



Implementation of strengthening character education in Indonesian elementary schools: systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of Strengthening Character Education (PPK) in Indonesian elementary schools through a systematic approach. The study analyzed 18 relevant studies to understand implementation strategies, character values developed, and challenges and opportunities in character education. The results showed that PPK was implemented through curriculum integration, extracurricular activities, collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community, as well as the use of media and technology. The most prominent character values include mutual cooperation, religiosity, integrity, independence, and nationalism. The main obstacles include a dense curriculum, limited teacher training, and suboptimal communication. Nevertheless, cross-stakeholder collaboration and government program support provide opportunities to strengthen character education in a sustainable manner. This research provides an empirical basis for the development of character education strategies that are effective, contextual, and adaptive to local culture.



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INTRODUCTION

Character education in Indonesia is an essential aspect in shaping a young generation that is ethical, responsible, and competitive. Primary school has a strategic role as an early stage of forming moral values and positive behaviors in children, which affect their social, emotional, and academic development in the future (Young et al., 2018; Hart, 2022). Strengthening Character Education (PPK), which has begun to be implemented nationally, emphasizes noble values such as honesty, responsibility, religiosity, nationalism, independence, and mutual cooperation, which are the foundation for formal education in Indonesia (Mu'alimah et al., 2020; Lintong et al., 2021). This policy is in line with Law Number 20 of 2003 which emphasizes the importance of intellectual development as well as student character, so that education in Indonesia not only focuses on cognitive aspects but also builds students' moral and ethical capacity (Mubarak, 2021; Sanusi et al., 2022).

The urgency of character education is increasing in line with the challenges of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, which demands that the younger generation have balanced social, cognitive, and ethical skills. In practice, several obstacles hinder the implementation of PPK in elementary schools, including a dense curriculum, limited teacher training, and suboptimal coordination between schools, parents, and communities (Atika et al., 2021; Lukman et al., 2021; Nurasiah et al., 2022). This challenge raises the need to systematically review the implementation strategy of character education so that the values developed can be effective and relevant to the socio-cultural context of Indonesia.

The theoretical foundation of character education refers to the principles of Pancasila and the theory of character education from Lickona, Vygotsky, and Baehr, which emphasizes the internalization of values through social experience and repeated practice in the school environment. The values instilled include religiosity, nationalism, integrity, independence, and mutual cooperation, which not only shape moral behavior but also strengthen students' national identity and social involvement (Baehr, 2017; Pangastuti, 2022; Suryani & Muslim, 2024). The implementation of these values is carried out through integrated learning, extracurricular activities, and the use of technology to support the internalization of character in various school activities (Firdaus et al., 2023; Prasetyo et al., 2020).

Although many PPK practices have been implemented, there is a research gap related to the systematic review of the implementation pattern of PPK in elementary schools. Previous studies are still limited to individual cases or specific regions, so they have not provided a comprehensive picture of the most emphasized character values, effective learning strategies, and potential challenges and solutions in their implementation (Prasetyo et al., 2020; Junaidi & Rohmani, 2024). This gap is the basis for this study to comprehensively analyze the literature related to PPK, so as to identify best practices that can be adopted more widely.

This research aims to map the implementation strategy of PPK in Indonesian elementary schools, identify the positive character values developed, and explore challenges and opportunities in its implementation (Butar-Butar et al., 2025). The research focus includes aspects of the curriculum, school culture, collaboration with parents and the community, as well as best practices that integrate character values into academic and non-academic activities (Hanafi, 2021; Syahrul et al., 2024). This analysis is expected to make an academic and practical contribution to the development of character education in Indonesia and enrich the global discourse related to value learning in elementary schools.

The research questions that are the focus of this study are: first, how elementary schools in Indonesia integrate PPK in the curriculum and school culture; second, what positive character values are developed through PPK; and third, what challenges and potential solutions arise in the implementation of the PPK. The results of the research are expected to provide guidance for educators, policymakers, and researchers in designing effective and contextual character education programs, in accordance with the needs of the local community and culture (Suryani & Muslim, 2024; Hanafi, 2021).

METHODS

This study aims to map and analyze the pattern of strengthening character education in Indonesian elementary schools based on relevant literature and written sources. We conducted a review, evaluation, and synthesis of existing literature to build a new understanding of a particular topic (Hart & Turk, 2019). This approach is considered appropriate for this study because it allows us to study and analyze various sources to understand patterns and trends in strengthening character education in schools.

Research design

The design of this research can be categorized as a systematic literature review. Our research involves a comprehensive literature search, a critical evaluation of the literature, and the synthesis of findings to answer specific research questions (Kastner et al., 2016; Wolgemuth et al., 2017). This approach ensures that research is conducted systematically and transparently, increasing the reliability and validity of findings by referring to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

Literature search strategy

Our research sources include various literature and documents relevant to the topic of strengthening character education in Indonesian schools. The literature was searched through the Scopus database, ACM Digital Library, Crossref, and Google Scholar, using the keywords "character education reinforcement" or "strengthening character education" and "Indonesian schools". For data extraction

and synthesis needs, we filtered the search by only having a publication form in the form of open-access journal articles. Especially for sourcing on the Crossref and Google Scholar databases, we used the help of Publish or Perish Software (Lange & Hammes, 2021). In addition to academic literature, school documents, curriculum, educational policies, and learning modules were also collected from schools and educational institutions in Indonesia to be used as a comparison of the results of the analysis in the discussion section of this paper. These documents provide direct insight into the implementation of character education in the field.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria ensure the relevance and quality of selected sources in the study. Included sources focus on character education in primary schools in Indonesia, are empirical research or best practice reports published in international journals with open access, involve interventions in character education approaches or programs, are from Indonesian schools, and were published within the last 5 years (2019-2024) to ensure current literature. Excluded sources are those that do not meet these criteria or are deemed irrelevant to the study's focus.

Study selection

The selection of studies in this study was carried out in May 2024 and went through four stages. The first stage involved filtering multiple data sources (deduplicated) between databases using SR-Accelerator's Deduplicator automated tool (Clark et al., 2020). In the second stage, the title and abstract screening stage with the help of SR-Accelerator's Screenatron (Clark et al., 2020) to ensure that the study is field research that reports the results of strengthening character education in Indonesian elementary schools.

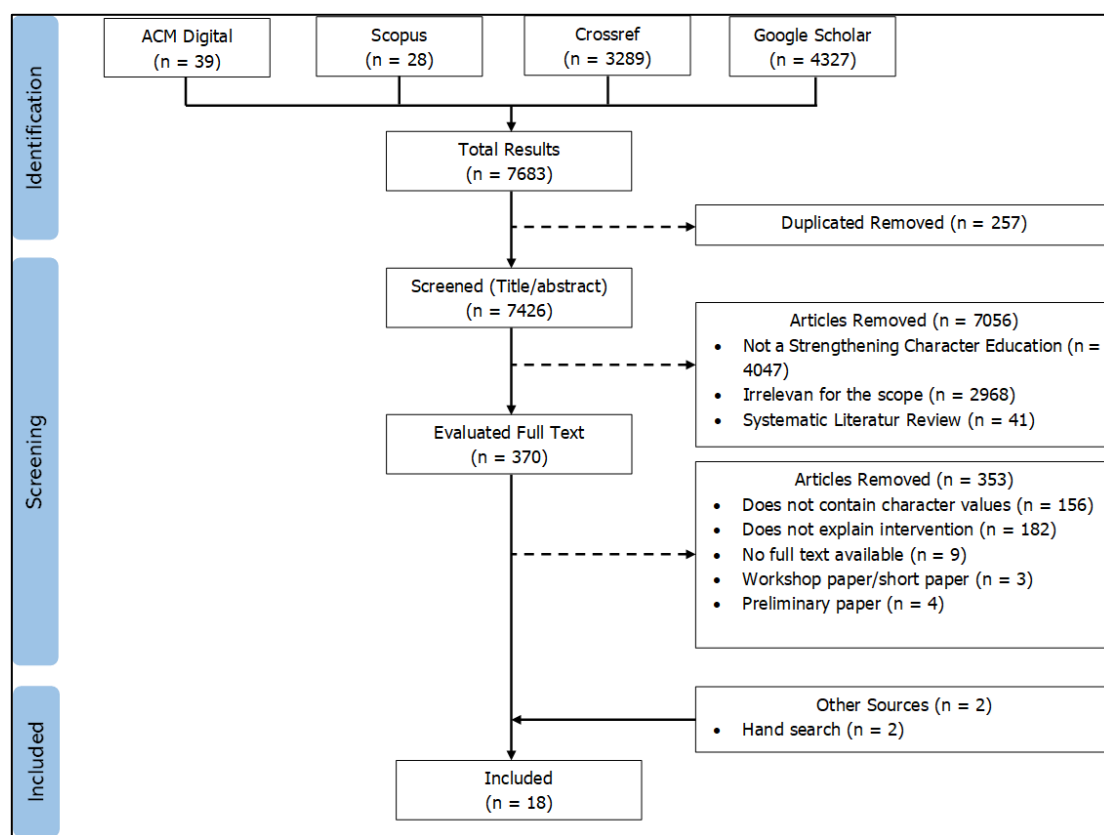


Figure 2. Study Selection and Source Identification

The third stage was the source evaluation stage based on the complete manuscript. At this stage, we included sources with the full text accessible. In addition, the sources were reports on the results of

research that contained the development of character values and interventions carried out by schools for the development of students' character in elementary schools. The fourth stage involved a manual search (hand search) of relevant articles on the database of the *Garba Rujukan Digital* (GARUDA) (Kusuma et al., 2021) as a journal database of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.

Data extraction and synthesis

Data extraction followed a thematic analysis approach as described by Braun & Clarke, (2019). First, we familiarized ourselves with the data by reading and understanding the collected literature. Then, open coding was done to identify the initial patterns and themes that emerged from the data. In the later stages, the themes were reviewed and revised to ensure coherence and representativeness. Finally, the themes that emerged were described and named, and the relationships between them were explained. Data extraction and synthesis as well as answering research questions were carried out by displaying the results of extraction and synthesis based on the theoretical framework.

RESULTS

Analysis of 18 selected studies showed that the implementation of Strengthening Character Education (PPK) in Indonesian elementary schools was carried out through various approaches tailored to the context of schools and communities. Of the total studies, around 33% implemented PPK through a classroom-based approach, 50% through a school-based approach, and 17% through a community-based approach. The classroom-based approach focuses on integrating character values into daily teaching and learning activities, such as thematic and extracurricular learning. The school-based approach emphasizes school culture, PPK management, as well as the role of teacher leadership and inter-staff collaboration, while the community-based approach involves the participation of parents, local communities, and the use of social media or technology to strengthen the internalization of character (Hanafi, 2021; Suryani & Muslim, 2024).

Table 1. Study Selection Results

Study	Location/Region	Theme	Scope
Atika et al. (2021)	D.I. Yogyakarta	Management of PPK	Community-based
Firdaus et al. (2023)	Central Java	P5 implementation	Classroom-based
Frasandy et al. (2022)	West Sumatera	Minangkabau culture	Classroom-based
Jaya & Ariyati (2024)	Aceh	Discipline character	School-based
Kartikawati (2019)	West Java	IECD	School-based
Kuswara & Sumayana (2021)	West Java	<i>Ramadan</i> fasting values	Community-based
Lamba & Rahman (2023)	South Sulawesi	Media on WhatsApp	School-based
Lukman et al. (2021)	Indonesia (cluster)	Teachers' personality	Classroom-based
Nurafiati et al. (2021)	South Sulawesi	Strategy for PPK	School-based
Nurasiah et al. (2022)	Indonesia (case study)	Cultural values	Classroom-based
Nursafitri & Rahayu (2023)	North Sumatera	The efforts to PPK	School-based
Pratiwi et al. (2023)	South Kalimantan	<i>Kayuh baimbai</i>	Classroom-based
Siruwa et al. (2023)	Indonesia (cluster)	PPK management	School-based
Srirahmawati & Hunaifi (2022)	East Java	<i>Barongan mask</i>	School-based
Suardi et al. (2023)	South Sulawesi	Integrative morals	Community-based
Suud et al. (2019)	Indonesia (cluster)	Honesty stages	School-based
Syahrial et al. (2022)	Jambi	Local cultural games	Classroom-based
Utomo & Thaibah (2021)	South Kalimantan	Inclusive education	School-based

Findings related to character values show the five most developed values in Indonesian elementary schools, namely gotong-royong (27%), religiosity (25%), integrity (17%), independence

(16%), and nationalism (15%). The character of mutual cooperation includes cooperation, empathy, inclusivity, and volunteerism, which is a reflection of the collectivist values of Indonesian society. The value of religiosity is integrated through worship activities, moral teaching, and the practice of inter-religious tolerance. Integrity is developed through student discipline, honesty, and accountability in a variety of activities, while independence encourages students' ability to make decisions and take responsibility for their actions. Nationalism is developed through activities that instill a sense of love for the homeland and an understanding of local and national history (Sanusi et al., 2022; Syahrial et al., 2022).

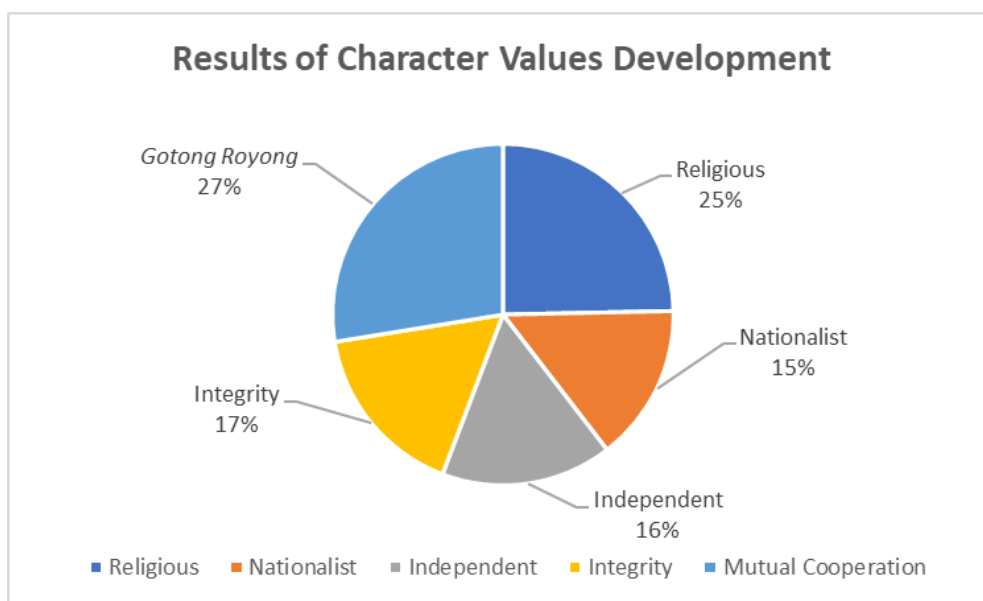


Figure 2. Proportion of character values developed

Various media and learning strategies are used to support the implementation of the PPK. Some studies highlight the use of digital media such as WhatsApp for the delivery of character material, while others use traditional media based on local culture, such as traditional games and Barongan masks. The integration of character in the Merdeka curriculum is also seen in Indonesian language subjects, social studies, and religious education, as well as STEM-based projects that incorporate character values into students' practical tasks (Lamba & Rahman, 2023; Prasetyo et al., 2020; Puspitasari & Rodiyana, 2022).

The analysis of the challenges of PPK implementation shows several main obstacles. A dense curriculum that focuses on academic achievement often reduces time and attention to character education. In addition, the limitations of teacher training cause their competence in guiding and assessing students' character to be less optimal. Communication barriers between schools, parents, and the community also decrease the effectiveness of character internalization, especially when the influence of the external environment conflicts with the values taught in schools (Atika et al., 2021; Lukman et al., 2021; Nursafitri & Rahayu, 2023).

Despite the challenges, the opportunities for PPK implementation are also significant. Successful schools demonstrate collaborative practices between teachers, parents, and communities, as well as the use of technology to expand the reach of character education. Government programs such as Merdeka Mengajar provide additional support through teacher training and the provision of resources, which allows for the replication of best practices in other schools. Project-based approaches and the integration of local values in extracurricular activities have also been shown to improve student engagement and understanding of character values (Frasandy et al., 2022; Suardi et al., 2023).

Overall results show that PPK in Indonesian primary schools is implemented systematically, although there are still variations in strategies and success rates. Effective implementation combines a variety of approaches, core character values, innovative learning media, and the support of teachers, parents, and the community. These results provide a strong empirical basis for further discussion on the effectiveness of the PPK strategy and the improvement of character education programs at the elementary school level.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that the implementation of Strengthening Character Education (PPK) in Indonesian elementary schools has been carried out comprehensively through various approaches, including class, school, and community-based. These findings are in line with the view of Hanafi (2021) and Suryani & Muslim (2024) that the success of character education depends on the integration of moral values into learning activities, school culture, and collaboration with society (Pramudyawardhani et al., 2025). This holistic approach shows that character internalization does not only occur in the classroom, but also through the school environment as a whole, reinforcing Baehr's (2017) theory that emphasizes the importance of sociocultural context in character development.

The most developed character values, such as mutual cooperation, religiosity, integrity, independence, and nationalism, reflect the national focus in Indonesian character education. These results confirm previous studies by Sanusi et al. (2022) and Syahrial et al. (2022) which showed the dominance of collectivist values such as mutual cooperation in elementary school practice. The emphasis on local and cultural values, including activities such as Kayuh Bambai and traditional games, suggests that effective character education must be contextual and relevant to the local culture (Frasandy et al., 2022; Puspitasari & Rodiyana, 2022).

Learning strategies, including integrated, project-based, extracurricular learning, as well as the use of digital media such as WhatsApp and the Sukuraga Puppet application, show innovations in character internalization (Lamba & Rahman, 2023; Nurashiah et al., 2022). This approach is in line with the view of Lickona (2023) and John-Steiner & Mahn (1996) that the integration of character values into all learning experiences facilitates the application of those values in various contexts, so that students are able to internalize character consistently.

This study also highlights the main challenges of PPK implementation, including a dense curriculum, excessive academic focus, limited teacher training, and suboptimal communication between schools, parents, and the community (Atika et al., 2021; Lukman et al., 2021; Nursafitri & Rahayu, 2023). These findings confirm the need to strengthen teacher capacity, supportive school management, and the development of effective communication mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of character education, as recommended by Permatasari (2021) and Maisyaroh et al. (2023).

Despite the obstacles, the opportunity to increase the effectiveness of PPK is quite large. Government programs such as Merdeka Mengajar, teacher-parent-community collaboration, and technological innovation provide the potential for broader character strengthening (Frasandy et al., 2022; Suardi et al., 2023). This shows that successful character education requires a supportive environment, the active role of teachers, and the involvement of various stakeholders, in line with the results of studies by Ciampa & Wolfe (2021) and Adams & Rodriguez (2019) on the importance of practical involvement of teachers and communities.

Overall, these findings confirm that the implementation of character education in Indonesian primary schools involves not only a formal curriculum but also cultural, artistic, technological, and community participation practices (Prihatmojo et al., 2026). This study underscores the importance of contextual, collaborative, and innovative character education strategies, which can serve as a model for the development of more effective PPK programs in the future (Suryani & Muslim, 2024; Syahrul et al., 2024; Dewia & Alam, 2020). The practical implications of this study include recommendations for

teacher capacity building, integration of character values in various school activities, and the use of technology to support the internalization of student character in a sustainable manner.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the implementation of Strengthening Character Education (PPK) in Indonesian elementary schools has been implemented systematically through integration in the curriculum, extracurricular activities, collaboration between teachers, parents, and communities, and the use of media and technology to support the internalization of character values. The main values developed include mutual cooperation, religiosity, integrity, independence, and nationalism, emphasizing the importance of local cultural contexts and participatory educational practices. Despite the success in implementing the PPK strategy, this study has limitations, including a focus on the Indonesian literature so that the results cannot be directly generalized to the international context, and most studies are cross-sectional so that the long-term evaluation of the effectiveness of the PPK is still limited. The implications of this study include the importance of strengthening teacher capacity through character training, improving coordination between schools, parents, and the community, and developing innovative learning media to support sustainable character education. These findings can serve as a basis for the development of character education frameworks that are inclusive, culturally adaptive, and globally applicable, supporting holistic educational strategies and preparing students to face the challenges of an increasingly connected world.

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