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A Systematic Literature Review on Character Education Strategies in Primary and Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Character education is important in developing 21st-century education, especially at the elementary and secondary school levels. However, its implementation still faces conceptual and operational challenges in various countries. This study conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) of 35 articles published between 2019 and 2024 from the Scopus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar databases. Article selection followed the PRISMA guidelines with specific inclusion criteria. The analysis revealed four main themes: value-based learning approaches, teacher involvement, the role of the school environment, curriculum integration, and implementation barriers. A trend toward increased collaborative approaches was identified, but teacher training and character evaluation systems remain challenges. This study recommends strengthening the character education ecosystem by involving schools, teachers, and communities holistically and contextually.

Keywords: *Character education, Systematic literature review, primary and secondary schools, learning approaches, teachers, character values, implementation.*

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become one of the main focuses in curriculum development in recent years, particularly at the elementary and secondary school levels. However, its implementation in the field has not yet demonstrated consistency between concept and practice. Teachers' belief in the importance of character education is not always accompanied by adequate pedagogical skills to implement it contextually.[1] This aligns with the views of Junaidi and Rohmani, who highlight that collaborative and adaptive learning strategies significantly contribute to building students' character. However, these approaches have yet to become widespread practice in schools.[2] This phenomenon shows a gap between the idealism of character education and the reality of its implementation, which tends to be partial and not yet sustainable.

The involvement of the school ecosystem in shaping students' character is an important dimension that has often been overlooked in previous studies.[3] School culture, internal regulations, and social interaction patterns majorly influence the process of internalizing character values.[4] However, academic exploration of this aspect remains descriptive and is not yet supported by large-scale empirical studies. According to recent reviews, teachers act as educators and moral agents who shape students' character through example. Unfortunately, many teachers have not received specialized training to fulfill this role optimally, especially in dealing with increasingly complex social dynamics.

Although character education research is growing, there is still an important gap regarding practical pedagogical approaches in the context of local culture. Many highlight the implementation challenges in elementary schools, but few explore contextual learning strategies tailored to the characteristics of Indonesian culture.[5] Additionally, there is potential for subject-based approaches in Civic Education (PKn) and strategic innovations, but empirical evidence on the effectiveness of such interventions remains limited. This gap between theory and practice necessitates systematic research to identify pedagogical models that are proven to align with local cultural values and capable of fostering authentic and sustainable character education.[6]

Furthermore, the existing literature has not extensively addressed the involvement of multiple stakeholders- teachers, parents, and the community- in holistic character education synergy. The lack of infrastructure support, teacher training, and parental involvement remains a significant obstacle. Other studies mention challenges in character assessment by

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[1] M. Singh dan C. Jackson, "Teachers' beliefs towards character education curriculum in primary school: A systematic literature review," *Education 3-13* 52, no. 8 (2022): 999–1011.

[2] A. Junaidi dan I. Rohmani, "School and parent collaboration in character building," Journal of Education 9, no. 3 (2023): 201–15.

[3] Nouman Maqbool Rao dkk., "Role of Teachers in the Character Development of Students Findings from a Systematic Review," *Academy of Education and Social Sciences Review* 4, no. 4 (2024): 575–94, https://doi.org/10.48112/aessr.v4i4.935.

[4] Agustien Lilawati, "The Role Of The School Environment In Shaping Children's Character," *EDUTEC : Journal of Education And Technology* 7, no. 4 (2024), https://doi.org/10.29062/edu.v7i4.955.

[5] Nur Irsyadiah dkk., "Strengthening Local Culture-Based Character Education," *EDUTEC : Journal of Education And Technology* 7, no. 3 (2024), https://doi.org/10.29062/edu.v7i3.849.

[6] Umar Umar dkk., "Integrity Character Education in Indonesia: Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 16, no. 4 (2024), https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i4.5644.

teachers, but there has been no in-depth analysis of how collaborative mechanisms between schools and communities can strengthen student character development.[7] This situation provides significant room for formulating a collaborative framework that integrates the roles of all stakeholders in the systematic implementation of character education.

This study aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize recent findings on character education strategies implemented at the elementary and secondary school levels over the past five years. The primary focus is on the approaches used, the character values developed, and the challenges encountered in practice. This study uses the systematic literature review (SLR) method, which allows for rigorous literature screening and in-depth analysis of trends and gaps in previous research. Referring to the PRISMA guidelines, this study also seeks to formulate key questions that can provide new directions for developing contextual, sustainable, and relevant character education programs for students in an era of social and technological disruption.[8]

The main contribution of this study lies in its effort to summarize various implementable approaches to character education that have been tested in various contexts, while also revealing real challenges often overlooked by conventional research. In addition to offering a thematic mapping of dominant character values in academic literature, this study provides a conceptual and practical foundation for educators, policymakers, and researchers in designing integrated character education models. By bringing together empirical evidence from various countries, this article aims to strengthen the discourse on character education as part of shaping a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also morally, socially, and spiritually strong amid the complexities of the times.

This study aims to answer the following key questions, which are systematically organized to explore various aspects of character education implementation at the elementary and secondary school levels.

RQ1: How are the main approaches to character education applied in elementary and secondary schools, as depicted in the academic literature of the past decade?

RQ2: What character values are most frequently instilled and emphasized in character education programs according to various studies conducted?

RQ3: What challenges do teachers and schools face in implementing character education in various countries, and what are the best solutions?

RQ4: What is the contribution of teachers and the school environment in shaping student character, as reflected in the findings of empirical studies?

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[7] I Wayan Darna dan I Gede Sedana Suci, "Model of Synergy Parents and Teachers in Character Education of High School Students," *Edunesia : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 5, no. 2 (2024): 1084–97, https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v5i2.884.

[8] Junaidi Junaidi dan Rohmani Rohmani, "Effective Learning Strategies in Improving Elementary School Students' Character: A Systematic Literature Review," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach Research and Science* 2, no. 03 (2024): 1104–13, https://doi.org/10.59653/ijmars.v2i03.885.

METHOD

SLR Design

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to thoroughly examine the practice and implementation of character education in elementary and secondary schools. SLR was chosen because this methodology allows for compiling a structured, transparent, and replicable scientific synthesis. The process follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, which are widely used in social and educational studies.[9] Additionally, Kitchenham's framework strengthens the validity of systematic procedures in selecting, screening, and organizing relevant literature thematically and contextually.

This SLR design aims to evaluate pedagogical approaches, core character values developed, implementation challenges, and the involvement of educational actors. The synthesis process was conducted thematically using explicit selection criteria on the selected academic literature. The results are expected to strengthen theoretical understanding and the implementation of evidence-based character education practices. This approach is also beneficial in identifying research gaps and formulating strategic recommendations for policymakers, curriculum developers, and education practitioners in a broader and more dynamic context.

The SLR was conducted in three systematic stages: study identification, initial screening, and final selection based on content suitability. The studies were taken from several central databases, then screened based on topic relevance, scientific quality, and predefined inclusion–exclusion criteria. This approach aligns with the principles of transparency and scientific replication in SLR methodology.[10] Through these steps, the research produced a literature synthesis that is descriptive and critical of the dynamics and complexity of character education today.

Literature Search Process

The literature search process in this study was conducted systematically to ensure the completeness and relevance of the articles analyzed. The search focused on three major academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar, as all three have extensive coverage of reputable scientific publications. Additionally, the accessibility and completeness of metadata from these three sources enabled comprehensive bibliometric and thematic analysis. The selection of these databases also considered the diversity of indexed international and national journals discussing the theme of character education at the elementary and secondary school levels.[11] The search process took place from January to

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[9] Matthew J Page dkk., "The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews," *BMJ*, 29 Maret 2021, n71, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71.

[10] B. Kitchenham and S. Charters, "Guidelines for performing systematic literature reviews in software engineering (Version 2.3)," *Keele University and University of Durham*, 2007.

[11] Naveen Donthu dkk., "How to Conduct a Bibliometric Analysis: An Overview and Guidelines," *Journal of Business Research* 133 (September 2021): 285–96, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.070.

March 2025, with the final results being a collection of articles that met the previously established inclusion and exclusion criteria.

In the search process, researchers used a combination of primary keywords and derivatives relevant to the character education theme. Keywords were arranged using the Boolean approach to optimize search results. The search formulas used included: ("character education" OR "values education") AND ("elementary school" OR "primary education" OR "secondary education") AND ("implementation" OR "practice" OR 'model' OR "strategy"). Each database has its syntax system, so the search was adapted to the characteristics of each platform.[12] The researcher also limited the publication time to 2019–2024 to ensure the recency of the findings being studied. In addition, to avoid duplication, the Zotero reference management feature was used to filter the results.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria in this study were established to ensure that only relevant, high-quality articles aligned with the systematic focus were analyzed. The articles included were scientific publications indexed in reputable databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar), published between 2019 and 2024, and discussing the topic of character education at the elementary and secondary school levels. The selected studies encompass various study designs, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches, provided they describe strategies, models, or implementations of character education. Studies in both English and Indonesian were accepted to ensure a more inclusive scope. The selection criteria were based on the PRISMA guidelines and inclusion standards for systematic literature reviews.[13]

Conversely, exclusion criteria were established to reject articles that did not align with the scope and methodological quality required. Articles in the form of opinions, editorials, non-systematic reviews, and popular publications were automatically eliminated. Similarly, articles that did not explicitly address character education at the elementary or junior high school level were excluded, even if they contained relevant keywords. Studies with unverifiable or incomplete data (e.g., full text unavailable) are also excluded from the final synthesis. Establishing these exclusion criteria aims to maintain data validity and ensure that only findings that significantly contribute to knowledge mapping are included.[14]

Two researchers applied inclusion and exclusion criteria independently in stages. The initial stage involved screening based on titles and abstracts, followed by a full review of the article content. In cases of disagreement, joint discussions were held to reach a consensus. This approach was designed to minimize the risk of selection bias and maintain transparency in the selection process. This cross-validation also follows systematic review standards that

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[12] Nanny Mayasari dkk., "Bibliometric Analysis of the Implementation of Character Education in the School Curriculum," *West Science Interdisciplinary Studies* 2, no. 05 (2024): 1010–20, https://doi.org/10.58812/wsis.v2i05.909.

[13] Page dkk., "The PRISMA 2020 Statement."

[14] Sebastian K Boell and Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic, "On Being 'Systematic' in Literature Reviews in IS," *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 2 (2015): 161–73, https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2014.26.

recommend testing inter-rater reliability in the study screening process to maintain objectivity.

Quality Assessment

This study assessed the quality of the 35 selected articles as part of the rigorous SLR procedure. The assessment was conducted using an adapted instrument from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) and guidelines, which covered clarity of research objectives, methodological consistency, data transparency, and theoretical and practical contributions.[15] Each article was evaluated on a scale of 0–3 for each indicator, with a maximum total score of 15 points.

The evaluation results showed that most articles had good methodological quality, particularly regarding clarity of design and thematic relevance. However, some studies were rated as weak in data validity or failed to include critical reflection on the limitations of their research.[16] Articles that scored below nine were still included in the thematic synthesis but were given special attention in the interpretation. This step aims to ensure that the synthesis remains inclusive yet critical of the contributions of each source. This quality assessment strengthens the transparency and accountability of the study and helps readers understand the depth and strength of the findings analyzed.

Study Selection Process

The study selection process in this research followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, which aims to maintain transparency and accuracy in literature selection. This process consists of four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. In the initial stage, 423 articles were identified through searches in various databases, plus 17 articles from additional sources such as manual bibliographies. Subsequently, 60 duplicate articles were removed, leaving 380 for further screening.

The screening stage was conducted based on titles and abstracts, eliminating 290 irrelevant articles. A total of 90 articles underwent a full review to evaluate methodological eligibility and topic relevance. Of these, 55 articles were excluded for failing to meet inclusion criteria, lack of full-text availability, or weak methodological quality. Finally, 35 articles were included in the qualitative synthesis, which served as the basis for further analysis in this study. The following PRISMA diagram visualizes the selection process.

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[15] Nauman Bin Ali dan Muhammad Usman, "A Critical Appraisal Tool for Systematic Literature Reviews in Software Engineering," *Information and Software Technology* 112 (August 2019): 48–50, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infsof.2019.04.006.
[16] Oumaima Reda dkk., "A systematic literature review on data quality assessment," *Bulletin of Electrical Engineering and Informatics* 12, no. 6 (2023), https://doi.org/10.11591/eei.v12i6.5667.
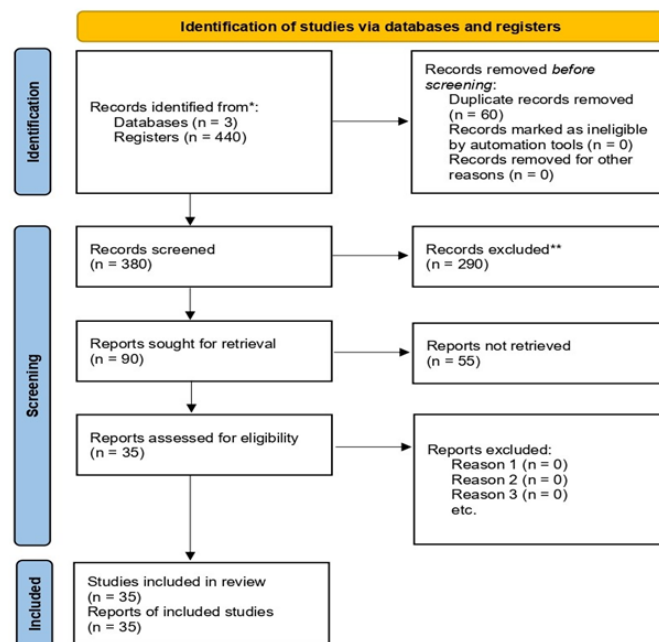
Figure 1. PRISMA-Based Data Selection Process.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this systematic literature review study used two main approaches: manual coding and software assistance. In the initial stage, researchers reread the selected articles to identify patterns, themes, and key concepts related to character education. This process was conducted manually and reinforced with software such as NVivo and ATLAS to facilitate data classification, thematic grouping, and frequency tracking of concepts. This software was considered effective in managing large amounts of qualitative data and maintaining consistency in coding.[17] The coding process was conducted iteratively, following a grounded theory approach so that the data developed from the bottom up rather than an imposed theoretical framework.[18]

After coding, the researchers conducted a thematic synthesis to identify the main themes from the analyzed articles.[19] This synthesis organizes the data into broad themes that describe trends in the implementation of character education, intervention models, challenges faced, and the effectiveness of the approaches used. This method was chosen because it is flexible and allows for in-depth interpretation of complex and contextual issues, such as character education.[20] Thematic synthesis is conducted systematically so that

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[17] T. M. Paulus dan J. N. Lester, "Digital tools for qualitative research: Lessons learned and practical recommendations," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 21 (2022): 1–12.

[18] Yulianto Hadi dkk., "Teacher-Centered Learning and Creative Reflection Approaches in Deaf Islamic Education Learning," *Journal of Educational Research and Practice* 3, no. 1 (2025): 69–89, https://doi.org/10.70376/jerp.v3i1.294.

[19] Nur Kholis dkk., "Community Multicultural Integration Pattern in Environment-Based Learning," *International Journal of Instruction* 13, no. 1 (2020): 101–24, https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.1317a.

[20] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11, no. 4 (2019): 589–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806.

conclusions are based on data frequency and the interconnections between concepts and the underlying theoretical frameworks.

In addition to thematic synthesis, descriptive and bibliometric analyses were conducted to complement the understanding of publication trends. Descriptive analysis included identifying the year of publication, the authors' countries of origin, and the methodological designs used. Meanwhile, bibliometric analysis evaluated citation networks, author collaborations, and the most frequently used keywords. This technique visually maps the intellectual structure within character education research, revealing gaps or areas under-explored by previous studies.[21] Combining thematic, descriptive, and bibliometric approaches yields a rich, comprehensive, and meaningful synthesis for advancing knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Result

Study Characteristics

The studies analyzed in this systematic review span the period from 2019 to 2024, reflecting contemporary developments in the implementation of character education at the elementary and secondary school levels. Most articles were published between 2021 and 2024, indicating increased academic attention to character issues amid the post-pandemic global education dynamics.[22] These publications come from national and reputable international journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. This period indicates that character education remains a central and relevant topic in 21st-century pedagogical discourse, particularly in social and technological disruption that demands the systematic formation of moral values from an early age.

The documents examined include empirical research articles, systematic literature reviews, and several qualitative case-based studies, all of which have undergone peer-review processes. Most articles employ qualitative or mixed-methods approaches, providing depth of data regarding implementation strategies and the socio-cultural context of character education. The diverse methods include field studies, interviews, participatory observation, and policy document analysis. The diversity of document types enriches the thematic perspective and allows for stronger triangulation of information in the synthesis process.[23] Additionally, the representativeness of these research types indicates that the issue of character education is not only discussed normatively but also through empirical approaches based on direct practice in schools.

Geographically, most studies originate from Indonesia, reflecting the high national attention to the urgency of character education amid the complexity of a multicultural society. However, studies from other countries such as Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and

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[21] Donthu dkk., "How to Conduct a Bibliometric Analysis."

[22] Mohammad Rudiyanto, "Character Education Development in The Education Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities in The 21st Century," *Yudistira Journal: Research Publication on Education and Language* 2, no. 2 (2024): 145–55, https://doi.org/10.61132/yudistira.v2i2.670.

[23] Aulia Khumairoh, "The Importance of Inculcating Character Education in Facing the Era of Globalization in the 21st Century Generation," *Journal of Character Education* 13, no. 1 (2022): 27–37, https://doi.org/10.21831/jpka.v13i1.41787.

Australia serve as contextual comparisons in examining character education strategies, challenges, and policies. This diversity enables cross-cultural exploration and comparative analysis of approaches used in various education systems. The dominance of Southeast Asian studies also indicates the need for character education approaches sensitive to local values and community social practices.[24] This condition supports the importance of synthesis that considers the cultural, religious, and social values inherent in the context of basic education in various developing countries.

The studies analyzed in this review also have a balanced distribution of education levels between elementary and secondary schools. Most articles explicitly discuss character education at the elementary school level, focusing on integrating values in thematic curricula and subjects such as civics, religion, or cross-curricular projects. On the other hand, studies at the junior high school level tend to highlight more interactive and reflective approaches and begin to examine student involvement in the active process of character formation. This difference in focus shows that character education implementation strategies must be adapted to students' developmental stages. Thus, mapping the characteristics of educational levels enriches our understanding of the relevance of the approaches used in various contexts of age and students' social-emotional readiness.

Key Findings Based on RQ

RQ 1: Key Approaches in the Implementation of Character Education

The approaches to implementing character education in primary and secondary education in the 35 reviewed articles show a variety of strategies, ranging from integrating values into subjects, project-based learning, to contextual methods that highlight local culture. Emphasize integrating character values into Civic Education (PKn) and religious education subjects. At the same time, collaborative learning and extracurricular activities are means of internalizing values. Demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based character strengthening. Meanwhile, the role of teachers in selecting approaches appropriate to the classroom context is a key factor in success. Overall, the articles indicate that active, contextual, and reflective strategies are the main trends in character education implementation.

Table 1. Direct Quote RQ 1

No.	RQ	Direct Quote	Sources
1	RQ1	"Value-based learning through integration in subjects such as civics and religion has become the dominant approach in elementary schools."	Nurhayati (2024)
2	RQ1	"Collaborative learning strategies have proven effective in building students' values of responsibility and empathy."	Junaidi & Rohmani (2023)
3	RQ1	"Teacher role modeling and a locally-based approach play a central role in the success of character education."	Sagita & Rochmania (2022)

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[24] Herlina Herlina dkk., "Education Character in the Era of Globalization: Facing the Challenges of the Modern World," *International Journal of Engineering, Science and Information Technology* 4, no. 4 (2024): 230–36, https://doi.org/10.52088/ijesty.v4i4.649.

No.	RQ	Direct Quote	Sources
4	RQ1	"Project-based approaches and active learning enable students to experience moral values directly."	Handoko et al. (2024)
5	RQ1	"The application of character values through extracurricular activities provides students space for expression."	Katni (2024)
6	RQ1	"Character education is effectively implemented through strengthening local contexts in learning."	Ahmad & Rahmawati (2022)
7	RQ1	"The integration of character into subjects is carried out gradually and consistently."	Fitriani & Mulyana (2021)
8	RQ1	"Value-based literacy activities help students understand character narratively."	Prasetyo & Hamidah (2023)
9	RQ1	"Teachers have flexibility in choosing character approaches according to the classroom context."	Husna et al. (2023)

Other studies add that the success of implementation depends heavily on the flexibility of methods and the support of school management structures. Activities based on value reflection, group discussions, and using digital media to connect character with students' real lives are also widely discussed as new approaches. In religion-based schools, spiritual approaches through structured religious activities dominate. Some international articles indicate that teacher involvement as facilitators and moral guides is crucial. There is no single dominant approach, but adaptive hybrid strategies tailored to the school culture and student characteristics.

RQ 2: The Most Dominant Character Values Developed

The dominant character values developed in 35 studies include discipline, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, honesty, nationalism, and tolerance. Responsibility and discipline are at the core of learning habits. Meanwhile, civic values such as tolerance and empathy are essential in this social and digital diversity era. Values such as love for the environment, mutual assistance, and social awareness can be built through project-based activities and real action. Religiousness and noble character are pillars in school character education based on spiritual values. This indicates that the character values instilled are normative and adaptive to local and global needs.

Table 2. Direct Quote RQ 2

No	RQ	Direct Quote	Sources
1	RQ2	"The most dominant character values developed in elementary school include discipline, responsibility, and honesty."	Winarni et al. (2021)
2	RQ2	"The values of nationalism and tolerance are important for integration in the context of Indonesia's cultural diversity."	Katni (2024)
3	RQ2	"Empathy and cooperation are the main focus of character education at the junior high school level."	Yuliani et al. (2024)
4	RQ2	"Character education emphasizes religious values and noble morals as the foundation for personality development."	Nurhayati (2024)
5	RQ2	"The strengthening of honesty is carried out through reflective habits and peer supervision."	Albet et al. (2024)
6	RQ2	"Social awareness is instilled through real action activities in the school environment."	Putri et al. (2023)

No	RQ	Direct Quote	Sources
7	RQ2	"Responsibility can be trained by managing students' daily tasks."	Sari et al. (2022)
8	RQ2	"Value literacy through stories of local figures is effective in instilling character."	Wahyuni & Suryadi (2022)
9	RQ2	"Digital citizenship is being introduced as part of 21st-century character."	Singh et al. (2022)

In addition to core values such as honesty and responsibility, there is also a focus on new values contextual to the challenges of the 21st century. Digital literacy and media ethics are beginning to be included in the character curriculum. The importance of caring values in the post-pandemic context, where social empathy and solidarity are part of school habits. In the context of multicultural education, the importance of non-discriminatory character learning and fostering respect for differences is emphasized. Thus, the synthesis shows that character development today reflects the flexibility of values and sensitivity to contemporary social issues.

RQ 3: Challenges and Solutions in the Implementation of Character Education

The 35 articles reviewed found various challenges in implementing character education, such as limited teacher training, unstandardized character evaluation, and weak school environment support. Teachers often do not receive special training in character education. The absence of standardized character evaluation tools makes it difficult for teachers to assess student progress. Additionally, technological limitations and low parental involvement act as significant external barriers. Several solutions were proposed, such as collaborative training programs.[25] The use of portfolios and reflective journals,[26] and the systematic integration of character education into school culture.[27]

Table 3. Direct Quote RQ 3

No	RQ	Direct Quote	Sources
1	RQ3	"Many teachers have not received pedagogical training that supports the effective integration of character education."	Handoko et al. (2024)
2	RQ3	"Limited school infrastructure is a significant obstacle to the implementation of character education."	Albet et al. (2024)
3	RQ3	"Collaborative solutions between schools and local communities can strengthen the character ecosystem."	Yuliani et al. (2024)
4	RQ3	"Character evaluation is still considered subjective and difficult to measure."	Singh et al. (2022)
5	RQ3	"The mismatch between curriculum idealism and reality in the field is a major challenge."	Winarni et al. (2021)
6	RQ3	"Parent involvement is often limited due to busy schedules and differing parenting styles."	Fitriani & Mulyana (2021)
7	RQ3	"Character development faces resistance from some students who are not yet accustomed to it."	Prasetyo & Hamidah (2023)

[25] A. Yuliani dkk., "The implementation challenges of character education in primary schools," *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendas* 10, no. 2 (2024): 238–54.

[26] Junaidi dan Rohmani, "Kolaborasi sekolah dan orang tua dalam penguatan karakter."

[27] Katni Katni, "Innovation Strategy Implementation of Character Education for the Young Generation of Indonesia," *Halaqa: Islamic Education Journal* 8, no. 1 (2024): 52–71, https://doi.org/10.21070/halaqa.v8i1.1654.

No	RQ	Direct Quote	Sources
8	RQ3	"Limited access to technology in rural schools hinders innovation in character education."	Ahmad & Rahmawati (2022)
9	RQ3	"Teachers find character evaluation difficult to conduct due to the absence of standardized tools."	Sari et al. (2022)

In addition to technical and structural challenges, some articles note cultural challenges such as students' resistance to values that do not align with their life experiences. The success of character education programs requires time and consistency in implementation. A school environment that does not support or contradict the values taught also poses a serious obstacle. Therefore, the recommended solutions are pedagogical and involve comprehensive changes to the school culture. For example, strengthening the vision of school leadership, fostering a favorable school climate, and creating a reward system that recognizes the practice of values in students' daily lives.

RQ 4: The Role of Teachers and the School Environment in Character Building

Teachers play a central role in shaping students' character, as emphasized by almost all 35 articles reviewed. The importance of teachers as role models in internalizing values cannot be overstated. In addition to teachers, school principals' leadership and the collective culture within the school environment are key pillars in character building—the importance of a conducive school climate, value-based regulations, and active involvement of all school members. Mentoring programs, reflection spaces, and value-based activities are practical examples of the role of the school environment. The involvement of parents, community leaders, and partner institutions such as religious organizations is also considered important.

It is also important to note that social interactions among students, dialogic teacher-student relationships, and ethical school routines are part of the character-building system, and the importance of strengthening the role of teachers as facilitators of moral reflection. Meanwhile, emotional and motivational support from teachers contributes significantly to the process of internalizing values. It is recommended that values be integrated into school policies and institutional structures. In other words, the role of teachers and schools is operational and transformative in creating an ethical learning environment that supports holistic character growth. This is further elaborated in Table 4, a direct quote from RQ 4.

Table 4. Direct Quote RQ4

No.	RQ	Direct Quote	Sources
1	RQ4	"Teachers are the primary moral agents in shaping students' character through role modeling."	Singh et al. (2022)
2	RQ4	"A supportive school environment, including internal regulations and positive social relationships, is essential for the success of character education."	Sagita & Rochmania (2022)
3	RQ4	"Character programs such as mentoring and thematic extracurricular activities can strengthen students' values of empathy and social awareness."	Handoko et al. (2024)
4	RQ4	"Teachers need to be supported by moral training and supervision to fulfill their role as role models."	ResearchGate (2024)

No.	RQ	Direct Quote	Sources
5	RQ4	"The principal's leadership in instilling a character vision also influences the school climate."	Winarni et al. (2021)
6	RQ4	"Collaboration between teachers, students, and parents in regular forums strengthens value communication."	Putri et al. (2023)
7	RQ4	"A school culture emphasizing politeness and responsibility is formed through daily policies."	Wahyuni & Suryadi (2022)
8	RQ4	"Reflection rooms in schools are used as a medium for internalizing values."	Husna et al. (2023)

3.3. Data Visualization

The data visualization in the form of a word cloud in Figure 1 shows the frequency of occurrence of the main keywords studied from 35 selected articles. The word "teacher" occupies the most dominant position, indicating that the role of teachers is very central in the discourse on character education at the elementary and secondary levels. Other frequently appearing words such as "discipline," "responsibility," and 'empathy' reflect the core values that are the focus of character education in various countries, particularly Indonesia. Additionally, terms like "school environment" and "modeling" emphasize that the process of character development is not merely instructional but also contextual, shaped through interactions and the vibrant school culture. The dominance of these terms indicates a consensus in the literature that character education is holistic and requires the active involvement of all school elements.
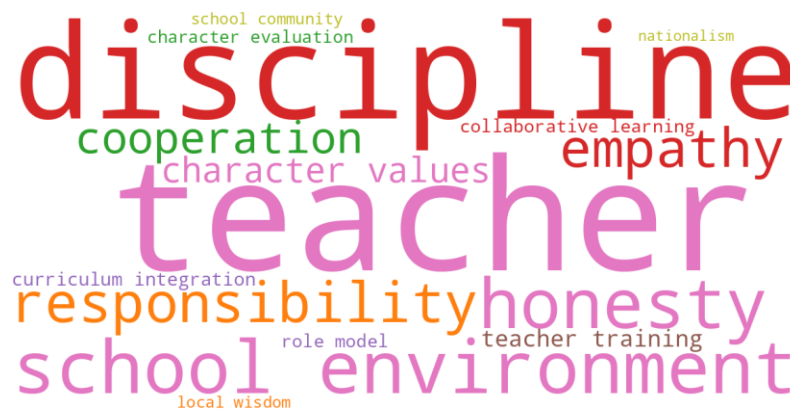

Figure 2. Word Cloud of Character Education Keywords

The emergence of keywords such as "local wisdom," "school community," and "curriculum integration" enriches the contextual dimension in the implementation of character education. This indicates that an adaptive approach to character education responsive to local culture and involving actors outside the formal classroom setting is increasingly being discussed in research. Meanwhile, the emergence of keywords such as "character evaluation" and "nationalism," which are not dominant, indicates a gap in research related to systematic character assessment mechanisms and national issues in education. This visualization helps researchers and education practitioners identify key focuses and areas that must be strengthened in developing comprehensive and contextual character education.

Figure 3 shows the trend in the number of publications related to character education from 2019 to 2024. The data shows a consistent increase, from 3 articles in 2019 to 8 in 2024. This increase reflects the growing awareness and academic attention to the importance of character education amid increasingly complex global and local challenges. A significant surge occurred after 2021, which is likely related to post-pandemic educational reflections, as various parties began to reemphasize fundamental values in learning. This trend also shows that character education is no longer considered a supplement to the curriculum but an integral part of developing the competencies of the younger generation.

The increase in publications indicates that character education is increasingly becoming a strategic agenda in developing primary and secondary education. Researchers are interested in exploring implementation models and the values developed, as well as addressing practical challenges such as teacher training limitations and character evaluation. The fact that the trend graph shows steady growth over the past six years indicates that this field has sustained appeal for the academic community. This opens opportunities to strengthen the empirical research base, particularly those based on contextual and collaborative approaches. Thus, this visualization is descriptive and reflective of the direction and dynamics of global and national character education discourse.

Figure 3. Trend in Character Education Publications 2019-2024

Research gaps in character education studies are evident through word cloud analysis and publication trends over the past six years. While words like "teacher," "discipline," and 'empathy' appear dominant, terms like "character evaluation," "nationalism," and "school community" seem to receive less attention. This indicates that research remains focused on approaches and core values but has not extensively addressed systematic character assessment aspects and in-depth cross-actor involvement. Additionally, the increasing publication trend since 2021 indicates that academic interest in character education

continues to grow, particularly post-pandemic. Moving forward, research development should emphasize community-based interventions, holistic evaluation mechanisms, and the integration of character values into students' real-life experiences through school-community partnerships.

Discussion

Character education in elementary and secondary schools has undergone an expansion of increasingly contextual and participatory approaches. The findings of this study indicate that the integration of character values is no longer limited to the formal curriculum but extends to extracurricular activities, the school environment, and student social relationships. Project-based approaches, teacher role modeling, and the integration of local culture form a strong foundation for strengthening the relevance of character education in the digital age[28]. This strategy aligns with contextual education theory, emphasizing the connection between learning experiences and students' real-life experiences.[29] This diverse approach reflects efforts to respond to local needs while maintaining the universal principles of character education.

Additionally, using digital media and value-based literacy activities further enhances the effectiveness of character education approaches. Some studies also highlight the importance of moral reflection through group discussions or direct practices in students' daily lives. This strategy fosters cognitive understanding of values and cultivates social sensitivity and ethical awareness. Thus, the contextual approach allows students to experience, understand, and internalize values more authentically.

Implementation in the field reveals an imbalance between pedagogical idealism and structural reality. Many teachers lack the pedagogical capacity and sufficient resources to fulfill their role as moral agents.[30] This gap highlights the importance of professional training that is not only content-oriented but also focused on strengthening teachers' ethical and reflective capacities. Within the framework of the theory of exemplarity, teachers are not merely academic facilitators but moral figures who shape students' habits through daily interactions. When schools fail to provide an ecosystem that supports this role, the process of value internalization becomes stagnant or even contradictory.

The capacity gap is also reflected in the lack of systemic support from the school environment. An unfavorable or unresponsive school climate toward ethical values can weaken the moral messages conveyed by teachers in the learning process. The success of character education depends heavily on the cohesion between the values communicated and

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[28] D. Nurhayati, "Implementation of character education values in PKn subjects in elementary schools," *International Journal of Students Education* 3, no. 1 (2024): 69–71; E. Handoko dan E.K.E. Sartono, "The implementation of character education in elementary school: The strategy and challenge," *Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Dasar* 7, no. 4 (2024): 619–31.

[29] Fr. Baiju Thomas, "The Effective Practice of Assistive Technology to Boom Total Communication Among Children With Hearing Impairment in Inclusive Classroom Settings," dalam *Intelligent Systems for Rehabilitation Engineering*, 1 ed., ed. oleh Roshani Raut dkk. (Wiley, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119785651.ch10.

[30] Singh and Jackson, "Teachers' beliefs towards character education curriculum in primary school: A systematic literature review"; ResearchGate, "Role of teachers in the character development of students: Findings from a systematic review," *Global Education Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 12–25.

the actual practices in the school environment. Therefore, school policy design and structural support improvements are needed to enable teachers to perform their functions fully.

The results of this study also indicate that the quality of synergy among educational actors highly determines the success of character education. Studies often cite collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community as a key factor, but its systematic implementation remains limited.[31]. The absence of the community in character education narrows the space for value formation to mere formalities in the classroom. The social ecology approach in education emphasizes that a coherent environment between home, school, and community reinforces value consistency.[32]. Therefore, policies supporting cross-sector participation in character education design and evaluation are crucial for program sustainability.

Structured communication forums typically mark successful synergistic practices, parental involvement in value-building activities, and collaboration with local communities to address real social issues. This involvement not only adds legitimacy to the values taught in schools but also strengthens a sense of shared responsibility in shaping the character of the younger generation. This cross-actor collaboration can also solve structural challenges that schools cannot address alone.

Various findings in this SLR reinforce the theoretical foundations that have long been developed in character studies, particularly the three main components of character education: moral knowing, feeling, and moral action. The studies show that teacher role modeling, social engagement, and integrating values into learning greatly influence character education practices in elementary and secondary schools. This is consistent with Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which emphasizes the importance of developmental stages and social context in shaping students' moral decisions. Thus, this SLR's results validate classical theory and provide a richer contextual dimension, especially when applied in a multicultural and dynamic education system such as Indonesia's.

The SLR findings also align with Vygotsky's perspective, which places the role of social and cultural interaction as the primary medium for value learning. Project-based approaches, local character narratives, and school community involvement reflect practices of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where students learn through meaningful social guidance.[33]. Furthermore, consistency with contemporary research on the effectiveness of character education is highly dependent on teachers' ability to respond flexibly to students' social contexts. The integration of adaptive, reflective, and collaborative pedagogical approaches underscores that character education must be dynamic, not confined to normative approaches alone, but built based on the school's participatory reality.

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[31] J. Winarni dkk., "Challenges in the implementation of character education in elementary school: Experience from Indonesia," *Elementary Education Online* 20, no. 1 (2021): 1351–63; Katni, "Innovation Strategy Implementation of Character Education for the Young Generation of Indonesia."

[32] Barbara Brown, "Research-Practice Partnerships in Education: Benefits for Researchers and Practitioners," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 67, no. 4 (2021): 421–41, https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs/ajer.v67i4.70073.

[33] L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Harvard University Press, t.t.).

A conceptual framework for character education responsive to the times' complexities can be developed by uniting these theoretical perspectives. Ideal character education fosters moral awareness, strengthens empathy, and encourages ethical action through transformative and participatory learning. This model requires students' emotional engagement, social skills, and consistency between the values taught and the supportive environment. Thus, this theoretical synthesis enriches the academic foundation and provides practical guidance for curriculum designers and education policymakers.

CONCLUSION

First, the character education approach includes integrating values into subjects, collaborative learning, project-based activities, and teacher role modeling. Strategies based on local culture and spiritual values also strengthen their effectiveness. There is no single dominant approach; success depends on a combination of contextual and sustainable strategies. Second, the dominant character values developed include responsibility, honesty, empathy, discipline, and cooperation. Contextual values such as tolerance, religiosity, social awareness, and digital literacy are also beginning to be mainstreamed through daily habits and reflective activities. Third, implementation challenges include limited teacher training, weak character evaluation standards, inadequate infrastructure, and low community involvement. Proposed solutions include collaborative training, reflective portfolios, and strengthening a values-based school culture. Fourth, the role of teachers as moral agents is crucial, supported by a conducive school climate, visionary leadership, and synergy between schools and parents. Effective character education requires the consistent and transformative integration of values into school policies, learning, and social practices.

Implications

The findings of this study provide a strong basis for teachers, principals, and policymakers to design contextual and sustainable character education. Education practitioners must develop active, reflective, and locally based learning strategies and integrate them into everyday school life. Teacher training that targets ethical and pedagogical capacity building is important to ensure the role of teachers as moral agents. In addition, schools need to build a culture that supports character internalization through mentoring programs, reflection spaces, and collaboration with parents and the community.

Academically, this study expands our understanding of the dynamics of character education in complex socio-cultural contexts. Further research could examine the effectiveness of specific approaches longitudinally and develop more objective character evaluation instruments. Additionally, interdisciplinary exploration—for example, between character education, educational technology, and developmental psychology—is needed to build a holistic learning model. The results of this SLR also serve as a conceptual foundation for curriculum development and practice-based research in the field.

Recommendation

First, future character education development needs to be directed toward creating a collaborative school ecosystem, where teachers, parents, and the community are actively involved in designing and evaluating value-based programs. Second, valid and applicable character evaluation instruments must be developed to make the assessment process objective and based on student behavior data. Third, strengthening teachers' capacity through continuous professional training should focus on pedagogical, ethical, and contextual aspects. Finally, integrating educational technology that supports the instillation of values such as interactive media or character-building applications can be an important innovation in addressing the challenges of the digital age.

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