

Strengthening Students' Character and Discipline through the Student Development Program at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the strengthening of students' character and discipline through the student development program at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The research participants included the principal, the vice principal for student affairs, the guidance and counseling teacher, homeroom teachers, student activity supervisors, and students of SMA Ar-Rahman Medan. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the student development program at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan has been implemented systematically through daily, weekly, and annual activities, including morning assemblies, the habituation of the 5S culture *Senyum, Salam, Sapa, Sopan, dan Santun* (Smile, Greet, Acknowledge, Be Polite, and Be Courteous) religious activities, student organization development, extracurricular activities, and the enforcement of school regulations. The program has proven effective in strengthening students' religious character, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, leadership, and social awareness. The implementation of the program has also positively affected students' discipline, as demonstrated by improvements in punctuality, compliance with school regulations, proper use of school uniforms, and active participation in various school activities. The program's success is supported by the principal's commitment, the active role of the vice principal for student affairs, teachers' exemplary conduct, parental support, and a supportive school culture. The inhibiting factors include limited disciplinary awareness among some students, the influence of peer environments, and uncontrolled use of social media.

Keywords: *character strengthening, student discipline, student development*

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Introduction

Education plays an important role in developing individuals who are knowledgeable, possess strong character, are disciplined, and demonstrate responsibility. Education is directed not only toward achieving academic competence but also toward developing students' attitudes and behavior so that they can live as good individuals and responsible members of society (Harahap, 2022). In the context of national education, character development constitutes an important component of the educational process because students' success is measured not only through academic achievement but also through their ability to demonstrate religious attitudes, honesty, discipline, responsibility, independence, concern for others, and respect.

Strengthening students' character has become increasingly important amid rapid social change. Technological developments, changing patterns of social interaction, the influence of social media, and weakened social control may affect students' behavior in the school environment (Panggabean & Nasution, 2023). Various problems, including arriving late, failing to comply with school regulations, demonstrating limited responsibility in participating in school activities, communicating impolitely, and showing insufficient concern for the school environment, indicate that character education must be implemented systematically and continuously. Therefore, schools must create educational environments that emphasize not only classroom learning but also the development of attitudes and behavior through student development programs.

Discipline is one of the principal character values that must be instilled in students. Discipline can be understood as students' ability to comply with regulations, value time, complete assignments, maintain order, and assume responsibility for their obligations (Pardede, 2025). Disciplined students are better able to participate in learning activities, respect teachers, maintain a conducive classroom atmosphere, and properly perform school activities. Conversely, limited discipline may obstruct the learning process and disrupt the development of a positive school culture. (Arsyad et al., 2025) explain that student attendance discipline can be improved through effective student management, clear regulations, student involvement, communication of regulations to students and parents, and consistent habituation.

Student development programs hold a strategic position in strengthening students' character and discipline (Siagian & Harahap, 2025). Student development refers to a series of activities designed by schools to develop students' potential, attitudes, behavior, interests, talents, and responsibilities both within and outside learning activities. These programs may include the enforcement of school regulations, guidance and counseling, religious activities, student organizations, extracurricular activities, flag ceremonies, morning assemblies, social activities, the habituation of positive behavior, rewards, and guidance for students who violate school regulations (Mujiono, 2025). Through such programs, students are not only provided with knowledge about character and discipline but are also trained to practice positive behavior in their daily school lives.

Effective student development does not merely emphasize punishment for violations but prioritizes guidance, habituation, exemplary conduct, and the development of students' awareness. Discipline developed through a positive approach helps students understand the importance of rules instead of merely fearing sanctions. (Khasbiyah, 2025) emphasizes that positive discipline can strengthen character education because it promotes self-awareness, responsibility, parental involvement, teacher consistency, and a safe and inclusive school

culture. Therefore, student development programs must be directed toward forming discipline based on awareness rather than coercion.

Teachers and educational personnel play important roles in implementing student development programs. The principal is responsible for establishing policies and determining the direction of student development. The vice principal for student affairs coordinates student development programs. Guidance and counseling teachers provide guidance and counseling services and address students' problems. Homeroom teachers directly monitor students' behavioral development. Subject teachers and extracurricular supervisors also provide examples and develop students' discipline through learning and school activities. Therefore, the success of efforts to strengthen students' character and discipline depends greatly on cooperation among all elements of the school.

Strengthening students' character and discipline is also consistent with the current educational policy emphasizing the Pancasila Student Profile. The Pancasila Student Profile describes students as lifelong learners who possess global competence and behave according to Pancasila values. Its dimensions include faith in and devotion to God Almighty, noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity. These values are closely associated with character development because schools are expected not only to produce academically competent students but also to develop students with strong personalities, discipline, and responsibility.

As a secondary education institution, SMA Ar-Rahman Medan is responsible for developing students with strong character and discipline. At the senior high school level, students are in adolescence, a phase in which they begin to search for their identities, develop independence, and interact more extensively with their social environments. This condition requires schools to provide well-directed student development programs so that students can develop positively. Student development programs are expected to serve as environments for developing positive habits, strengthening responsibility, and preventing behavior that violates school regulations.

Nevertheless, strengthening students' character and discipline is not always easy. Schools may face various obstacles, including differences in students' family backgrounds, peer influences, limited awareness of school regulations, excessive use of digital devices, and inadequate cooperation between schools and parents. (Aini et al., 2024) explain that improving student discipline through character development requires a gradual process, beginning with teacher warnings, homeroom teacher guidance, the involvement of guidance and counseling teachers, and communication with parents. This indicates that developing character and discipline requires effective coordination and consistent approaches.

Based on the preceding explanation, research on strengthening students' character and discipline through the student development program at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan is important. This study is expected to explain how student development programs are designed and implemented, the strategies used by the school to strengthen students' character and discipline, and the supporting and inhibiting factors. Therefore, this study may contribute to the development of more effective and humane student development programs that are consistent with students' needs.

Literature Review

2.1.Strengthening Students' Character

Character refers to values embedded within an individual and reflected in everyday attitudes, speech, and actions. In education, character is associated with developing students' personalities so that they demonstrate good behavior, responsibility, honesty, discipline, concern, independence, and respect for others (Pramono et al., 2022). Strengthening students' character is a conscious, planned, and continuous educational process intended to develop positive habits among students.

Character strengthening cannot be achieved solely through lectures or classroom material. Character must be developed through habituation, exemplary conduct, supervision, value reinforcement, and a supportive school culture (Rahman, 2019). Schools must create environments that encourage students to behave positively. Character values can be instilled through learning activities, religious activities, social activities, extracurricular programs, guidance and counseling services, and daily interactions among students, teachers, and other members of the school community.

2.2.Strengthening Character and Discipline through Student Development

Student development is closely related to strengthening students' character and discipline. Through student activities, students do not merely learn theories concerning character values but also practice them within the school environment. For example, flag ceremonies teach discipline, nationalism, and responsibility. Extracurricular activities teach cooperation, leadership, and commitment. Through guidance and counseling, students receive assistance in resolving personal and social problems (Casika et al., 2023). School regulations train students to respect rules and maintain order.

Effective student development programs must be implemented consistently and involve the entire school community. Principals, teachers, homeroom teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, student council supervisors, extracurricular supervisors, educational staff, students, and parents must cooperate. Without such cooperation, the development of character and discipline will not be implemented optimally. (Intan Astina Dewi, 2025) emphasizes that strengthening student discipline must be supported by cooperation between schools and parents, habituation, and the formulation of clear school regulations.

Student development must also apply a humane approach. Students who violate regulations should not merely receive punishment but should be guided to understand their mistakes and develop an awareness of the need to improve themselves. Therefore, student development should combine firm regulations, educational approaches, teachers' exemplary conduct, and a positive school culture.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the strengthening of students' character and discipline through the student development program at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan. The research informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation of the student development program. The informants consisted of the principal, the vice principal for student affairs, the guidance and counseling teacher, homeroom teachers,

the Student Council (OSIS) supervisor, extracurricular activity supervisors, and students. Primary data were obtained through observations and interviews with the informants, while secondary data were derived from student affairs work programs, school regulations, records of student violations, activity schedules, guidance and counseling documents, photographs of activities, and other records relevant to the research focus.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to examine the implementation of the student development program, students' disciplinary behavior, interactions between teachers and students, and the school culture supporting character development. Interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding the forms of the program, implementation strategies, supporting and inhibiting factors, and the program's effects on students' character and discipline. The data were analyzed interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation in narrative form, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through source and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from various informants with the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. The study also observed research ethics by obtaining informed consent, protecting the informants' identities, and using the collected data solely for academic purposes.

Results

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation conducted at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan, the findings indicate that the student development program was implemented in a planned manner through daily, weekly, and annual activities involving the principal, vice principal for student affairs, teachers, homeroom teachers, extracurricular supervisors, and all students.

4.1.Implementation of the Student Development Program in Strengthening Students' Character and Discipline

Based on the observations, interviews, and documentation conducted at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan, the student development program was identified as one of the school's principal programs. It was systematically designed to support the development of students' character and discipline. The program did not merely function as a supporting activity for the learning process but also constituted an implementation of the school's vision and mission to develop students who possess strong character, noble morals, discipline, responsibility, and leadership qualities.

Field observations indicated that all student development activities had been organized within an annual work program, which was subsequently elaborated into semester, monthly, weekly, and daily programs. The program was developed by the vice principal for student affairs in cooperation with the principal and involved teachers, homeroom teachers, extracurricular supervisors, and members of the Student Council. The involvement of all school elements indicates that character development is a shared responsibility and not solely the responsibility of guidance and counseling teachers or the vice principal for student affairs.

The student development program was implemented continuously through various activities integrated into the school's routines. As part of the daily program, students were encouraged to arrive before the learning process began. Each morning, an assembly or brief guidance session was conducted to motivate students, communicate important information, and

remind them of the importance of maintaining discipline and complying with school regulations. Teachers on duty checked students' attendance, uniform neatness, school attributes, personal hygiene, and readiness to participate in learning activities.

The school also implemented the 5S culture Smile, Greet, Acknowledge, Be Polite, and Be Courteous as a form of character habituation in everyday life. Based on the observations, this culture was implemented from the moment students entered the school gate. Teachers welcomed students, who were then encouraged to exchange greetings, acknowledge teachers and friends, and demonstrate polite behavior throughout their time at school. This habituation gradually developed harmonious relationships between teachers and students while fostering mutual respect.

In relation to religious character, the student development program included activities such as collective prayers before and after lessons, the recitation of Qur'anic verses by Muslim students, congregational prayers, commemorations of religious holidays, and other spiritual development activities. According to interviews with religious activity supervisors, these religious activities aimed to develop students' spiritual awareness so that honesty, responsibility, discipline, and concern for others emerged from internal awareness rather than merely from compliance with school regulations.

Character development programs were also implemented through extracurricular activities. SMA Ar-Rahman Medan provided various extracurricular activities as environments for students to develop their talents, interests, and leadership abilities. Through these activities, students learned to cooperate, respect the opinions of others, resolve problems through deliberation, and assume responsibility for their assigned duties. Extracurricular supervisors served as mentors and role models in developing students' positive character throughout the activities.

In addition to extracurricular activities, character development was implemented through student organizations, particularly the Student Council. Based on interviews with Student Council members, participation in the organization provided practical experience in leadership, communication, time management, responsibility, and teamwork. Through various organizational activities, students were trained to design work programs, organize activities, resolve problems, and account for the outcomes of their activities to the school.

To improve discipline, the school implemented regulations that were communicated to all students at the beginning of the academic year. These regulations included provisions concerning attendance, school uniforms, communication ethics, environmental cleanliness, mobile phone use, and behavior during learning activities. Based on the documentation, school regulations were displayed in several strategic locations so that they could be easily accessed by all members of the school community.

The observations indicated that teachers did not merely supervise compliance with school regulations but also provided guidance when violations occurred. The approach emphasized persuasive guidance through advice, communication with homeroom teachers, invitations for parents to attend meetings when necessary, and educational assignments intended to develop students' responsibility.

The observations conducted during the study indicated that the implementation of the student development program positively affected students' behavior. Most students demonstrated improved discipline, as indicated by the reduced number of students arriving late,

increased compliance with requirements for wearing complete school attributes, and more orderly implementation of teaching and learning activities. Students also became more actively involved in school activities, demonstrated greater respect for teachers and peers, and assumed greater responsibility for academic assignments and organizational activities.

The findings indicate that the student development program at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan was implemented in a structured and continuous manner through various activities designed to develop students' character and improve their discipline. The program was not merely a supplementary activity but had become part of the school culture consistently implemented in everyday school life.

The implementation of morning assemblies, the 5S culture, religious activities, student organizations, extracurricular activities, and school regulations demonstrates that the school applied a habituation approach. This approach was considered effective because character cannot be developed merely through classroom instruction but requires continuous practice in various situations. Through habituation, students obtained practical experience in applying the values of discipline, responsibility, cooperation, concern for others, and leadership.

The findings demonstrate that religious character was among the most prominent character values developed by students. Regular religious activities were capable of developing spiritual awareness so that disciplined and responsible behavior emerged as part of students' appreciation of religious values (Abdi Syahrial Harahap, 2020). This condition indicates that character education at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan was not oriented solely toward social aspects but also emphasized students' moral and spiritual development.

In addition to religious character, discipline also improved considerably. This was indicated by students' increased punctuality, compliance with uniform regulations, and greater orderliness during learning activities. These improvements demonstrate that the enforcement of school regulations accompanied by persuasive guidance is more effective than punishment alone. Teachers did not merely act as supervisors but also served as mentors who helped students understand the benefits of discipline in their lives.

4.2.Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Student Development Program

Based on an interview with the vice principal for student affairs, the success of the student development program was closely related to effective cooperation among the principal, teachers, homeroom teachers, extracurricular supervisors, parents, and students. The school regularly coordinated and evaluated program implementation so that any problems could be addressed immediately. The school also implemented a reward system for high-achieving and highly disciplined students to motivate other students to demonstrate similar behavior.

Nevertheless, this study identified several obstacles to program implementation. Based on interviews with several teachers, a small number of students continued to demonstrate limited awareness of the need to comply with school regulations. This condition was influenced by various factors, including insufficient family supervision, peer influences outside the school, developments in social media, and the use of digital technology that had not been fully directed toward positive activities. Some students continued to arrive late, demonstrate limited discipline in completing assignments, and participate insufficiently in student development activities.

To address these obstacles, the school continued to conduct periodic evaluations, improve communication with parents, provide counseling services, strengthen character

habituation within the school environment, and implement continuous guidance. Therefore, character development was not conducted only when students violated school regulations but became an educational process that continued throughout their period of study at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan.

The success of the student development program was influenced by several supporting factors, including the principal's commitment, the active role of the vice principal for student affairs, teachers' involvement as role models, parental support, and a supportive school culture. The synergy among all members of the school community created an environment that supported the development of students' positive character.

On the other hand, the inhibiting factors included limited awareness among some students, influences from environments outside the school, and developments in information technology that presented various challenges for character development. Therefore, more intensive supervision, communication, and collaboration between the school and families are necessary to ensure that character development can be implemented continuously.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that student development programs, school culture, student organizational activities, and religious habituation constitute effective strategies for developing students' character, responsibility, and discipline when implemented consistently and supported by the entire school community (Mhd. Habibu Rahman, 2020).

Based on the findings, character development can be understood as a process requiring continuity among education within schools, families, and communities. Therefore, student development programs cannot function optimally when they rely solely on the school. Intensive communication with parents, regular program evaluations, and the strengthening of school culture are necessary so that the character values instilled in students become firmly established habits.

Overall, the findings indicate that the student development program at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan made a tangible contribution to strengthening students' character and improving their discipline. Programs implemented in a planned and consistent manner and involving the entire school community were proven to produce positive changes in students' behavior. Nevertheless, further improvements remain necessary to overcome various inhibiting factors originating from students' internal and external environments.

Conclusion

The student development program at SMA Ar-Rahman Medan has played an effective role in strengthening students' character and improving their discipline. The program was implemented through various habituation activities, student organization development, religious activities, extracurricular programs, enforcement of school regulations, and exemplary conduct demonstrated by teachers and educational personnel. These programs contributed to the development of religious character, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, leadership, and social awareness, as reflected in students' behavior within the school environment.

The program's success was supported by cooperation among the entire school community and parents, although several obstacles remained, including external environmental influences and limited awareness among some students. Therefore, the student development program must continue to be developed through continuous evaluation, increased collaboration

with parents, and the strengthening of school culture so that the development of students' character and discipline can be implemented optimally and sustainably.

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