

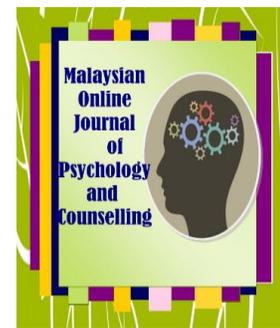
THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL-BASED CHARACTER-BUILDING PROGRAM ON SELF-ESTEEM, SELF-EFFICACY AND RESILIENCE AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Character-building programs play a crucial role in fostering students' personal growth and psychological well-being. This study examines the effectiveness of a school-based character-building program in enhancing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience among primary school students. The intervention, grounded in the Information-Motivation-Behavioral (IMB) model and Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory, aims to equip students with essential emotional regulation skills, decision-making abilities, and adaptive coping strategies. A single-group pre-test and post-test design was employed, in which students participated in structured activities that focused on self-awareness, motivation, and behavioral skills. Findings indicated significant improvements in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience, supporting previous literature emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence-based interventions in character development. The results suggest that integrating IMB and EI strategies into school programs can enhance students' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience. These findings have implications for educators, policymakers, and future research, highlighting the need for longitudinal studies and broader implementation of character-building initiatives in school settings.

Keywords: *Character-building, self-esteem, self-efficacy, resilience, emotional intelligence, IMB model.*



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INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) has placed significant emphasis on character education as part of its holistic student development framework. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MEB) highlights the need for students to develop strong ethical and moral values alongside academic excellence (Hafizi et al., 2024). One key focus of the blueprint is integrating character-building programs to nurture resilience, self-discipline, and emotional intelligence (KPM, 2023). School-based character-building programs have gained significant attention for their role in enhancing students' personal development and psychological well-being (Arifuddin et al., 2023). These programs are designed to instill essential values such as resilience, responsibility, and self-discipline, which contribute to students' overall character formation (Sokatch, 2017).

For instance, the introduction of the concept of *Anak yang Baik lagi Cerdik* (ABC) emphasizes students' holistic development, ensuring a balance between moral character formation and academic excellence (KPM, 2023). It is based on the belief that intelligence should not be measured only by academic achievements but also by emotional maturity, integrity, self-discipline, and social responsibility. This approach aligns with Malaysia's education transformation agenda, particularly the Malaysia Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013-2025, which aims to produce individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also possess strong ethical values, resilience, and emotional intelligence (Ganaprakasam et al., 2023). The ABC concept supports a student-centered education model where the development of moral character and intellectual abilities progresses simultaneously to shape responsible, well-rounded individuals.

The need for character-based education has become increasingly critical amidst globalization and modern societal challenges (Zhu et al., 2022). While academic excellence remains essential, students must also develop critical life skills such as resilience, improved self-esteem, and self-efficacy to navigate complex life situations effectively (Ganaprakasam et al., 2021). Psychological development theories suggest that primary school years are crucial for the formation of self-identity, confidence, and moral reasoning (Hamwey et al., 2019). When students are exposed to structured programs that promote resilience and good self-esteem and self-efficacy, they are more likely to develop into well-functioning individuals with a growth mindset (Cherewick et al., 2023; Jianping et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2023).

Several core elements form the foundation of character-based education under the ABC concept (Othman & Yusoff, 2024). First, moral and ethical development is essential, where students are instilled with positive values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility through storytelling, reflective activities, and experiential learning. Second, emotional intelligence and self-awareness must be nurtured, ensuring students understand and manage their emotions effectively. This can be achieved through gratitude exercises, stress management training, and group counseling interventions. Third, the development of social skills and empathy is crucial, as students should learn to engage in healthy social interactions, appreciate diversity, and develop meaningful relationships through effective communication and peer collaboration activities. Fourth, critical and creative thinking skills should be fostered, encouraging students to solve problems innovatively, think independently, and engage in reflective learning. Lastly, cultivating a sense of gratitude and responsibility is significant in psychological well-being. Activities such as gratitude journaling, appreciation letters, and discussions on positive experiences help reinforce students' optimistic outlook on life.

Character-building programs often emphasize several psychological foundations that support students' holistic development, particularly self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience. These constructs function as essential pillars that strengthen positive dispositions, enhance personal competencies, and contribute to meaningful life outcomes among young learners (Cherewick et al., 2023; Jianping et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2023).

Self-esteem reflects how individuals appraise their own worth, respect themselves, and view their abilities. It encompasses the subjective judgment one forms about one's value and competence with others (Rosenberg, 1965). Students with a strong sense of self-esteem typically demonstrate higher confidence, greater willingness to attempt challenging tasks, and stronger perseverance when they encounter academic or personal difficulties (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023). Empirical work shows that positive self-esteem is linked to enhanced learning motivation (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023), overall happiness (Yap et al., 2022), and improved academic functioning. In contrast, low self-esteem is frequently associated with self-doubt, fear of failure, and elevated anxiety, which can interfere with academic engagement and performance (Alghamdi et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2019). Studies have consistently reported that diminished self-esteem predisposes students to greater emotional distress, including symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Nguyen et al., 2019; Choi et al., 2019). Persistent negative self-judgements can lead to learned helplessness, reduced motivation, behavioral challenges, and long-term difficulties in forming healthy interpersonal relationships (Lee, 2020).

Self-efficacy, conceptualized by Bandura (1997), is the belief individuals hold regarding their capability to complete tasks and manage challenges effectively. Students with higher self-efficacy tend to learn actively, persist through obstacles, and interpret setbacks as opportunities for development rather than signs of failure (Zhou et al., 2021). Within character-building initiatives, strengthening self-efficacy enables students to develop stronger problem-solving skills, adaptability, and a more forward-looking orientation towards academic and personal demands (Cherewick et al., 2023). This belief in one's capacity to succeed is closely tied to motivation, goal pursuit, and psychological well-being. In the academic context, self-efficacious students frequently demonstrate greater engagement, use more effective learning strategies, seek help appropriately, and achieve better academic outcomes (Arcoverde et al., 2022; Saks, 2024). Beyond academic benefits, self-efficacy contributes to mental health, as students who trust their abilities are more likely to set ambitious goals and draw on social support, both of which have been linked to better mental well-being (Rippon et al., 2024). Consequently, nurturing self-efficacy early in schooling equips students with a growth-oriented mindset, greater confidence, and the capacity to manage academic and emotional challenges resiliently.

Resilience refers to an individual's capacity to respond adaptively to stress, challenges, or adversity. It reflects the internal ability to regain emotional balance, recover from setbacks, and continue functioning effectively despite unfavorable circumstances. Masten (2001) emphasizes that resilience is not limited to enduring difficulties; rather, it involves drawing on coping strategies, personal strengths, and available social support to manage obstacles constructively. Among school students, resilience significantly influences academic progress, emotional well-being, and the quality of peer and family relationships (Steel et al., 2024; Weitzel et al., 2022). Students who exhibit high resilience typically demonstrate perseverance, interpret academic challenges as opportunities for improvement, and maintain sustained engagement in learning. Ali et al. (2024) further highlight that resilience predicts academic buoyancy, whereby students are able to recover quickly from disappointing grades, difficult academic tasks, or fluctuations in school performance. Conversely,

students with limited resilience often find it difficult to manage academic pressure, leading to avoidance tendencies, diminished motivation, and, in severe cases, disruptions in schooling.

The Information–Motivation–Behavioral Skills (IMB) Model (Zarani et al., 2012) provides the structural basis for implementing school-wide character-building initiatives, while Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995) offers the conceptual underpinning for designing specific module activities. As a behavior change model, the IMB framework explains how information, motivational factors, and practical skills interact to bring about and sustain adaptive behaviors (Peng et al., 2023). When applied to character development efforts, the IMB Model enables a systematic approach to teaching and reinforcing emotional competencies that enhance students' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Previous studies have shown that the IMB Model can lead to improved self-regulation, better adherence to healthy behaviors, and enhanced overall functioning across various educational and health-related settings (Dapari et al., 2022; Minhat & Zakaria, 2022; Newsome, 2023).

This model asserts that effective behavior modification is contingent upon three fundamental components: information, motivation, and behavioral skills (Fisher et al., 2006). The information component emphasizes the need for individuals to have adequate knowledge of mental health conditions, coping mechanisms, and emotional well-being strategies. The motivation component highlights the role of emotional and social factors in driving individuals to engage in health-promoting behaviors, such as fostering positive self-perception, resilience, and self-regulation. Lastly, the behavioral skills component ensures that individuals develop the ability to apply learned strategies effectively in their daily lives, leading to sustained behavior change (Kiliñç & Kartal, 2024; Xu & Wang, 2023; Yousif & Ibrahim, 2024).

Some notable applications include diabetes education, where the IMB framework has been used to enhance self-management and emotional resilience among adults with type 2 diabetes by improving motivation and behavioral skills for lifestyle modifications (Kiliñç & Kartal, 2024). In epilepsy management, the IMB model has strengthened self-efficacy and medication adherence through knowledge-based and motivational interventions for individuals with epilepsy (Xu & Wang, 2023). Additionally, the model has been applied in nursing education, where it has been instrumental in increasing mental health literacy and promoting person-centered care practices among healthcare providers (Jun & Lee, 2024). Given these successful implementations, the IMB model provides a solid theoretical foundation for designing school-based character-building programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy enhancement, making it highly relevant in educational settings.

To further enhance the effectiveness of mental health programs, integrating Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory (Goleman, 1995) within the IMB model offers a more holistic and comprehensive approach to fostering psychological well-being. This approach facilitates students' understanding of emotional impact on self-esteem and decision-making. By embedding Emotional Intelligence Theory within the IMB Model, interventions become more structured, impactful, and sustainable, ensuring that students not only gain knowledge about emotional well-being but also develop motivation and practical skills to sustain positive mental health behaviors.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study employs a single-group pre-test and post-test design to evaluate the effectiveness of a school-based character-building program in enhancing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience

among primary school students. Given the focus on assessing individual improvements, this design ensures that each participant serves as their own control, reducing variability related to individual differences in baseline self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience.

This research design is particularly suitable when conducting school-based interventions, where randomization and control groups may be logistically or ethically challenging (Olowoyeye et al., 2019). In educational settings, students often participate in interventions as part of their learning and developmental experience, making it impractical to withhold participation from a control group (Knapp, 2016). This design also provides a practical and cost-effective means of evaluating program effectiveness within real-world school environments (Knapp, 2016). Furthermore, given that school-based character-building programs aim to produce immediate and measurable improvements, this design allows for a timely assessment of impact without requiring extended follow-ups, which may not always be feasible in primary school settings.

Participants

This study targets primary school students aged 10 to 12 years old, as this age range represents a critical period for emotional and social development, in which self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience begin to solidify. At this stage, students become more self-aware, experience greater peer influence, and face increasing academic expectations, making them ideal candidates for character-building interventions (Lin & Guo, 2024). A convenient sampling method will be used, which selects participants from a single school implementing the character-building program. The study aims to recruit eight students per teacher referrals and data from the *Sistem Sahsiah Diri Murid* (SSDM), ensuring that those who may benefit most from the intervention are included.

Inclusion criteria require that students be currently enrolled in the school and have parental/guardian consent to participate. Exclusion criteria apply to students with cognitive impairments or learning disabilities that may hinder their ability to engage effectively in the intervention. This selection approach ensures a focused and practical assessment of the program's impact on students' psychological well-being.

Intervention

The intervention is a structured program implemented in schools to improve self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience in primary school students. The program is grounded in the Information-Motivation-Behavioral Skills (IMB) Model and Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995), providing a thorough framework for enhancing psychological well-being and personal development. The program will span five weeks, which consists of two weekly sessions, each lasting circa 60 minutes. This period facilitates incremental skill development, consolidates learning, and provides students with sufficient opportunities to implement newly acquired knowledge and strategies.

The intervention is structured into three core components, aligning with the IMB model:

Table 1

Components of the School-Based Character-Building Program

Components	Objective	Activity
Information	This component aims to provide students with knowledge about emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and coping strategies, helping them understand the	Emotion Recognition and Expression Exercise

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	role of emotions in shaping their self-perception and decision-making.	Building Self-Esteem Through Positive Self-Talk
		Developing Self-Efficacy Through Small Wins
		Resilience Training: Overcoming Failures and Setbacks
Motivation	This component aims to engages students in goal-setting exercises, growth mindset development, and peer discussions to strengthen intrinsic motivation and positive self-beliefs.	My SMART Goal Chart The Power of Yet Strength in Sharing Effort Tracker
Behavior	This component aims to develop real-life coping mechanisms, enhance emotional regulation, and improve their ability to handle stress and setbacks effectively.	Stress Buster Toolbox Bounce Back Challenge

The module was developed using the Sidek Model of Module Development (Sidek & Jamaludin, 2005), which encompasses a systematic approach involving needs analysis, content development, expert validation, and pilot testing to ascertain its appropriateness for the intended audience. The module's validity was assessed through a review conducted by seven experts, comprising university lecturers, school guidance and counselling teachers, and mental health professionals. The validation process employed a questionnaire created by Russell (1974) that evaluates five essential components: suitability for the target population, appropriateness of the implementation environment, adequacy of time allocation, potential impact on academic performance, and influence on students' attitudes, resulting in an overall content validity coefficient of 0.92 for the module, surpassing the 70% threshold suggested by Tuckman and Waheed (1981).

The reliability test utilized Cronbach's alpha, which demonstrated a high reliability coefficient of 0.91 for the overall School-Based Character-Building Program, indicating a strong internal consistency.

Each module exhibited satisfactory reliability scores, detailed as follows: Module 1 (Information) demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.82, Module 2 (Motivation) recorded a reliability coefficient of 0.81, and Module 3 (Behavior) attained a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The reliability values indicate that the program consistently delivers its intended outcomes.

Instruments and Data Analysis

In the study, three standardized instruments were employed to assess self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience through pre- and post-intervention measures. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, a 10-item tool with a 4-point Likert format, yielded a high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .88). Self-efficacy was measured using another 10-item scale (Cronbach's alpha = .90), while resilience was evaluated via the Brief Resilience Scale, which consists of 6 items and has a Cronbach's alpha of .91. Data analysis included quantitative methods to analyze a character-building program's effects on students' psychological metrics, using descriptive statistics for demographic details and a Paired Sample t-test to determine pre- and post-test changes, indicating improvements in psychological well-being.

RESULT

Demographic

We used descriptive statistics to summarize demographic data, e.g., the participants' ages and genders. Participants' ages ranged from 11.2 years (SD = 0.6), and they were all men (n = 8, 100%), which means that all of the participants were the same gender.

Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Table 2

Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores on Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Resilience

Variable	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z-value	p-value (2-tailed)	Decision
Self-Efficacy	8	4.50	36.00	-2.52	.012	Significant
Self-Esteem	8	4.88	39.00	-2.67	.008	Significant
Resilience	8	4.50	36.00	-2.52	.012	Significant

Note. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for normality assumption (Shapiro-Wilk test, $p < .05$). Significance level set at $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed).

Table 3 demonstrated the assumption of normality, which was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which revealed non-normal data distribution ($p < .05$) for all three variables. Therefore, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was employed to examine differences between pre-test and post-test scores for self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resilience among participants.

Paired Samples T-Test Analysis

Table 3

Analysis t-test to Assess the Impact of The School-Based Character-Building Program on Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Resilience

Variable	Mean Pretest	Mean Posttest	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Self-efficacy	25.45	28.2	-23.92	p < 0.001	6.04
Self-esteem	18.19	20.75	-97.41	p < 0.001	8.20
Resilience	19.69	22.24	-95.41	p < 0.001	7.48

Findings show in Table 3 indicate that significant improvements in self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resilience following the School-Based Character-Building Program ($p < 0.001$ for all variables). Self-efficacy increased from $M = 25.45$ to $M = 28.20$ ($t(7) = -23.92$, $d = 6.04$), self-esteem improved from $M = 18.19$ to $M = 20.75$ ($t(7) = -97.41$, $d = 8.20$), and resilience rose from $M = 19.69$ to $M = 22.24$ ($t(7) = -95.41$, $d = 7.48$). These large effect sizes confirm that the program had a strong psychological impact, enhancing students' confidence, self-worth, and coping skills.

The results indicate notable improvements in all three psychological constructs following participation in the School-Based Character-Building Program. Self-efficacy increased by 10.78%, suggesting that students gained greater confidence in overcoming challenges and achieving personal goals. Self-esteem improved by 14.06%, reflecting a more positive self-perception and an enhanced sense of self-worth. Additionally, resilience showed a 12.97% increase, demonstrating that students became more adept at managing stress and navigating setbacks effectively. These findings highlight the program's effectiveness in fostering personal growth and emotional well-being among the participants.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that the module designed by the researcher based on the Information–Motivation–Behavioral (IMB) Model and Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory effectively strengthens students' character development. Notable gains in self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resilience, which ultimately form the psychological basis of character building, reflect the module's effectiveness. The mentioned variables are essential because they support students' ability to manage challenges, regulate emotions, and cultivate a healthy sense of personal value. Emotional intelligence contributes to character formation by enhancing emotional regulation, improving decision-making, and supporting adaptive social interactions, all of which have been shown to elevate self-esteem (Goleman, 1995). In parallel, as highlighted by Bandura (1997) regarding the essence of self-efficacy that ultimately influences students' motivation and behavior, it was found to be reflected in the core point of Social Cognitive Theory.

For adolescents, high self-efficacy is associated with greater engagement in positive actions, stronger resilience in the face of difficulties, and a more consistent adherence to moral and ethical standards (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016). Together, these findings reinforce the value of integrating EI and IMB principles in character-building programs, which promote students' psychological and emotional growth. The findings of this study align with existing literature emphasizing the effectiveness of school-based character-building programs in enhancing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience

among students. Numerous interventions integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) and character education have demonstrated positive psychological outcomes, reinforcing the importance of structured programs in fostering personal growth and well-being. The results of this study, which indicate significant improvements in self-esteem and self-efficacy among participants, are consistent with findings from Merle et al. (2024), who examined the CharacterStrong program. Their study reported that students with lower baseline self-efficacy exhibited notable improvements in self-perceived confidence and motivation after completing the intervention. These findings suggest that targeted school-based programs can effectively cultivate self-belief and proactive behavior among students.

The character strength journaling program examined by Lee et al. (2024) has demonstrated effectiveness in fostering resilience among elementary school students. Their findings revealed that participants experienced greater subjective well-being and were more adept at recognizing and utilizing their strengths in daily life. This aligns with the present study's results, which indicate a significant improvement in students' resilience scores post-intervention. The mechanism through which resilience is developed (self-reflection, self-awareness, and application of personal strengths) appears to be a common factor in both studies.

Similarly, Truskauskaitė-Kunevičienė et al. (2020) found that the Try Volunteering program led to substantial gains in students' self-esteem and confidence through skill development and social engagement. The present study supports these conclusions, as students who participated in the character-building intervention reported a heightened sense of self-worth and motivation to engage in academic and personal challenges. This reinforces the argument that character-focused initiatives enhance students' ability to develop self-efficacy through experiential learning and community engagement.

The study findings align with the IMB model, which posits that effective character development requires a combination of cognitive awareness (information), emotional competence (motivation), and behavioral regulation (self-discipline). The Emotional Intelligence framework also supports these findings by emphasizing the role of emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, and social competence in shaping strong moral character (Mayer et al., 2001). By integrating IMB and EI-based strategies into the intervention module, this study provides evidence that structured training in emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and coping mechanisms can significantly enhance students' ability to make responsible choices, demonstrate ethical behavior, and build strong interpersonal relationships. This aligns with previous literature indicating that emotional intelligence and self-efficacy are central to character-building initiatives in educational settings (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2014).

The implications of these findings are substantial for both educational policy and psychological practice, particularly in fostering holistic student development. For educators and counselors, integrating Emotional Intelligence (EI) and IMB-based interventions into school programs can enhance students' resilience, self-discipline, and ethical decision-making skills, which are essential for both academic success and social well-being. By equipping students with the ability to manage emotions, navigate social interactions, and make responsible choices, such interventions contribute to stronger character development, improved academic performance, and healthier peer relationships. For policymakers, these findings emphasize the need to embed character education programs within the school curriculum, ensuring that students receive structured opportunities to develop moral reasoning, emotional regulation, and social competence. Prioritizing character

education at the policy level can lead to a more emotionally intelligent and socially responsible generation.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample size and generalizability are limited, as the research was conducted in a specific educational setting. Second, reliance on self-reported measures may introduce bias, as students could overestimate or underestimate their self-efficacy, self-esteem, or resilience. Third, the lack of longitudinal data makes it unclear whether the intervention's effects are sustained over time. Lastly, external factors such as family influence and school climate were not accounted for, which may impact students' character development. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the role of Emotional Intelligence and IMB-based interventions in fostering character-building.

To strengthen the impact of Emotional Intelligence and IMB-based interventions in character-building, several steps are suggested. First, expand implementation across diverse educational settings to enhance generalizability. Second, adopt a mixed-method approach by incorporating qualitative data from teachers and peers for a more comprehensive evaluation. Third, conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects on self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resilience. Lastly, consider socio-environmental factors such as family dynamics and school climate to develop more holistic intervention strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study provides strong empirical support for the effectiveness of an IMB-based Emotional Intelligence intervention module in fostering character development among students. The findings confirm that enhancing self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resilience through structured emotional intelligence training leads to stronger moral character, responsible decision-making, and improved social interactions. These results reinforce the importance of integrating character-building programs in schools to promote students' ethical development, psychological well-being, and academic success. Future research should focus on sustained interventions and long-term evaluations to maximize the benefits of character education in school settings.

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Statement of Informed Consent

All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals who participated in the study. The authors ensured that participant anonymity was fully protected by avoiding the use of names, initials, identification numbers, or any other information that could reveal participant identity.

Disclosure and Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that no financial or personal conflicts of interest influenced the research, analysis, or interpretation of the findings presented in this manuscript. No external funding or financial support was received for the conduct of this study.

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