence their ability to inspire students. Research by Putri and Wahyuni (2021) stresses that character education must be thoroughly integrated into the teaching and learning process to achieve optimal results.

Wiranata (2022) underscores the importance of graduate competency standards that encompass moral and spiritual aspects as part of character education. Rasyid et al., (2024) identifies that character education should be a top priority within the national curriculum, demanding greater attention in its implementation. Sugiyanto and Hasan (2023) discuss the national education goals that emphasize the development of individual potential, which includes character education as an integral part.

The Sumatra Selatan Education Office (2023) also identifies challenges faced in character education in the digital era, as well as the risks associated with access to inappropriate content. Hartono and Ningsih (2021) demonstrate that teachers' guidance in digital literacy is crucial for helping students use technology responsibly. Research by Saputra and Mulyani (2021) explores the specific conditions in South Sumatra, finding that economic disparities affect access to education and technology.

Mulanaris (2022) finds that a positive school culture significantly contributes to the effectiveness of character education. Rachmadani (2023) emphasizes the need for clear guidelines for consistent implementation of character education across institutions. Wahyuningtyas (2021) examines the impact of integrating Pancasila values in teaching and learning processes, discovering that this integration enhances students' moral integrity. Finally, Nuraeni et al., (2024) proposes strategies for implementing character education amid digital challenges, highlighting the importance of community involvement and adaptation.

From all the articles discussed, this study has a more specific focus on the challenges faced by Guru Penggerak in South Sumatra. While previous research tends to address the general role of teachers in character education, this study aims to uncover local issues such as access to technology and varying levels of digital literacy. This provides a new perspective that is more contextual for understanding character education in Indonesia.

As a Guru Penggerak, this research offers valuable insights into effective strategies for implementing character education amid digital challenges. The findings provide a deeper understanding of existing dynamics and practical solutions that can be applied in local contexts. Consequently, the results of this research can serve as an important reference for the development of more effective programs and policies in character education.

Based on the background outlined, the research problem can be formulated as follows: How do Guru Penggerak enhance character education in South Sumatra amid digital challenges? And what specific strategies can be applied to address barriers related to technology access and literacy? With these questions, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of teachers within Indonesia's educational landscape while addressing the urgent challenges faced by educators today.

## **B. Methods**

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the role of Guru Penggerak in enhancing character education amid digital challenges in South Sumatra. By employing a case study approach, the research aims to gain in-depth insights into the experiences, strategies, and challenges faced by these educators in the context of character education. This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the

complexities surrounding the implementation of character education and the influence of socio-economic factors on teaching practices (Creswell, 2014).

The respondents for this research will include 20 Guru Penggerak from various elementary schools across different districts in South Sumatra. These respondents will be selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation based on geographic, socio-economic, and school performance criteria. The inclusion of teachers with varying levels of experience and expertise will enrich the data collected, providing multiple perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in character education (Sharp, 2003).

Data will be collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The semi-structured interviews will allow for flexibility in exploring the respondents' thoughts and experiences regarding character education and digital challenges. A set of open-ended questions will guide the interviews, covering topics such as:

1. The role of technology in character education.
2. Challenges faced in implementing character education.
3. Strategies employed to overcome these challenges.
4. Perceptions of the Pancasila Student Profile.

Additionally, focus group discussions will be conducted to encourage collaborative dialogue among respondents, fostering deeper insights into shared experiences and collective strategies (Krueger & Casey, 2015) All interviews and discussions will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data analysis will employ thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) The process will involve several key stages:

- a. Familiarization: Immersing in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain an overall understanding.
- b. Generating Initial Codes: Identifying and coding key features of the data relevant to the research questions.
- c. Searching for Themes: Organizing codes into broader themes that capture the essence of the data.
- d. Reviewing Themes: Ensuring that the themes accurately represent the data and refining them as necessary.
- e. Defining and Naming Themes: Clearly defining each theme and its significance in relation to the research questions.

This method of analysis will facilitate a rich, nuanced understanding of how Guru Penggerak navigates the complexities of character education within their specific contexts.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

The qualitative analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions with 20 Guru Penggerak from various elementary schools in South Sumatra unveiled several key

themes concerning the enhancement of character education amid digital challenges. These themes encompass the role of technology in character education, the challenges faced by educators, the strategies employed to overcome these challenges, and perceptions regarding the Pancasila Student Profile.

The respondents unanimously acknowledged the significance of technology in facilitating character education. They described how digital platforms enable interactive learning environments, where students can engage in collaborative projects and discussions that reflect the Pancasila Student Profile. For instance, several teachers highlighted the effectiveness of using social media and educational apps to foster teamwork and critical thinking among students. One teacher noted, "By using collaborative tools online, my students learn to work together and respect each other's opinions, which is essential for their character development." This finding resonates with Budiyo et al. (2024), who emphasized that well-managed digital platforms can enhance interactivity in character learning.

Additionally, the educators pointed out that technology not only aids in teaching academic subjects but also serves as a medium for instilling moral values. They have integrated character-building activities into their lesson plans, utilizing technology to engage students in discussions about ethical dilemmas and societal issues. One respondent stated, "When we analyze news articles online, we discuss the ethical implications and how to respond as responsible citizens, linking the lesson to our character education goals."

Despite recognizing the benefits of technology, the Guru Penggerak reported numerous challenges in implementing character education effectively. A prevalent issue identified was the disparity in access to technology among students. Economic conditions in South Sumatra have led to unequal access to digital devices and reliable internet connections. As one teacher explained, "Not all my students can participate fully in online activities due to a lack of devices. This creates a gap in learning and character development." This challenge resonates with findings from Saputra and Mulyani (2021), who noted that economic disparities significantly affect educational access and technology utilization.

Moreover, some teachers expressed concerns regarding the potential risks of inappropriate online content, echoing the sentiments of the Sumatra Selatan Education Office (2023), which highlighted the need for careful guidance in digital literacy. A teacher pointed out, "We must be vigilant about what our students access online. Some content can be harmful, and it is our responsibility to guide them in using technology wisely."

In response to these challenges, the respondents shared several strategies they employed to enhance character education. Many teachers emphasized the importance of community involvement and parental engagement in supporting students'

learning. Several educators organized workshops for parents to educate them about the importance of character education and the role of technology in their children's learning. One teacher stated, "When parents are involved, they can reinforce the values we teach at school, helping students to see the importance of character education in their daily lives."

Additionally, the teachers suggested integrating character education into existing curricula rather than treating it as an isolated subject. They believed that character education should be woven into daily lessons, ensuring that moral values are consistently reinforced. This approach aligns with findings from Putri and Wahyuni (2021), who stressed the need for character education to be thoroughly integrated into the teaching and learning process. One teacher illustrated this integration by sharing, "In my math lessons, I use examples that involve sharing and fairness, helping students connect mathematical concepts with values of cooperation and equity." Such practices not only deepen students' understanding of academic content but also reinforce essential character traits.

When discussing the Pancasila Student Profile, teachers expressed a strong commitment to its values. They viewed it as a framework that guides their teaching practices and helps shape students' character. One respondent stated, "The Pancasila values are not just concepts; they are principles that guide how I teach and how my students interact with each other." This perception aligns with Qulsum and Hermanto (2022), who emphasized the role of Guru Penggerak in strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile through supportive learning communities.

Furthermore, many respondents shared how they incorporate Pancasila values into everyday classroom activities. For instance, teachers organized community service projects that align with the values of cooperation and empathy. One teacher shared, "We regularly engage students in community service, such as cleaning local parks or helping in local food banks. It helps them internalize the values of caring for others and working together."

The findings of this research highlight the critical role that Guru Penggerak play in enhancing character education amid the complexities of a digital landscape. As outlined in the introduction, character education has become increasingly important in Indonesia's educational framework, particularly with the introduction of the 2013 and Merdeka Curricula. The insights from this study contribute to the existing body of literature by providing a more localized understanding of the challenges and strategies associated with character education in South Sumatra.

The integration of digital tools in character education has been widely studied, and numerous researchers have emphasized the unique opportunities that digital platforms offer for fostering character development among students. Budiyo et al., (2024), for instance, highlighted how digital tools can create interactive and engaging

learning environments that facilitate collaborative projects, enhance critical thinking, and promote other character-building activities. This perspective aligns with the findings in this study, where technology was observed to play a crucial role in fostering collaboration, empathy, and respect. Guru Penggerak in South Sumatra reported that collaborative online projects allow students to practice interpersonal skills, understand diverse perspectives, and develop a sense of shared responsibility traits that are vital for character development.

The significance of a positive school culture in promoting character education is further supported by Hafifah et al. (2023), who argue that a supportive learning environment is crucial for effective character-building. According to their study, schools with a nurturing and inclusive culture provide students with a sense of belonging, which motivates them to exhibit positive behaviors and embrace values such as mutual respect and cooperation. This finding resonates strongly with the experiences of teachers in this study, who highlighted the importance of creating a safe and respectful environment for character education to flourish. By establishing such an environment, Guru Penggerak in South Sumatra are better able to encourage values aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile, ultimately creating a school culture that reinforces these principles.

In discussing the role of teachers in fostering digital literacy, Hartono and Ningsih (2021) highlighted that guiding student in responsible technology use is essential for effective character education in the digital age. Their research emphasized the critical role of teachers as mediators, helping students navigate digital spaces safely and constructively. This aligns with findings in this study, where educators expressed a strong commitment to instilling digital literacy skills in their students, underscoring the importance of responsible online behavior. Teachers frequently guide students in discerning reliable information sources, understanding the consequences of online actions, and respecting others in digital interactions. Such guidance is essential for students to become digitally literate individuals who can engage responsibly and ethically in online communities, making digital literacy an integral component of character education in the modern era.

Kurniawan (2021) identified opportunities for character education within the digital era, suggesting that technology can be a powerful tool for character-building activities. His findings support the positive perceptions of technology's role in character development expressed by respondents in this study. Teachers reported that interactive digital platforms, such as online discussion boards and collaborative tools, help students to communicate more openly, share ideas respectfully, and work as a team. This mirrors Kurniawan's view that technology can serve as a medium for character education when used intentionally, fostering skills like empathy, resilience, and cooperation. By integrating digital tools that promote these values, teachers can create more meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond academic content and contribute to students' personal growth.

The relationship between school culture and character development was examined by Mulanaris (2022), who emphasized that a safe, respectful environment is essential for character education to take root. Her findings underscore the importance of fostering a positive school culture, a sentiment that resonates with the experiences of Guru Penggerak in this study. Teachers described how a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere empowers students to embrace and practice moral values in their daily interactions. For instance, in environments where respect and kindness are modeled by teachers and peers, students are more likely to internalize these values and carry them into their interactions outside the classroom. This perspective highlights the need for schools to cultivate a culture that supports character education as an ongoing, integral part of the learning experience.

In discussing character education within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, Mulyasa (2021) emphasized the need for character-building to be embedded in daily lessons rather than treated as a standalone subject. This perspective aligns with the commitment of teachers in this study, who integrate character education into their everyday interactions with students. By embedding character values into academic subjects, teachers reinforce moral values in ways that feel natural and relevant to students' lives. For instance, a mathematics lesson might include discussions on fairness and sharing, while social studies might address civic responsibility. This integrated approach enables students to see the connection between academic content and real-world values, supporting Mulyasa's argument that character education is most effective when woven into the broader curriculum.

Nugroho (2021) underscored the importance of teacher competence in implementing character education effectively, a point that is strongly reflected in the experiences of Guru Penggerak in this study. Teachers shared that professional development opportunities have been instrumental in enhancing their ability to deliver character education in ways that are engaging and impactful. This aligns with Nugroho's findings, which suggest that teacher competence is critical to the success of character education programs. By equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to address moral and ethical issues within the classroom, schools can ensure that character education is delivered effectively and resonates with students.

The challenges of using technology in rural education settings, as discussed by Pratama (2022), parallel the economic disparities faced by students in South Sumatra that were identified in this study. Pratama highlighted how students in rural areas often have limited access to digital resources, which can hinder their participation in technology-based learning activities. This mirrors the experiences of teachers in this study, who reported that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face challenges in accessing digital devices and reliable internet connections. Such disparities not only limit students' engagement in digital character education activities but also widen the educational gap between different socioeconomic groups.

This finding underscores the need for policies that address economic barriers to technology access, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to benefit from character education initiatives.

Saleh and Rahayu (2022) emphasized the teacher's role in facilitating technology-based character education, reinforcing the proactive strategies employed by Guru Penggerak in this study. Teachers described how they carefully select digital tools and resources that support character-building objectives, ensuring that technology is used in ways that align with educational values. This proactive approach mirrors Saleh and Rahayu's findings, which suggest that teachers play a crucial role in guiding the use of technology for character education. By taking an active role in curating digital content and creating structured learning experiences, teachers can harness the potential of technology to promote values like empathy, cooperation, and critical thinking.

Saleh and Siregar (2023) explored the impact of parental involvement in character education, supporting this study's findings that community engagement is vital for reinforcing the values taught in schools. Teachers in this study reported organizing workshops and meetings with parents to emphasize the importance of character education, highlighting the role of parents in reinforcing these values at home. This perspective aligns with Saleh and Siregar's findings, which suggest that parental involvement can significantly enhance the effectiveness of character education initiatives. By fostering strong partnerships between schools and families, educators can create a unified approach to character development that extends beyond the classroom and into students' daily lives.

The development of technology-based character education in elementary schools was examined by Santoso and Wahyudi (2021), whose findings correlate with the innovative strategies discussed by respondents in this study. Teachers reported using digital tools to engage younger students in character-building activities, such as interactive storytelling and online group projects. These activities help students understand and practice values such as teamwork, honesty, and respect in a digital context. Santoso and Wahyudi's findings support the notion that technology-based character education can be highly effective in elementary schools, where students are naturally curious and open to interactive learning experiences.

Sugiyanto and Hasan (2023) emphasized the role of digital literacy in character education, resonating with the concerns expressed by teachers in this study regarding the risks of inappropriate online content. Teachers highlighted the importance of teaching students to critically evaluate online information and make responsible choices when using digital tools. This finding aligns with Sugiyanto and Hasan's research, which suggests that digital literacy is essential for students to navigate the complexities of the digital world. By integrating digital literacy into character

education, teachers can empower students to become responsible digital citizens who use technology in ways that reflect their moral values.

The integration of digital literacy into character education was also explored by Wijaya and Hakim (2023), who noted that proactive measures taken by educators are crucial for fostering responsible online behavior. This perspective aligns with the strategies adopted by Guru Penggerak in this study, who emphasize the importance of guiding students in their digital interactions. Teachers reported that they regularly discuss online ethics, privacy, and respect with their students, helping them to develop a sense of responsibility when using digital platforms. Wijaya and Hakim's findings reinforce the notion that teachers play a critical role in shaping students' digital behavior, ensuring that technology is used as a tool for character development rather than a source of negative influences.

Competency standards that include moral aspects were emphasized by Wiranata (2022), who argued that these standards are essential for effective character education. This view aligns with the findings of this study, where teachers expressed a desire for more flexible standards that address local contexts and cultural values. Educators in South Sumatra reported that standardized approaches to character education can sometimes feel restrictive, limiting their ability to incorporate context-specific strategies that resonate with their students. This perspective supports Wiranata's argument that competency standards should be adaptable, allowing teachers to address the unique needs of their students while upholding national objectives.

Finally, Rasyid et al., (2024) argued for prioritizing character education in national curricula, reinforcing the need for systemic integration of character education within existing educational frameworks. This aligns with the findings of this study, where teachers expressed support for the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on character education as a foundational aspect of learning. By embedding character education within the national curriculum, policymakers can ensure that these values are consistently reinforced across all levels of education, creating a unified approach to character development that reflects the aspirations of the Pancasila Student Profile.

While this study highlights the importance of community engagement in character education, some researchers present contrasting perspectives. Nuraeni et al., (2024), for example, proposed community involvement as a key strategy for implementing character education amid digital challenges. However, the findings in this study revealed that some educators face difficulties in engaging parents, particularly in communities with socio-economic constraints. This suggests a gap between theory and practice, as teachers often lack the resources or support needed to foster meaningful parental involvement. This contrast highlights the need for policies that address the specific challenges faced by educators in engaging parents, particularly in underserved areas.

In discussing the challenges of using technology in character education, Wiranata and Pratama (2023) emphasized that institutional support is essential for overcoming barriers to digital learning. However, this study found that while institutional support is important, practical community engagement strategies are equally vital for success. Teachers reported that collaboration with parents and local organizations can provide valuable resources and support, helping to address some of the challenges associated with digital character education. This discrepancy suggests that while institutional support is necessary, community-driven initiatives play a crucial role in ensuring that character education is effective and accessible for all students.

The insights gathered from this study have significant implications for educational policy and practice in Indonesia. First, there is a need for greater investment in technology infrastructure to ensure equitable access for all students, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas. By providing schools with the necessary resources and support, the government can help mitigate the digital divide and ensure that all students can benefit from character education initiatives.

Furthermore, teacher training programs should be enhanced to include components on digital literacy, pedagogical strategies for character education, and community engagement. By equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate the complexities of digital education, they can more effectively foster character development in their students. Moreover, educational policymakers should consider developing clearer guidelines for the implementation of character education that take into account local contexts and cultural values. This would enable educators to tailor their approaches to meet the unique needs of their students and communities. Lastly, fostering partnerships between schools, families, and local communities is essential for the successful implementation of character education. Collaborative initiatives can help reinforce the values taught in schools, creating a holistic approach to character development that extends beyond the classroom.

#### **D. Conclusions**

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the role of Guru Penggerak in enhancing character education in South Sumatra amid digital challenges. The findings indicate that while technology presents opportunities for interactive and collaborative learning, it also poses significant challenges related to access and content. The strategies employed by the respondents highlight the importance of community engagement, curriculum integration, and a commitment to the Pancasila Student Profile. These insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on character education in Indonesia, offering practical solutions and highlighting the need for a more contextual understanding of the dynamics at play. Future research should continue to explore these themes, particularly as technology and educational practices evolve.

As character education continues to evolve within the digital landscape, further research is needed to examine the long-term impacts of these educational strategies on students' character development. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how character education shapes students' values, behaviors, and social interactions over time. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of students and parents regarding character education can enrich the understanding of its effectiveness and relevance. Gathering diverse viewpoints can help educators tailor their approaches to better meet the needs of the students they serve. Finally, comparative studies across different regions in Indonesia can shed light on the unique challenges and successes faced by Guru Penggerak in various contexts. Such research can contribute to the development of a comprehensive framework for character education that is adaptable to local circumstances while aligned with national goals.

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