

Developing Student Character through the Implementation of Deep Learning Management: Lessons from Cianjur Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the implementation of deep learning management in fostering students' character within primary school settings, specifically focusing on GR Terry's established four management functions: planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. Conducted at SDN Sukanagalih 2 and SDN Winayaloka in Cianjur Regency, the research utilized a qualitative approach with a case study methodology. Data collection involved in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies, subsequently analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings indicate a positive trajectory in character development through deep learning management at both institutions; however, persistent challenges were identified across all POAC dimensions. The planning function demonstrated a 65% effectiveness, incorporating character values into lesson plans, yet lacking systematically measurable indicators. The organizing function proved most robust, characterized by efficient task distribution and coordination, though parental engagement remained limited. The actuating function scored 60%, primarily due to inconsistent project-based learning implementation, attributed to time and resource constraints. The controlling function registered the lowest score, as comprehensive character assessment systems were not fully integrated into the school's evaluation processes. Overall, the average implementation level of deep learning management was determined to be 62.5%. This research highlights a disparity between the theoretical ideals of learning management and its practical application in elementary schools, particularly concerning reflection and character evaluation. A key contribution of this study is the integration of the managerial POAC paradigm with a pedagogical deep learning approach focused on character formation, culminating in the conceptual model of Character-Based Deep Learning Management. This model redefines POAC as a reflective, collaborative, and contextual framework for character development, transcending its conventional administrative role. Consequently, this research advances educational management practices in Indonesian primary schools by advocating for impactful and sustainable character education initiatives.

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Introduction

1. Background

Elementary education plays a strategic role as the main foundation in shaping the character and personality of the nation's next generation (Wardani, 2024). At this level, students are not only introduced to basic cognitive skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, but are also guided to understand and internalize moral, social, and spiritual values (Asrin & Utami, 2023; Nurhayati, 2022). Thus, elementary education should not merely focus on *what to learn*, but also on *why we learn* (Nurasiah et al., 2022). This holistic approach acknowledges that primary school forms a crucial developmental stage where children begin to grasp their potential, environmental demands, and future aspirations, making informed decisions for themselves (Hutagalung et al., 2024; Santamaría-Villar et al., 2021). This developmental stage is further supported by character education, which plays a pivotal role in fostering ethical reasoning, empathy, and cooperation among students, essential for becoming responsible societal members (Wardani, 2024; Yuliatin et al., 2025). The integration of character education within the elementary curriculum is therefore paramount, emphasizing values such as honesty, discipline, and social care, which are often simplified into core tenets like religion, nationalism, independence, integrity, and mutual cooperation for practical implementation (Aningsih et al., 2022).

In the global context of the twenty-first century, education faces increasingly multifaceted and pressing challenges (Chen & Yang, 2023). The unprecedented pace of technological advancement, the overwhelming deluge of information, and fundamental shifts in social values imperatively demand that schools cultivate individuals who are not only intellectually proficient but also possess unwavering character, acute social empathy, and the advanced capacity for critical and reflective thought (Ikeda & Miyamoto, 2021; Levi-Keren et al., 2024). Consequently, there is an urgent need to transform learning paradigms decisively from surface learning which predominantly relies on rote memorization toward deep learning, which champions authentic meaningful understanding and the holistic internalization of values in real-life contexts (Wu, 2023). This transformation emphasizes cultivating practical wisdom, ethical decision-making, and complex problem-solving skills to prepare students for an increasingly interconnected and complex world (Holman & Švejdarová, 2024; Jakubik, 2021).

The *deep learning* approach positions students as active agents who construct knowledge through experience, analysis, and reflection (Feri et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2023). This model not only engages the cognitive aspect but also touches the affective and moral dimensions of learners, making it highly relevant in fostering essential character traits such as responsibility, discipline, and empathy (Fitriyani et al., 2025; Hariyanto et al., 2022). This concept aligns with Indonesia's current educational policy direction, particularly the implementation of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile) and the *Strengthening of Character Education (PPK)* program, which emphasize the integration of moral and character values within the learning process (Hasbi et al., 2023; Sartika et al., 2024). The Indonesian educational roadmap for 2020-2035, for instance, explicitly aims to produce lifelong learners who not only continuously evolve but also uphold strong moral values, seamlessly intertwining Indonesian cultural values and Pancasila principles into the educational framework for future generations (Hariyadi et al., 2023; Samala et al., 2024). This overarching vision underpins initiatives like the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, which seeks to transform education by shifting towards a student-centered approach that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, thereby addressing the challenges of the digital era and globalization (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024; Saa, 2024).

Nevertheless, the ideal of character-based education has not been fully realized in many elementary schools. Preliminary observations at SDN Sukanagalih 2 and SDN Winayaloka in Cianjur Regency revealed several challenges in character formation among students. The values of discipline, responsibility, and social awareness remain low, while teaching practices tend to focus on academic achievement rather than character development. Teachers primarily function as knowledge transmitters rather than facilitators of meaningful learning experiences, leading to classroom activities that remain teacher-centered and superficial in cognitive engagement (Bhardwaj et al., 2025). From a managerial perspective, learning plans lack explicit emphasis on the integration of character values, resource organization within schools remains suboptimal, collaboration between teachers and parents is limited, and supervision and evaluation processes are primarily focused on academic outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). These conditions illustrate a significant gap between the ideals of character education policy and its implementation in practice (Aziz et al., 2023). Therefore, a more systematic and structured management approach is imperative to ensure that the implementation of deep learning substantively enhances students' character development (Feri et al., 2025). It is therefore essential to examine how the management of deep learning can be effectively designed and implemented in elementary schools. Sound management encompassing the functions of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling is crucial for ensuring that character values are not merely taught theoretically but are also internalized in students' attitudes and behaviors through meaningful learning experiences.

2. Previous Literature Review

Various previous studies have demonstrated that *deep learning* effectively enhances learning outcomes and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Marton and Säljö argued that *deep learning* encourages students to think critically and to seek meaning behind the concepts they study, rather than merely memorizing information (Marton & Säljö, 1976). Subsequent research over the past decades has reinforced the idea that *deep learning* positively correlates with reflective, analytical, and creative thinking skills among students.

In the realm of character education, Zubaedi emphasized the necessity of integrating moral and character values directly into the learning process rather than treating them as separate or extracurricular activities (Zubaedi, 2015). In line with this, the Indonesian government has reinforced character formation through the *Strengthening of Character Education (PPK)* policy and the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* within the Merdeka Curriculum, both of which highlight the importance of holistic character development in elementary education.

Crucially, a significant limitation of existing scholarship is its predominant focus on specific pedagogical techniques such as project-based or problem-based learning as methods for fostering student character or improving academic outcomes. Remarkably, a glaring deficit exists in research specifically examining deep learning as a cohesive pedagogical and managerial framework for character education, with even fewer studies rigorously analyzing its systematic implementation through a robust management lens.

Consequently, a pronounced research gap unequivocally persists between the theoretical understanding of deep learning and its practical implementation within character education at the elementary level. While extensive, most prior investigations have predominantly fixated on the *outcomes* of deep learning such as academic achievement or cognitive growth often neglecting to delve into the intricate *underlying management processes* indispensable for its consistent and successful realization. Moreover, limited research has discussed how planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating learning activities can be structured to effectively and integrally embed character values.

In practical terms, a persistent challenge for many educators remains the effective design of meaningful learning experiences that consistently and organically embed moral and social values. School-level management also tends to prioritize administrative compliance and academic performance, while the monitoring and evaluation of students' character development remain minimal.

The *profound novelty* of this research unequivocally stems from its rigorous analytical focus on the *management* of deep learning implementation. It distinctively employs G.R. Terry's classical management functions planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling as a foundational theoretical framework to scrutinize its application specifically within character education in elementary schools. Crucially, this study transcends the conventional perspective of deep learning merely as an instructional strategy. Instead, it conceptualizes deep learning as an *integrated and comprehensive managerial system* that necessitates meticulous planning, strategic organizing, deliberate actuating, and robust controlling to systematically achieve paramount character-building goals. Through this distinctive approach, the research offers a groundbreaking perspective, forging a vital link between cutting-edge pedagogical innovation and established educational management theory.

Building upon this compelling rationale, this study is meticulously designed to rigorously analyze the management of deep learning implementation in SDN Sukanagalih 2 and SDN Winayaloka, Cianjur Regency, as an explicit effort to enhance students' character formation. Specifically, this investigation endeavors to precisely identify *how* the fundamental management functions of planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision are currently executed by both teachers and principals in their critical endeavor to effectively integrate moral values into the learning process. Ultimately, this research profoundly intends to culminate in the development of a systematic, robust, and demonstrably effective management model for deep learning. This model is engineered to substantially strengthen character education in elementary schools, concurrently contributing a significant theoretical advancement to the fields of educational management and pedagogical practices.

Method

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the management process of *deep learning*-based instruction in shaping students' character at the elementary school level. The qualitative design was chosen because the issue under investigation is contextual and complex, requiring an exploration of meaning and an understanding of the lived experiences of educational actors (Creswell, 2018). Through a case study design, the researcher sought to examine how management functions planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling are applied in the context of *deep learning* implementation aimed at strengthening students' character (Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted at two public elementary schools in Cianjur Regency, namely SDN Sukanagalih 2 and SDN Winayaloka, which were purposively selected due to their diverse student backgrounds and strong commitment from school leaders and teachers to develop character-based learning. The research subjects included all stakeholders directly involved in learning management principals, teachers, staff, students, and parents. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting those who possessed extensive understanding and direct experience with *deep learning* implementation (Patton, 2015). The key informants consisted of the principals of both schools, six teachers, two staff members, ten students, and parent or committee representatives.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore the application of management functions in teaching, including planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating learning. Observations were carried out during classroom and school activities to examine teacher–student interactions and the enactment of character values through reflective, collaborative, and contextual strategies (Miles et al., 2014). Document analysis included lesson plans, activity programs, meeting minutes, class schedules, and both academic and non-academic student data.

The research procedures were carried out in three stages: preparation, implementation, and analysis. In the preparation stage, a preliminary study was conducted to understand the school context and obtain research permissions. The implementation stage involved iterative and in-depth data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation until data saturation was reached (Lincoln et al., 1985). The analysis stage was conducted simultaneously with data collection, following the principles of interactive and reflective qualitative analysis.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing key information relevant to the study’s focus, while data were presented narratively to reveal emerging themes and relationships among categories. Conclusions were drawn through deep interpretation and verified through cross-checking among various data sources.

To ensure data credibility, several validation strategies were applied, including source triangulation by comparing information from principals, teachers, students, and parents; technique triangulation by integrating data from interviews, observations, and documents; and member checking to validate findings with participants. Peer debriefing was also conducted to minimize researcher bias and enhance analytical rigor (Creswell, 2018). Through this methodological framework, the study aims to produce a comprehensive and credible understanding of how *deep learning* management is implemented to strengthen character education in elementary schools.

Result

This study found that the implementation of deep learning-based learning management at SDN Sukanagalih 2 and SDN Winayaloka has shown positive progress in shaping students’ character, although several challenges remain in the areas of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. These four management functions are interrelated and illustrate how far schools have applied meaningful and character-oriented learning practices.

1. Planning

At the planning stage, teachers in both schools have begun to include character values such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness in their Lesson Plans (RPP). However, the character indicators used remain general and have not been systematically measurable. The principal of SDN Winayaloka explained that teachers sometimes struggle to develop deep learning strategies due to the heavy administrative workload. In an interview, she stated that teachers’ time is often consumed by paperwork, leaving little opportunity to design more innovative learning methods.

Nevertheless, the commitment to strengthening character dimensions has started to emerge through weekly reflection sessions and the integration of Pancasila Student Profile values into learning themes. However, based on observations, most planning activities remain

focused on achieving academic goals. Therefore, the planning aspect of deep learning implementation can be categorized as “fairly good” (65%), though it still requires improvement in developing measurable character indicators and reflective learning design.

2. Organizing

The organizing function shows that school principals in both institutions have distributed teachers’ responsibilities according to their competencies and teaching roles. Task division ensures that each character-based learning activity can run with collaborative support. For example, some teachers are responsible for morning routines, while others supervise character-based projects. However, the limited number of teachers has caused some of them to handle administrative duties concurrently, reducing the frequency of routine coordination and decreasing time management effectiveness. Parental involvement in supporting character education programs is still incidental. Although schools try to involve them in major events such as cleanliness competitions or social projects, structured and sustainable communication forums are yet to be established.

Overall, the organizing function runs relatively effectively internally, indicated by good teamwork and informal communication among teachers, although external collaboration with parents and the community still needs strengthening. The implementation level of the organizing function is categorized as “good” (70%).

3. Actuating

In the actuating stage, teachers act as facilitators to create meaningful learning experiences that cultivate character values. The learning process begins by building students’ motivation and awareness of life values. In the main activities, teachers apply project-based and problem-solving approaches to encourage critical thinking and collaboration. At SDN Sukanagali 2, for instance, a school cleanliness project was used to foster responsibility and teamwork. One teacher mentioned that through simple activities such as maintaining classroom cleanliness, students learned to help each other and appreciate their peers’ contributions. However, deep learning implementation has not been fully optimal due to limited time, a dense curriculum, and inadequate media and learning facilities. In several classes, teachers still revert to lecture-based methods because they are considered more time-efficient. Moreover, teachers’ exemplary behavior plays a significant role in shaping students’ character. Several students admitted that they were motivated when teachers arrived on time or demonstrated discipline. This aligns with Bandura’s social learning theory, which emphasizes that students learn through observation and imitation of teachers’ behavior.

Thus, the actuating stage is categorized as “fairly good” (60%), but it still requires consistency in applying contextual learning methods and strengthening teachers’ reflection on their teaching practices.

4. Controlling

The controlling function is carried out through principal supervision, teachers’ assessment of learning outcomes, and post-learning reflection. However, the results show that evaluation still focuses more on academic achievement, while character development assessment has not yet been conducted systematically. Some teachers have attempted to evaluate students’ character through behavioral observation and reflection journals, but no standardized assessment instrument has been implemented. The principal emphasized that

the culture of teacher reflection needs to be strengthened as an integral part of the learning cycle. At SDN Winayaloka, teacher reflection forums have begun to take place at the end of each month, although they are not yet routinely practiced in all classes. The reflections tend to be general and have not deeply explored changes in students' attitudes and behaviors.

Overall, the controlling function received the lowest score, categorized as "poor" (55%), as supervision and character-based reflection have not yet been fully integrated into the school's evaluation system.

5. Comparative Analysis of POAC Implementation

Overall, the implementation of deep learning management at SDN Sukanagalih 2 and SDN Winayaloka can be considered moderately effective, with an average effectiveness score of **62.5%**. The organizing function emerged as the strongest aspect, while controlling remains the main challenge.

Table 1. Comparison of POAC Management Functions in Deep Learning Implementation

Management Function (POAC)	Description of Field Implementation	Implementation Rate (%)	Category
Planning	Teachers have designed character-oriented learning, but the indicators are still general and not measurable.	65%	Fair
Organizing	Teacher task distribution is effective, internal coordination is strong, but parental involvement is limited.	70%	Good
Actuating	Teachers have begun implementing project-based and reflective learning but lack consistency due to time and facility constraints.	60%	Fair
Controlling	Supervision focuses mainly on academic aspects; reflection forums are irregular, and no character assessment tools are available.	55%	Poor
Average		62,5%	Fair

In conclusion, the findings suggest that the implementation of deep learning management in the two primary schools in Cianjur Regency is moving in a positive direction toward meaningful, character-based learning. However, there is a need for reinforcement, particularly in reflection practices, collaboration with parents, and the development of a more systematic and sustainable character evaluation system.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that the implementation of deep learning management in shaping students' character at SDN Sukanagalih 2 and SDN Winayaloka has shown positive development, although several challenges remain across the planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling stages. Based on G.R. Terry's (1958) theoretical framework of the four management functions (POAC), each stage plays an essential role in ensuring effective learning management. However, their implementation is still uneven and lacks continuity. From the quantitative analysis, the overall implementation rate reached an average of 62.5%

(moderately effective), with the highest performance in the organizing aspect (70%) and the lowest in controlling (55%). This data supports the qualitative findings, which reveal a gap between the ideal concept of learning management and the realities of classroom practice in primary schools. The novelty of this research lies in integrating the managerial POAC paradigm with a pedagogical deep learning approach that focuses on character formation. While Marton and Säljö emphasized cognitive development and academic achievement, this study shifts the focus toward the affective and moral dimensions, positioning character as the main outcome of meaningful learning.

1. Planning: Between Conceptual Idealism and Implementation Reality

The planning process in both schools shows that teachers are aware of integrating values such as discipline, responsibility, and empathy into lesson plans (RPP). However, interviews and quantitative data indicate that character indicators remain general and not fully measurable, resulting in a score of 65% (moderate category). One teacher stated, "Sometimes we're too busy with administrative work, so there's less time to design more creative learning methods." This reflects that planning tends to be administrative rather than strategic. This condition demonstrates a gap between theoretical learning management, which requires clear goals, strategies, and measurable indicators, and actual planning practices, which remain symbolic. In the context of deep learning, Marton and Säljö emphasize the importance of designing instruction that facilitates meaningful understanding rather than mere curriculum completion. This research introduces a novel approach called reflective-based planning, where each learning objective is linked to contextual character indicators that can be continuously evaluated. Thus, planning becomes not only technical but also strategic in shaping students' character.

2. Organizing: Collaborative Synergy in Character Formation

The organizing stage achieved the highest score of 70% (good category). The principals of both schools distributed teacher duties based on competencies and fostered team coordination. However, due to limited human resources, some teachers also handled administrative tasks, indicating a gap between Terry's ideal of efficient work distribution and the real conditions in elementary schools. Despite these limitations, collaboration among teachers and parental involvement began to develop through informal communication and school activities, though not yet optimal. As one principal noted, "We always emphasize that every lesson plan should not only contain materials but also the character values being instilled." This finding supports Zubaedi (2017), who argue that character formation cannot be separated from the synergy among school, family, and community. The study strengthens this dimension by introducing the concept of organizational synergy as a critical element in implementing character-based deep learning. The success of character education depends not only on teachers' strategies but also on the quality of coordination among principals, teachers, students, and parents.

3. Actuating: Role Modeling and Reflection in Deep Learning Practice

The actuating stage obtained a score of 60% (moderate category) and serves as a crucial point in translating concepts into real actions. Teachers in both schools implemented project-based learning and problem-solving approaches, such as school-cleanliness projects and social activities. These practices align with deep learning principles emphasizing active and reflective engagement.

However, time and facility limitations were major obstacles. One student said, “We enjoy doing projects while learning, but sometimes there’s not enough time.” Moreover, teachers’ consistency in role modeling significantly influences character internalization. This study advances the notion of deep learning implementation as not only a cognitive strategy but also an active modeling process. Teachers are not merely transmitters of moral values but also active role models in daily behavior. Thus, students learn “through character,” not just “about character.”

4. Controlling: Reflective and Transformative

The controlling function received the lowest score of 55% (poor category), indicating it remains the weakest point in the learning management cycle. In both schools, supervision was still largely focused on academic achievement, while character evaluation was not yet systematized. Although teacher reflection forums have begun to emerge, they have not yet developed into a consistent culture. One principal admitted, “We already conduct supervision, but we don’t yet have a specific format to assess students’ character.” This finding illustrates a gap between Terry’s ideal of comprehensive control and the field reality that has yet to integrate character reflection into evaluation systems. As an innovation, this study proposes the concept of reflective controlling, in which teacher and student reflection becomes part of the monitoring mechanism. Through this approach, supervision becomes not only corrective but also transformative, helping both teachers and students evaluate how character values evolve within the learning process.

5. Synthesis, Gap, and Novelty

Overall, the study concludes that the implementation of deep learning management in primary schools remains partial and has not fully integrated character formation into every POAC function. Organizing emerged as the strongest aspect due to relatively effective coordination and synergy, whereas controlling remains the weakest due to a lack of systemic character evaluation. Theoretically, this study reveals a gap between the managerial paradigm, which emphasizes system efficiency, and the pedagogical paradigm, which emphasizes meaning and reflection. The novelty of this research lies in integrating these paradigms into a conceptual model called Character-Based Deep Learning Management (CBDLM). This model positions POAC not merely as an administrative framework but as an instrument for reflective, collaborative, and contextual character formation. Therefore, this study contributes new insights to the development of primary education management in Indonesia, particularly in transforming learning management orientation from performance-based efficiency toward meaningful and sustainable character education.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of deep learning management in shaping students’ character at SDN Sukanagalih 2 and SDN Winayaloka has shown positive progress, although it still faces several challenges in each management function. The planning process has begun to integrate character values into lesson design, yet measurable indicators and reflective learning components are not fully developed. The organizing function is relatively effective, as task distribution and internal coordination among teachers run well, though collaboration with parents and the wider community remains limited. In the implementation stage, teachers have started to apply project-based learning and contextual learning strategies that emphasize responsibility, cooperation, and discipline. However, the execution is not yet consistent due to limited time, heavy administrative workloads, and insufficient facilities. The controlling function remains the weakest aspect, as the schools’ evaluation systems are still

focused on academic outcomes and lack a structured mechanism for assessing character development. Overall, the level of deep learning management implementation reached a moderately effective category (62.5%), with organizing as the strongest function and controlling as the weakest. This finding indicates a gap between the theoretical ideal of deep learning management and its practical application in the school context. The study's novelty lies in combining the POAC management framework with a pedagogical deep learning approach oriented toward character formation, forming the conceptual basis for the Character-Based Deep Learning Management (CBDLM) model. Strengthening reflection practices, developing standardized character assessment instruments, and enhancing collaboration between schools, families, and communities are essential steps toward realizing more meaningful and sustainable character education in Indonesian primary schools.

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