

## VALUE- AND CHARACTER-BASED BASIC EDUCATION MANAGEMENT: A COMPARISON OF GLOBAL APPROACHES

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare character education management policies and practices at the primary education level across ten countries (Indonesia, USA, Saudi Arabia, Australia, UK, Japan, Germany, Malaysia, Singapore, and China) through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method using the PRISMA protocol. Analysis of literature from 2015–2025 identifies three main clusters of approaches: (1) Eastern Values and Discipline-based approaches which are centralized and monolithic (Japan, China, Singapore); (2) Democratic Citizenship and Individual-based approaches emphasizing autonomy and curriculum integration (USA, UK, Australia, Germany); and (3) Religious and National Identity-based approaches (Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia). The findings reveal significant variations in implementation strategies across subjects and curriculum integration, as well as in teacher roles, ranging from authoritative moral role models to ethical discussion facilitators. This study concludes that while no single model is universally effective, Indonesia can strengthen its system by adopting systematic habituation mechanisms from East Asia and critical reasoning development from the West to complement its strong religious value basis.

Keywords: Character Education, Primary Education, Comparative Study, Values Education, SR.

### INTRODUCTION

Global education is undergoing a fundamental transformation from the conventional paradigm that emphasizes academic-cognitive achievement to a holistic education that integrates the social-emotional and ethical dimensions in the 21st century. This shift is based on the realization that individual success is no longer measured only through the mastery of factual knowledge, but also through the ability to think critically, collaborate, communicate, and be creative, known as 21st-century skills (Griffin et al., 2012; Voogt & Roblin, 2012). UNESCO, through its 2023 Recommendations on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, explicitly integrates transformative approaches such as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) with holistic approaches such as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to develop the human values, integrity, and transversal competencies that students need in facing global and personal challenges. This paradigm shift marks the urgency of character formation as an important foundation in the management of basic education in various countries.

The phenomenon of a global moral crisis characterized by increasing cases of bullying, intolerance, degradation of ethical values, and social disruption due to the penetration of digital technology has prompted countries around the world to re-strengthen the education of values and character at the basic education level. Research shows that mental health problems, math anxiety, and social-emotional gaps among primary school students have been increasing in recent decades, indicating the failure of the education system to foster healthy social-emotional and behavioral skills (Ashcraft & Krause, 2007). In Indonesia itself, this challenge is increasingly complex with the demand to integrate Pancasila values, local wisdom, and social ethics into educational practices in the midst of massive digital transformation. Similar developments are occurring in other countries, including the United States, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Europe, which face the challenge of adapting character education to contemporary sociocultural dynamics and globalization.

Character education at the elementary level has a strategic role because elementary school age is a critical period in the formation of the foundation of personality, moral values, and social-emotional competencies that will affect lifelong development (Durlak et al., 2011; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Effective educational management must include curriculum design, teachers as role models, a conducive school culture, and systematic evaluation mechanisms to ensure the internalization of character values among students. Bibliometric studies on character education management show a significant increase in research publications since 2018, with dominant themes including the integration of character education with SEL and global citizenship education, as well as the use of digital technology in value learning. Character education management in different countries has a varied approach, ranging from explicit models that integrate character education as a separate subject to implicit models that instill value through school culture and hidden curriculum (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Jelovac, 2025).

Although research on character education has grown rapidly, there are still significant gaps in the scientific literature regarding comparative studies that systematically compare the management of character education across continents, particularly those that include East Asia (Japan, China, Singapore), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia), the Middle East (Saudi Arabia), Europe (UK, Germany), the United States (United States), and Oceania (Australia) within a single integrated analytical framework. Most existing comparative studies tend to focus on

limited bilateral or regional comparisons, such as Indonesia-Japan comparisons or education policy analyses in European Union countries, the United States, and China (Lokshyna et al., 2020; Zulkarnain et al., 2021). In fact, a comprehensive understanding of how the world's various education systems approach character education can provide valuable theoretical and practical insights for identifying best practices, understanding the socio-cultural contexts that influence implementation, and developing adaptive models that fit local needs. Getting to know one another across nations is the philosophical foundation for the importance of cross-continental studies. From an Islamic perspective, the effort to study the practices of people from different cultures aligns with the principle of *lita'arafu* as stated by Allah in the Qur'an. Al-Hujurat verse 13:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

*"O mankind, verily We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble among you in the sight of Allah is the most pious among you. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Knowing."*

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of character education has become a national priority since the launch of the Character Education Strengthening Movement (PPK) in 2016. The 2013 Curriculum has reinforced it and, subsequently, the Independent Curriculum, which emphasized the formation of the Pancasila Student Profile. Implementation challenges faced include limited teachers' understanding of character pedagogy, policy inconsistencies between regions, and gaps between formal curriculum and learning practices in the field. The latest study confirms that implementing the religious education curriculum, which is one of the main moral foundations, must be comprehensive, covering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects to form a complete religious character and be globally competitive (Pahrudin & Jarmiko, 2025). In addition, the effectiveness of value internalization depends heavily on the implementation of a systematic active learning strategy, from planning through evaluation, to ensure continuity in the character-learning process (Rifaldi et al., 2023). Comparative studies with countries with long experience and well-established character education management systems, such as Japan with a culture of collectivism-based approach to moral education, Singapore with structured Character and Citizenship Education (CCE), the United States with a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) framework, and Saudi Arabia with

Islamic values-based education, can provide important references for policymakers and education practitioners in the United States. Indonesia to design a more effective and contextual managerial strategy.

This research is important and relevant because it offers a systematic and comprehensive analysis of character education management policies and practices in ten countries representing different educational systems, cultural traditions, and managerial approaches. Using a systematic review method, this study not only identifies similarities and differences in managerial approaches to instilling value in elementary education students but also explores contextual factors that influence implementation success, such as curriculum structure, teacher roles, government policy support, and family and community involvement. The findings of this research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to enriching the comparative character education discourse and to provide practical recommendations for education policymakers in Indonesia to adapt global best practices in accordance with Pancasila values, local wisdom, and the contemporary challenges faced by the national education system.

Based on the background that has been described, this research is focused on answering the complexity of the variation in character education management at the global level. Specifically, this study aims to examine the characteristics of character education management policies in various geopolitical and cultural clusters, including Western countries (United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany), East Asia (Japan, China, Singapore), and countries with a strong Malay religious or cultural base (Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia). Furthermore, this study will investigate the similarities and differences in managerial approaches across the ten countries, particularly regarding curriculum, teachers' roles as moral agents, and the development of school culture. This analysis aims to identify which character education management models are highly adaptable for application or adaptation to improve the education system in Indonesia.

This research aims to comprehensively map global policies on value education at the elementary level to understand trends, priorities, and paradigm shifts across countries. Furthermore, this study aims to compare the implementation strategies used, both explicit through special subjects and integrative within the curriculum and school culture. The ultimate goal is to formulate a synthesis of best practices in character education management from a

global perspective that can be used as a strategic reference in the development of an effective and culturally relevant character education model for the Indonesian national education system.

Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on educational management and comparative education, particularly by providing a cross-continental analytical framework for implementing character education. The findings of this study will also fill the gap in the literature by comparing education systems across developed and developing countries in a single integrated review. Practically, this research is expected to provide strategic insights and policy recommendations for the government, curriculum developers, school principals, and education practitioners in Indonesia for designing an adaptive, measurable, and sustainable character education ecosystem, as well as addressing moral challenges in the era of globalization.

## METHODOLOGY

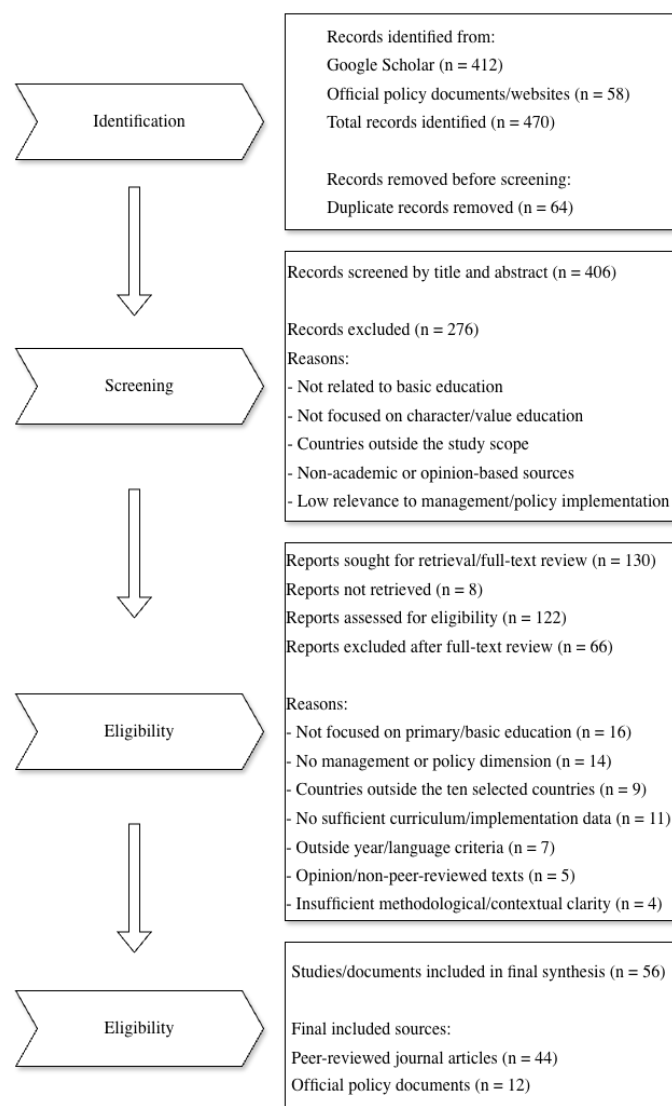
This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design using the PRISMA protocol to identify, screen, select, and synthesize literature related to the management of value- and character-based basic education across ten countries. The PRISMA framework was used to ensure transparency throughout the literature identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion processes. The use of this protocol also enabled the study to present a systematic and replicable review process, particularly because the literature covered various socio-cultural, political, and educational contexts (Liberati et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021).

The literature search was conducted using two main sources: Google Scholar and official policy documents published by ministries of education or other relevant government education agencies in the selected countries. The search focused on publications from 2015 to 2025 using several keywords and keyword combinations, including “character education management,” “values education in primary education,” “moral education in elementary school,” “citizenship education in basic education,” “social emotional learning in primary school,” “Islamic education and character education,” and country-specific combinations such as “character education in Japan,” “moral education in China,” “Character and Citizenship Education Singapore,” “Pancasila Student Profile Indonesia,” and “Islamic education Saudi Arabia.”

The initial search identified 470 records, consisting of 412 articles retrieved from Google Scholar and 58 official policy documents obtained from ministry or government education websites. After removing 64 duplicate records, 406 records were screened based on titles and

abstracts. At this stage, 276 records were excluded because they were not directly related to basic education, did not focus on character or values education management, discussed countries outside the study's scope, or were non-academic sources. A total of 130 documents were then selected for full-text retrieval. However, 8 documents could not be fully accessed, leaving 122 documents for eligibility assessment. The PRISMA flow diagram presents the process of identifying, screening, assessing eligibility, and including literature in this systematic review. From 470 initial records, 56 documents were finally included in the synthesis, consisting of 44 journal articles and 12 official policy documents.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Literature Selection Process



The eligibility assessment was conducted by reading the full text and evaluating its relevance to the study's focus. At this stage, 66 documents were excluded for several reasons: 16 did not focus on primary/basic education, 14 did not contain a management or policy

dimension, 9 discussed countries outside the ten selected countries, 11 did not provide sufficient data on curriculum or implementation practices, 7 were outside the specified publication period or language criteria, 5 were opinion-based or non-peer-reviewed texts, and 4 lacked sufficient methodological or contextual clarity. Finally, 56 documents were included in the synthesis, consisting of 44 peer-reviewed journal articles and 12 official policy documents.

The included literature was then analyzed using thematic and comparative analysis. Thematic analysis was used to classify the findings into key themes, including policy orientation, curriculum structure, teacher roles, school culture, implementation strategy, and character evaluation. Comparative analysis was conducted using a juxtaposition approach to identify similarities and differences among countries and clusters. The ten countries were grouped into three major analytical clusters: Eastern values and discipline-based approaches, represented by Japan, China, and Singapore; democratic citizenship and individual-based approaches, represented by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany; and religious and national identity-based approaches, represented by Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Literature Distribution Map*

The systematic literature review identified 56 final sources, comprising 44 peer-reviewed journal articles and 12 official policy documents, published between 2015 and 2025. The distribution of literature shows that studies on character education management are not evenly distributed across the ten countries analyzed. East and Southeast Asian countries, particularly Japan, China, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, dominate the reviewed literature, accounting for 34 sources (60.7%) of the total documents. This finding indicates that character education has become a prominent research and policy issue in Asian education systems, particularly regarding moral education, social discipline, national identity, and school culture.

The literature was then grouped into three analytical clusters, as outlined in the introduction: Eastern values and discipline-based approaches; democratic citizenship and individual-based approaches; and religious and national identity-based approaches. The distribution of literature by country and cluster is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of Reviewed Literature by Country and Analytical Cluster**

| Cluster                                                   | Countries               | Number of Sources | Percentage | Dominant Focus in the Literature                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cluster 1: Eastern values and discipline-based approaches | Japan, China, Singapore | 22                | 39.3%      | Moral education, discipline, collectivism, school culture, civic responsibility, and |

|                                                                      |                                                   |    |       |                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                      |                                                   |    |       | structured value habituation                                                                                     |
| Cluster 2:<br>Democratic citizenship and individual-based approaches | United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany | 19 | 33.9% | Social-emotional learning, citizenship education, democratic values, autonomy, tolerance, and critical reasoning |
| Cluster 3:<br>Religious and national identity-based approaches       | Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia                 | 15 | 26.8% | Religious values, national ideology, moral education, Pancasila, Islamic education, and cultural identity        |
| Total                                                                | 10 countries                                      | 56 | 100%  |                                                                                                                  |

**Table 2. Distribution of Reviewed Literature by Country**

| No.   | Country        | Cluster                                     | Number of Sources | Percentage |
|-------|----------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 1     | Japan          | Eastern values and discipline-based         | 8                 | 14.3%      |
| 2     | China          | Eastern values and discipline-based         | 7                 | 12.5%      |
| 3     | Singapore      | Eastern values and discipline-based         | 7                 | 12.5%      |
| 4     | United States  | Democratic citizenship and individual-based | 6                 | 10.7%      |
| 5     | United Kingdom | Democratic citizenship and individual-based | 5                 | 8.9%       |
| 6     | Australia      | Democratic citizenship and individual-based | 5                 | 8.9%       |
| 7     | Germany        | Democratic citizenship and individual-based | 3                 | 5.4%       |
| 8     | Saudi Arabia   | Religious and national identity-based       | 3                 | 5.4%       |
| 9     | Malaysia       | Religious and national identity-based       | 6                 | 10.7%      |
| 10    | Indonesia      | Religious and national identity-based       | 6                 | 10.7%      |
| Total |                |                                             | 56                | 100%       |

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the highest concentration of literature is in Cluster 1, which includes Japan, China, and Singapore. This cluster accounts for 22 sources or 39.3% of the total reviewed documents. The dominance of this cluster reflects the strong emphasis on moral education, school discipline, and structured value habituation in East Asian education systems. Japan contributes the most sources in this cluster, particularly due to the reform of Doutoku, or moral education, as a formal subject at the primary school level.

Cluster 2, consisting of the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany, contributes 19 sources (33.9%) to the reviewed literature. The literature in this cluster is primarily related to Social-Emotional Learning, citizenship education, democratic values, tolerance, and critical reasoning. Compared with Cluster 1, the studies in this cluster tend to emphasise individual autonomy, reflective learning, student voice, and democratic participation rather than direct moral transmission.

Cluster 3, consisting of Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Indonesia, contributes 15 sources, accounting for 26.8% of the total reviewed documents. The literature in this cluster focuses strongly on integrating religious values, national identity, and moral education into the formal curriculum. Indonesia and Malaysia contribute more sources than Saudi Arabia, indicating the growing academic attention to character education in Southeast Asian Muslim-majority contexts. Meanwhile, the relatively small number of sources from Saudi Arabia and Germany indicates that the literature on character education management in these countries remains more limited in scope and language than the criteria of this review.

The publication trend shows a gradual increase in academic and policy attention to character education management from 2015 to 2024. As shown in Table 3 and Figure 1, the number of reviewed sources increased from 2 in 2015 to 8 in 2024. This increase became more visible after 2018, which corresponds with the strengthening of character education policies and curriculum reforms in several countries, including the formal implementation of moral education reform in Japan, the expansion of Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore, and the strengthening of character education policy in Indonesia through the PPK movement and the later development of the Pancasila Student Profile. The number of sources in 2025 appears lower because the publication year was still ongoing at the time of data collection, meaning that the 2025 figure should not be interpreted as a decline in scholarly interest (Boon & Wong, 2019; Kemendikbudristek, 2017; Saito & Sato, 2020).

The trend also indicates that character education management has increasingly become a cross-national concern. In the earlier period of 2015–2017, the literature was still relatively limited and mostly discussed values education, moral education, and citizenship education in separate national contexts. From 2018 onward, the literature began to show greater attention to policy implementation, school culture, teacher roles, and the integration of character education with Social-Emotional Learning, Global Citizenship Education, and digital-era moral challenges. This pattern underscores the relevance of a comparative systematic review, as the development of character education is no longer merely a domestic curricular issue but has become part of a broader global discourse on holistic education, citizenship, and ethical formation (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Jelovac, 2025).

**Table 3. Publication Trend of Reviewed Literature from 2015 to 2025**

| Year  | Cluster 1: Eastern Values and Discipline | Cluster 2: Democratic Citizenship | Cluster 3: Religious and National Identity | Total Sources |
|-------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------|
| 2015  | 1                                        | 1                                 | 0                                          | 2             |
| 2016  | 1                                        | 1                                 | 1                                          | 3             |
| 2017  | 1                                        | 2                                 | 1                                          | 4             |
| 2018  | 2                                        | 2                                 | 1                                          | 5             |
| 2019  | 2                                        | 2                                 | 1                                          | 5             |
| 2020  | 2                                        | 2                                 | 2                                          | 6             |
| 2021  | 3                                        | 2                                 | 2                                          | 7             |
| 2022  | 2                                        | 2                                 | 2                                          | 6             |
| 2023  | 2                                        | 2                                 | 2                                          | 6             |
| 2024  | 4                                        | 2                                 | 2                                          | 8             |
| 2025  | 2                                        | 1                                 | 1                                          | 4             |
| Total | 22                                       | 19                                | 15                                         | 56            |

In terms of research methodology, most articles employed descriptive qualitative approaches, policy studies, and comparative analyses, with only a small number using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to measure the effectiveness of character education programs. This shows that character education research is still dominated by efforts to understand and describe local practices, policies, and values taught. However, it is still lacking in terms of evaluating the long-term impact on student character formation empirically and measurably. This gap reinforces the urgency of systematic comparative research as conducted in this study to identify cross-border patterns that can provide a theoretical and practical basis for the development of more effective and adaptive character education management models.

**Table 4: Comparison of Cross-Border Character Education Management Approaches**

| Country  | Program Name/Curriculum                                           | Delivery Method                                         | Key Values                                          | Teachers' Role                                           | Character Evaluation                                           |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jepang   | <i>Doutoku</i> (Moral Education) + <i>Souji</i> & <i>Kyushoku</i> | <i>Monolithic</i> (special subjects) + daily activities | Responsibility, discipline, social harmony, respect | Role model of morality & facilitator of moral discussion | Behavioural observation, self-reflection, formative assessment |
| Tiongkok | <i>Ideological and Political Education</i> (IPE)                  | <i>Monolithic</i> + Cross-Subject Integration           | Patriotism, collectivism, core socialist values     | Role model of ideology & transmitter of political values | Moral knowledge tests, ideological participation assessments   |

|                 |                                                                      |                                                                       |   |                                                                                                     |                                                          |                                                                                        |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Singapura       | <i>Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)</i>                     | <i>Monolithic School Culture &amp; Values in Action (VIA)</i>         | + | Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, Care, Resilience, Harmony                                       | Role model moral & character guide                       | Behavioural observation, portfolio reflection, holistic assessment                     |
| Amerika Serikat | <i>Social Emotional Learning (SEL)</i>                               | <i>Integrative/Infused</i> (spread across the map) + special programs | + | Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making | Ethics discussion facilitator & reflection guide         | Informal observations, narrative reports, self-assessment                              |
| Inggris         | <i>Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) + British Values</i> | <i>Monolithic</i> (Special Subjects)                                  |   | Democracy, rule of law, individual freedom, respect for diversity                                   | Discussion facilitator & critical thinking mentor        | Formative, observational assessment, without numerical value                           |
| Australia       | <i>Values Education</i> (integrated in the Australian Curriculum)    | <i>Integrative/Infused</i> + School culture                           |   | Care and compassion, respect, responsibility, tolerance, inclusion                                  | Dialogue facilitator & inclusivity model                 | Observation, narrative reports, value reflection                                       |
| Jerman          | <i>Ethical/Religious Education + Politische Bildung</i>              | <i>Monolithic</i> (separate subjects per Bundesland)                  |   | Human rights, civic responsibility, tolerance, democratic participation                             | Facilitator of political and ethical discussions         | Assessment of participation, discussion without a focus on formal character evaluation |
| Arab Saudi      | <i>Islamic Education</i> (Al-Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Morals)           | <i>Monolithic</i> (Compulsory Religion-Based Subjects)                |   | Obedience to Allah, Islamic morality, honesty, responsibility                                       | Role model of morality & transmitter of religious values | Religious knowledge test, observation of religious behaviour                           |
| Malaysia        | <i>Islamic Education + Moral Education + Rukun Negara</i>            | <i>Monolithic</i> (separate subjects for Muslims/non-Muslims)         |   | Islamic morals (Muslim), universal values (non-Muslims)                                             | Role model moral & value guide                           | Attitude assessment in report cards, observations, and moral                           |

|           |                                                                                 |                                                                                                         | Muslim),<br>Rukun Negara                                                                                   |                                                                       | knowledge<br>tests                                                                                                  |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Indonesia | Strengthening<br>Character<br>Education (PPK)<br>+ Pancasila<br>Student Profile | <i>Monolithic</i><br>(Religious<br>Education<br>PPKn)<br>integrative<br>(school culture<br>& community) | Faith & piety,<br>global diversity,<br>cooperation,<br>independence,<br>critical<br>reasoning,<br>creative | Role model<br>of morality<br>&<br>facilitator<br>of value<br>learning | Assessment<br>of attitudes<br>(affective) in<br>report cards,<br>observations,<br>and<br>habituation<br>assessments |

## DISCUSSION

### Cluster 1: Eastern Values-Based Approach and Discipline (Japan, China, Singapore)

Japan implements a structured character education system through a special subject called *Doutoku* (Moral Education), which has been an official part of the curriculum since the revision of the Course of Study in 2015 and was fully implemented in 2018 for primary schools (Saito & Sato, 2020; Sato, 2025). *Doutoku* is designed to encourage students to think and discuss moral values through a problem-solving learning approach, which integrates four main pillars: relationships with oneself (intrapersonal), relationships with others (interpersonal), relationships with nature, and relationships with society (Bamkin, 2018; Unsriana & Ningrum, 2018). In addition to formal classroom learning, Japan also emphasises character education through daily activities such as *Souji* (a joint classroom cleaning activity that instils responsibility, cooperation, and discipline) and a school lunch program (*kyushoku*) that teaches eating etiquette, gratitude, and social collaboration (Mulyadi, 2020; Sakariah, 2025). The management of character education in Japan is top-down with strict guidelines from the Ministry of Education (MEXT), but it still provides room for schools to adapt learning materials according to the local context (Saito & Sato, 2020).

China integrates character education through the Ideology and Political Education (*Sixiang Zhengzhi*) curriculum, which is the main pillar in shaping the values of patriotism, collectivism, and socialist national identity at the basic education level (Ouyang, 2024; Ye & Hu, 2023). The Core Socialist Values that include prosperity, democracy, harmony, and social justice are integrated into all subjects, including Chinese, Mathematics, and Science, through a recontextualization mechanism that transforms political ideology into structured pedagogical content. Moral education in China also emphasises the cultivation of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture (CETC), which teaches Confucian values such as filial piety, social responsibility, and communal harmony (Wang & Zhang, 2024; Wei, 2024). The implementation of character education in China is highly centralised and political, with the central government

setting national curriculum standards that must be followed by all schools, as well as a strict evaluation system to ensure students understand and internalise the ideological values that the state wants.

Singapore has implemented a structured and systematic approach to Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) since 1997, with a major revision in 2014 (CCE 2.0) emphasising character formation through six national core values: Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, Care, Resilience, and Harmony. CCE is integrated into the formal curriculum through specialised subjects, as well as internalised through school culture, co-curricular activities, and community service programs (Values in Action / VIA) that encourage students to apply the values learned in real-life contexts (Boon & Wong, 2019; Ikeda, 2023; J. P. L. Tan et al., 2017). CCE management is top-down, with very detailed guidance from Singapore's Ministry of Education, including the provision of teaching materials, teacher guidance, and an evaluation framework based on observations of student behaviour and self-reflection. The three countries in this cluster show similarities in the management of character education: it is centralised and structured, emphasising order, social responsibility, communal identity, and collective values that put the interests of the community above those of individuals.

### ***Cluster 2: Democratic and Individual Citizenship Approaches (US, UK, Australia, Germany)***

The United States adopts a highly decentralised approach to character education, in which policy and implementation are left to state governments and local school districts, resulting in significant variation in approaches, curricula, and the values taught (Berkowitz & Bier, 2017; Jelovac, 2025). One of the most influential frameworks is Social Emotional Learning (SEL) developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which emphasises the development of five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2011; Goswami, 2025). The SEL approach does not explicitly teach moral values as in Asia; rather, it focuses on developing social-emotional skills that enable students to think critically, empathise, and make ethical decisions independently within the context of democratic life. Teachers in this context serve as facilitators of discussion and reflection, not as conveyors of normative moral values.

The UK integrates character education through the framework of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education, which has been part of the compulsory curriculum since 2020 and includes learning about mental health, interpersonal relationships, economic awareness, as well as civic values known as British Values (democracy, rule of law, individual

freedom, and respect for diversity) (Arthur et al., 2017; RSE, 2025). The PSHE approach emphasises character building through open discussion, the development of critical thinking, and respect for individual rights and democratic participation. Australia implements Values Education integrated into the national curriculum framework (Benson, 2015), with an emphasis on nine core values: Care and Compassion, Doing Your Best, Fair Go, Freedom, Honesty and Trustworthiness, Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, and Understanding, Tolerance, and Inclusion (Benson, 2015; Lovat et al., 2010). The Australian approach places great emphasis on multiculturalism, inclusivity, and respect for cultural, religious, and identity diversity, which is reflected in pedagogical strategies that encourage intercultural dialogue, project-based learning, and reflection of values in the context of student life (Lovat, 2017; Lovat et al., 2010).

Germany implements character education through two main tracks: Ethics/Religion Education, which is taught separately according to the student's religious affiliation or the choice of ethical subjects for non-religious students, and Political Citizenship Education (Politische Bildung), which emphasises the formation of democratic character, political participation, and an understanding of human rights, social justice, and civic responsibility (Kenner, 2020; Losito et al., 2018). The German education system is federal, so character education policies vary across states (Bundesländer), but generally emphasise the development of critical thinking, tolerance, and democratic participation in a pluralistic society. The four countries in this cluster show similarities in the management of character education that is more flexible, emphasising individual autonomy, critical thinking, tolerance, individual rights, democratic participation, and respect for diversity, in fundamental contrast to the centralistic and collectivistic approaches found in Cluster 1 (Arthur et al., 2017; Berkowitz & Bier, 2017; Losito et al., 2018; Lovat et al., 2010).

### ***Cluster 3: Religious and Identity-Based Approaches (Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia)***

Saudi Arabia implements character education that is highly integrated with Islamic values, which serves as the main foundation of the national education system from primary to secondary levels. The curriculum in Saudi Arabia emphasises the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Tawheed, and Islamic Morals as compulsory subjects that teach moral values grounded in Islamic sharia, including obedience to Allah, respect for parents, honesty, responsibility, and compassion. The school management system in Saudi Arabia also implements gender segregation in the context of primary and secondary education, which is considered part of the cultural and religious values that must be maintained. The approach to character education is normative and transmissive, in which moral values are treated as absolute truths that must be

taught and internalised by students, leaving no room for alternative interpretations or criticism. The role of teachers in this context is as role models of morals and transmitters of religious values, who have full authority in guiding the formation of students' character (Al Zahrani, 2019; Osman, 2024).

Malaysia implements character education through two separate tracks: Islamic Education for Muslim students and Moral Education for non-Muslim students. Islamic education teaches the values of morality, monotheism, worship, and muamalah based on the Qur'an and Hadith. In contrast, Moral Education teaches universal values such as compassion, responsibility, honesty, and social justice without explicit reference to the teachings of a particular religion (Hafizi et al., 2024; B. P. Tan et al., 2018). In addition, Malaysia also integrates the values of the Rukun Negara (the five principles of national ideology: Belief in God, Loyalty to the King and State, Dignity of the Constitution, Rule of Law, and Civility and Morality) into the curriculum as an effort to build national identity and social harmony amidst ethnic and religious diversity. Character education management in Malaysia is top-down, with clear guidelines from the Ministry of Education Malaysia, but it leaves room for schools to adapt implementation strategies according to the local context and the demographic composition of students (Hafizi et al., 2024; Muslim et al., 2022).

Indonesia implements Strengthening Character Education (PPK), launched in 2016 and later transformed into the framework of the Pancasila Student Profile in the Independent Curriculum in 2021, which emphasises six dimensions of character: faith and fear of God Almighty, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity. PPK is implemented through three tracks: classroom-based education (integration of values in learning), school culture-based education (habituation and exemplarity), and community-based education (parental and community involvement) (Gunawan, 2017; Kemendikbudristek, 2021; Ruyadi, 2022). Pancasila values serve as the primary foundation, emphasising a balance among religious values, nationalism, and cultural diversity. The main challenges faced by Indonesia are inconsistent implementation across regions, limited teachers' understanding of character pedagogy, and gaps between the formal curriculum and learning practices in the field. The three countries in this cluster show similarities in placing religion and cultural/national identity as the primary source of value, with a common challenge in balancing traditional/religious values with the demands of a modern global society that emphasises critical thinking, tolerance, and inclusivity (Gunawan, 2017; Hafizi et al., 2024; Huda, 2019; Osman, 2024).

### *Comparative Synthesis Across Clusters*

A comparison of the methods of delivering character education shows a fundamental difference between a monolithic approach that teaches character through specialized subjects (such as *Doutoku* in Japan, Ideological and Political Education in China, CCE in Singapore, Religious and Moral Education in Malaysia and Indonesia, and PSHE in the UK) and an integrative/infused approach that integrates character values into all subjects without any specific time allocation (such as applied in Australia and some schools in the United States). The monolithic approach has the advantage of providing an explicit space for moral reflection and discussion of values. However, it risks making character education something separate from other learning and less contextual. In contrast, the integrative approach allows character values to be learned in a context that is more authentic and relevant to students' lives, but requires a very high level of teacher competence to identify and make explicit moral values in each subject. Empirical studies show that the effectiveness of both approaches is highly dependent on the quality of implementation, school commitment, and consistent policy support.

The role of teachers in character education also shows significant differences between clusters. In East Asian countries and religion-based countries (Clusters 1 and 3), teachers are seen as moral role models with the authority to instil values in students through example, habituation, and direct instruction. Confucian and Islamic traditions emphasise the importance of the teacher as an exemplary moral figure who not only imparts knowledge but also shapes character through daily behaviour and interactions. In contrast, in Western countries (Cluster 2), teachers play more of a role as facilitators of ethical discussions that encourage students to think critically, explore moral dilemmas, and shape their own values through reflection and dialogue. This approach is in line with the liberal education tradition that emphasises individual autonomy, value pluralism, and the ability to think independently. These differences reflect philosophical assumptions about the nature of moral values: whether they are objective and must be transmitted (essentialist view) or constructed and must be explored personally (constructivist view).

Character evaluations also show cross-country variation. In Asian countries such as Japan and Singapore, character is assessed primarily through behavioural observation by teachers, formative assessments based on classroom activities, and students' self-reflection recorded in learning portfolios or journals. China uses a more formal evaluation system that includes moral knowledge tests and assessments of participation in ideological and patriotic activities. In Western countries such as the United States and Australia, character evaluations tend to be conducted informally and holistically, without assigning numerical scores, focusing

on the development of social-emotional competencies assessed through observation, narrative reports, and self-assessment. Meanwhile, Indonesia and Malaysia used a combination of attitude assessment (affective), integrated into the report card, behavioural observation, and assessment of participation in character habituation activities. The main challenge in character evaluation is the difficulty of objectively measuring internal dimensions such as integrity, empathy, and moral commitment, as well as the risk that formal evaluations can encourage students to "pretend" to behave well without internalising true values.

## CONCLUSION

This systematic review of character education management across ten countries reveals that while character education is a global priority, its implementation is shaped by socio-cultural contexts and national ideologies. East Asian nations such as Japan, China, and Singapore adopt monolithic, centralised approaches rooted in communal discipline, whereas Western countries like the US, the UK, Australia, and Germany emphasise integrative, decentralised models that foster individual autonomy and democratic citizenship. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Indonesia highlight religious values as the foundation of their curricula, creating challenges in balancing obedience with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and tolerance. Teacher roles also vary, from authoritative moral exemplars in the East to facilitators of egalitarian ethical dialogue in the West. For Indonesia, these findings suggest strategic opportunities to synthesise global strengths to advance the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*. Practical habituation methods from Japan, such as *Souji* (cleanliness) and *Kyushoku* (lunch routines), could instil discipline and social responsibility. At the same time, Western pedagogical practices emphasising moral reasoning and critical citizenship may prevent rigid dogmatism. Combining religious and Pancasila values with East Asian discipline and Western critical inquiry could nurture students who are noble, adaptive, and globally competitive. Limitations of this study include reliance on English and Indonesian sources, risking representation bias. Future research should employ field studies and ethnographic comparisons to capture local nuances and assess long-term impacts on student behaviour..

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