Thomas Lickona's Concept of Character Education in the Perspective of Educational Management

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Abstract:

The transformation of education in the Society 5.0 era requires educational systems that adapt to rapid technological advancement while strengthening students' character development. However, studies on Thomas Lickona's character education have primarily focused on classroom-level pedagogy, leaving its relevance in educational management underexplored. This study aims to analyse the integration of Lickona's character education framework into educational management in the context of Society 5.0. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), ten peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2025 were analysed through identification, screening, eligibility, and thematic synthesis stages. The findings reveal three dominant patterns. First, curriculum integration embeds moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action into learning Design to support ethical reflection. Second, strengthening school culture emphasises institutional values, leadership modelling, and habitual practices in sustaining moral behaviour. Third, technology-supported character learning shows that digital media enhance moral engagement when guided by ethical management. Overall, character education is more effective when implemented systemically at the managerial level. This study contributes by repositioning Lickona's framework as a management-oriented paradigm for human-centred education. Future research should expand empirical validation and explore AI-supported models of character education.

Keywords: *Education, Character, Thomas Lickona, Educational Management, School Culture*

Abstrak:

Transformasi pendidikan di era Society 5.0 membutuhkan sistem pendidikan yang beradaptasi dengan kemajuan teknologi yang pesat sekaligus memperkuat pengembangan karakter siswa. Namun, studi tentang pendidikan karakter Thomas Lickona sebagian besar berfokus pada pedagogi tingkat kelas, meninggalkan relevansinya dalam manajemen pendidikan yang kurang dieksplorasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis integrasi kerangka pendidikan karakter Lickona ke dalam manajemen pendidikan dalam konteks Society 5.0. Dengan menggunakan Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis (SLR), sepuluh artikel peer-review yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2020 dan 2025 dianalisis melalui tahap identifikasi, penyaringan, kelayakan, dan sintesis tematik. Temuan ini mengungkapkan tiga pola dominan. Pertama, integrasi kurikulum menanamkan pengetahuan moral, perasaan moral, dan tindakan moral ke dalam desain pembelajaran untuk mendukung refleksi etis. Kedua, penguatan budaya sekolah menekankan nilai-nilai kelembagaan, pemodelan kepemimpinan, dan praktik kebiasaan dalam mempertahankan perilaku moral. Ketiga,

pembelajaran karakter yang didukung teknologi menunjukkan bahwa media digital meningkatkan keterlibatan moral ketika dipandu oleh manajemen etis. Secara keseluruhan, pendidikan karakter lebih efektif bila diimplementasikan secara sistemik di tingkat manajerial. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan memposisikan kembali kerangka kerja Lickona sebagai paradigma berorientasi manajemen untuk pendidikan yang berpusat pada manusia. Penelitian di masa depan harus memperluas validasi empiris dan mengeksplorasi model pendidikan karakter yang didukung AI.

Kata Kunci: *Pendidikan, Karakter, Thomas Lickona, Manajemen Pendidikan, Budaya Sekolah*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has profoundly transformed adolescents' social interactions and moral development, creating new ethical challenges in education. In the Society 5.0 era, digital systems and artificial intelligence increasingly mediate learning, communication, and identity formation, making character education a critical societal concern. International evidence indicates that cyberbullying affects a substantial proportion of adolescents globally, reaching up to 42.8% in some contexts and contributing to psychological distress, emotional instability, and social withdrawal (Gohal et al., 2023; Muhammed & Samak, 2025). A large-scale meta-analysis across 17 countries further confirms a strong positive relationship between cyberbullying victimisation and depression among youth (Polanin et al., 2022; Tran et al., 2023). These findings suggest that digital environments, while expanding educational access, simultaneously accelerate moral risks such as declining empathy and self-control. Consequently, societies face an urgent need to ensure that educational systems can balance technological advancement with moral development, positioning character education as a foundational element of sustainable social progress.

Despite the growing urgency of character education in digital societies, education systems continue to experience a widening gap between technological innovation and moral formation. The rapid shift toward online and technology-mediated learning has intensified ethical problems, including academic dishonesty and weakened accountability. Recent global evidence demonstrates a significant increase in self-reported cheating during online examinations compared to pre-pandemic face-to-face assessments (Newton & Essex, 2024; Yazici et al., 2023). These patterns reveal that moral challenges in digital learning are not incidental but structural, emerging from environments that prioritise efficiency and flexibility over ethical reflection. Traditional character education models, which rely on direct interaction and moral exemplification, struggle to address digitally mediated misconduct. As a result, character education often becomes fragmented or implicit within schools' digital agendas. This situation highlights a systemic problem: educational institutions are advancing technologically faster than they can manage students' moral development, necessitating new, management-oriented approaches.

Thomas Lickona's character education framework, grounded in moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, remains one of the most influential

models for ethical development in education. However, its application faces significant challenges in digitally mediated learning environments. Recent studies indicate that heavy reliance on online learning can reduce students' emotional engagement and social connectedness, particularly when digital literacy and self-efficacy are low (Getenet et al, 2024; Wu, 2023). Other research further shows that students immersed in digital environments may exhibit weakened moral reflection and limited emotional involvement when learning experiences lack intentional human-centred Design (Papadopoulou et al., 2024; Wang & Tang, 2023). These findings reveal a growing tension between Lickona's relational and reflective assumptions and the realities of AI-mediated learning in the Society 5.0 era. While Lickona's framework remains conceptually relevant, its effectiveness increasingly depends on the extent to which it is supported by educational management structures that foster moral interaction and reflection.

Educational management has emerged as a critical factor in sustaining character education amid digital transformation. International studies show that digital leadership, characterisedcharacterised by strategic vision, coordinated technology integration, and a supportive organisational culture, significantly strengthens schools' ability to maintain pedagogical coherence and moral development during periods of change (Reis-andersson, 2024). Evidence also suggests that leadership practices shape how digital tools are institutionalised, underscoring the need to manage character education systematically rather than leave it to individual classrooms (Anastasiou, 2025; Raptis et al., 2024). Recent reviews emphasise that principals in the digital era must integrate transformational, distributed, and human-centred leadership approaches to align technological innovation with ethical and values-based educational goals (Kamal et al., 2025; Karakose et al., 2024). These studies collectively affirm the importance of educational management but tend to focus more on leadership effectiveness than on explicit character education frameworks.

Although character education and digital leadership have been widely examined, existing research remains fragmented across levels and disciplines. Classroom-focused studies highlight the role of digital-supported instruction in shaping students' moral engagement (Getenet et al., 2024), while institutional research emphasises leadership and school culture in character formation (Schmitz et al., 2023). Other recent studies address digital ethical challenges such as algorithmic bias and cyber-ethics without explicitly linking them to established moral education models (Kamali et al., 2024). Systematic reviews in digital and sustainable education further prioritise technology adoption and governance, offering a limited synthesis of the integration of moral character within educational management (García-Hernández et al., 2023; Ramírez-Correa et al., 2025). As a result, no study comprehensively explains how Lickona's moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action are operationalised within educational management aligned with the Society 5.0 vision.

Recent scholarship increasingly recognises that effective character education in digital societies requires structurally integrated and value-based management systems. Studies demonstrate that schools with strategic, ethics-oriented management are better equipped to guide students through digital risks

such as harmful content, cyber aggression, and moral disengagement (Varela et al., 2022). Research further underscores the importance of moral reflection in addressing emerging digital dilemmas, such as algorithmic manipulation and misinformation, which demand strong ethical judgment (Kamali et al., 2024). Evidence also indicates that principals who adopt strategic digital leadership can strengthen character education, digital responsibility, and discipline within school environments (Lukmantoro et al., 2024). Additionally, meta-academic reviews identify digital leadership as a key paradigm that integrates technological, organisational, and ethical competencies in 21st-century education (Schmitz et al., 2023). These findings position educational management as the foundation for integrating character values with digital-age competencies.

Based on the identified gaps, this study addresses the problem of how Thomas Lickona's character education framework can be systematically integrated into educational management systems adapted to the Society 5.0 context. The study argues that character degradation in digital environments is fundamentally a managerial issue rather than solely a pedagogical concern. Character education must be embedded within institutional policies, leadership practices, and organisational culture to ensure sustainability. Educational management thus becomes the mechanism through which moral knowing is translated into strategic planning, moral feeling into school climate, and moral action into institutional practice. This argument reframes character education as an organisational responsibility that aligns humanistic values with technological advancement.

This study offers theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to educational research. Theoretically, it reconceptualises Lickona's character education framework within the domain of digital-era educational management. Methodologically, it provides a systematic synthesis of international literature using a transparent and rigorous review approach. In practice, the study proposes a value-based management perspective that can inform school leaders and policymakers in embedding character education into curricula, leadership, and organisational systems aligned with the Society 5.0 vision. By positioning educational management as the foundation for integrating moral values and digital competencies, this research responds to contemporary ethical challenges in education. It supports the development of morally resilient learners.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) Design guided by the PRISMA 2020 protocol to synthesise scholarly evidence on Thomas Lickona's character education and its integration within educational management in the Society 5.0 era. The SLR approach was selected because it enables a transparent, systematic, and reproducible synthesis of conceptual and empirical studies, which is particularly appropriate for theory development and integrative analysis across disciplines (Hilmi et al., 2023; Page et al., 2021). Compared to narrative reviews, SLR minimises selection bias through explicit search strategies, screening criteria, and quality appraisal procedures, thereby strengthening methodological rigour (Chigbu et al., 2023). The PRISMA

framework was adopted to ensure clarity in the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies, enhancing transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021). This Design is well-suited to the study's objective of reinterpreting Lickona's moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within educational management systems responding to digital transformation and Society 5.0 demands.

Data collection was conducted through a comprehensive search of six reputable academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, DOAJ, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar, chosen for their extensive coverage and scholarly credibility in education and social sciences (Savage & Olejniczak, 2022). Boolean search strings were applied, including "Thomas Lickona" AND "character education" AND "educational management" and "character education" AND "Society 5.0" AND "school leadership", to capture relevant literature across pedagogical and managerial perspectives. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, ensuring alignment with recent developments in digital education and Society 5.0 discourse. Following the PRISMA procedure, 214 records were identified, 82 articles were screened, 42 studies were assessed for eligibility, and 10 articles met the inclusion criteria for final synthesis. Inclusion criteria focused on relevance, scholarly rigour, and conceptual alignment, while exclusion criteria eliminated duplicates, non-academic sources, and studies that lacked a substantive discussion of character education or educational management (Page et al., 2021).

Data analysis followed a qualitative thematic synthesis approach to integrate findings across selected studies. Data extraction was conducted using a structured extraction matrix that captured bibliographic information, research Design, key findings, educational management dimensions, interpretations of character education, and relevance to Society 5.0. The coding process employed a hybrid deductive–inductive strategy, as recommended in qualitative evidence synthesis (Proudfoot, 2023). Deductive coding was guided by Thomas Lickona's three character education pillars —moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—which served as the primary analytical framework. Inductive coding was used to identify emerging themes in digital leadership, value-based management, and institutional governance. The analytical process was guided by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model, encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, enabling iterative comparison and thematic integration across studies (Zhang & Ramos, 2023).

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the qualitative synthesis, multiple validation strategies were applied. First, methodological quality appraisal was conducted using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) to assess credibility, relevance, and methodological consistency across studies (Tang et al., 2025). Second, theoretical triangulation was employed by comparing findings across different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, strengthening interpretive depth (Morgan, 2024). Third, an audit trail was maintained to document analytical decisions throughout the review process, enhancing transparency and

dependability (Ahmed, 2024). Finally, peer debriefing was used to refine coding interpretations and validate thematic conclusions, reducing subjective bias and reinforcing confirmability. These procedures collectively enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study's findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
The findings of this systematic literature review reveal three dominant patterns in the integration of Thomas Lickona's character education within educational management in the Society 5.0 era: curriculum-based character integration, character formation through school culture, and technology-supported character education. Across the reviewed studies, character education is consistently conceptualized as an integrated process encompassing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, rather than as a standalone instructional component. However, the distribution of research emphasis shows a clear imbalance, with most studies prioritizing technology-mediated character formation. At the same time, fewer address school culture and even fewer examine curriculum-embedded approaches at the planning level. This trend indicates a shift in scholarly attention toward digital adaptation and innovation in response to Society 5.0, often at the expense of structural curriculum Design. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that effective character education emerges when technological tools, cultural routines, and curricular planning are aligned within a coherent management framework. Collectively, these results underscore the need for comprehensive integration across curriculum, school culture, and digital systems to ensure that character education remains systematic, sustainable, and aligned with contemporary educational management demands.

Character Integration in Curriculum
Curriculum-based character integration refers to the inclusion of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within learning materials, instructional Design, and classroom activities. In this study, curriculum integration is identified when character values are explicitly incorporated into lesson structures, learning methods, or content sequencing. Integration is considered adequate when these values are not only written in curriculum documents but also translated into clear behavioural targets that students are expected to demonstrate.

One of the reviewed studies reported that curriculum implementation places character values within structured learning stages, such as inserting honesty, responsibility, and discipline into daily lesson routines. The curriculum documents examined in the article show that these values are not only slogans but also measurable learning outcomes, indicating that character formation is deliberately planned and embedded in classroom practice. This suggests that character development is framed as part of academic mastery rather than as a separate or additional component.

Another article shows that teachers intentionally design learning activities where students demonstrate moral actions through group tasks, peer collaboration, and reflective assignments. This indicates that curriculum integration is not limited to cognitive elements but includes experience-based formation, allowing students to practice values directly during learning sessions. The learning design encourages students to internalise values through repeated practice and meaningful interaction within classroom activities.

Across the reviewed studies, curriculum integration consistently emphasises explicit value placement and active student involvement. The pattern that emerges is that curriculum-based character education works best when moral values are operationalised through structured objectives and consistent practice in class activities. Overall, the curriculum-oriented approach appears most effective when supported by precise planning, teacher commitment, and alignment between learning goals and character expectations.

Character Formation Through School Culture

School culture, as a character-formation approach, refers to the habits, routines, social interactions, and institutional norms that shape students' moral behaviour. In this study, school culture is identified when character development occurs through daily practices outside formal instruction. This includes both visible routines and subtle behavioural cues that, together, shape the school's moral atmosphere.

One article highlights that teacher modelling plays a significant role in habituating student character. Teachers consistently demonstrate politeness, punctuality, and responsibility, which then shape student behaviour through imitation. This pattern suggests that moral feeling and action develop strongly through repetitive exposure to exemplary behaviour. Students naturally observe and absorb these behaviours, indicating that modelling functions as an implicit yet powerful learning mechanism.

Another study reports that schools reinforce character through disciplinary routines and collective activities, such as morning assemblies, cleanliness programs, and spiritual practices. These routines create a stable moral environment where students learn discipline and cooperation through shared experiences rather than solely through instructional explanation. Such routines function as a continuous reinforcement system that encourages students to behave consistently with school expectations.

Across the reviewed studies, the cultural approach strengthens character by providing continuous behavioural models and structured routines. The pattern shows that school culture influences students more deeply when routines are consistent and supported by adult modelling. Overall, school culture acts as a living system in which students internalise values through continuous participation, observation, and reinforcement.

Technology-Based Character Education in the Society 5.0 Era

Technology-based character education refers to the use of digital tools, media, and platforms to strengthen moral learning. This includes interactive videos, digital assignments, mobile applications, and technology-assisted

supervision that support the development of moral knowing, feeling, and action. In this context, technology is not only a learning aid but also an environment that shapes how students interact, respond to, and internalise moral values in digitally mediated settings.

One study reports that interactive video media increases student engagement and helps students connect moral values with real-life contexts. Digital content enables students to visualise the consequences of actions, enhancing their understanding and emotional connection to character values. This suggests that digital media can stimulate emotional involvement more effectively than text-based instruction, making moral decision-making more concrete and relatable for learners.

Another article shows that technology supports the creation of blended-learning ecosystems where character tasks can be monitored both in class and at home. Through digital platforms, teachers track the consistency of student behaviour, making character evaluation more continuous and transparent. Such systems encourage students to demonstrate consistent behaviour across different learning environments, reducing the gap between classroom expectations and everyday conduct.

Across the reviewed articles, technology contributes to character formation by enhancing visualisation, monitoring, and accessibility of moral learning. The pattern suggests that digital integration works best when technology is used not merely for content delivery but also to strengthen reflection and behavioural consistency. Overall, the use of educational technology creates a more interactive, accountable, and personalised pathway for character formation, especially when aligned with clear behavioural expectations and responsive teacher guidance.

Table: 1 Results of Journal Studies Discussing Thomas Lickona's Character Education from the Perspective of Educational Management

No	Researchers & Year	Title	Method	Research Findings
1	Hikmasari, Susanto, & Syam (2021)	"The Concept of Character Education from the Perspective of Thomas Lickona and Ki Hajar Dewantara"	Qualitative research with a historical–philosophical approach	The study revealed that both Lickona and Dewantara view character education as the moral foundation of individual formation. They emphasize that instilling character values must extend beyond formal institutions to involve families, communities, and workplaces. Character is formed through continuous interaction between individuals and their environments, thus requiring collaboration among all social groups. Character development,

No	Researchers & Year	Title	Method	Research Findings
				therefore, is not merely part of education but its ultimate goal, making it a shared movement among schools, families, and communities.
2	Munawarsyah, Fakhrurridha, & Muqowim (2024)	"Character Education for Teenagers in the Era of Society 5.0: Thomas Lickona's Perspective"	Qualitative research with a literature review approach	The findings highlight that the Society 5.0 era demands ethical reinforcement so that technological advancement yields positive social impact. Lickona's three pillars—moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—must be applied integratively. Character education should therefore merge moral values with technology, engage all societal elements, and create a learning ecosystem that fosters ethical excellence.
3	Saiful, Yusliani, & Rosnidarwanti (2022)	"Implementation of Character Education: The Perspective of Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona at MIT Meunara Baro, Aceh Besar"	Descriptive qualitative research (library research)	The implementation of character education at MIT Meunara Baro integrates compassion, humility, honesty, trustworthiness, and moral commitment in daily teaching. Teachers act as role models, provide guidance, and create joyful learning environments. Spiritual development is reinforced through religious values, while Lickona's components—moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—are embedded in daily practice.
4	Zakaria (2002)	"Integration of Character Values through Pancasila Education Learning in the Society 5.0 Era at Elementary Schools"	Qualitative field research	The study found that integrating character values into Pancasila Education significantly shapes students' personalities, preparing them mentally and morally for modern challenges. Cognitive, affective, and conative aspects are taught through classroom learning, extracurriculars, and school interactions, creating a consistent moral culture.
5	Muhaimin et al. (2024)	"Implementation of Character Education	Qualitative field research	The research indicated that character education

No	Researchers & Year	Title	Method	Research Findings
		Values in the Society 5.0 Era at Madrasah Aliyah Yasrib Lapajung Watansoppeng"		planning is participatory, involving all educators. However, implementation gaps remain between design and practice, particularly in religiosity and empathy. Routine evaluations are conducted effectively to assess internalization of moral values in both class and daily behavior.
6	Hanifah & Syaiba (2020)	"Interactive Video Media Based on Character Education to Enhance Good Character Values as a Response to the Society 5.0 Era"	Qualitative research	Interactive video media significantly enhance engagement and moral learning. The videos integrate values like religiosity, honesty, discipline, and responsibility, making learning contextual and appealing. Such media effectively combine technology and humanity, addressing Society 5.0 challenges.
7	Qadimunnur et al. (2022)	"Lickona's Character Education Theory and Its Implementation in the Formation of Santri Character: A Case Study at Gontor Poso Campus"	Qualitative research	Character education at Gontor aligns closely with Lickona's three pillars. Implementation includes teacher modeling, habitual discipline, moral environment creation, and structured supervision. This approach fosters obedience, ethical behavior, time management, and modesty, ensuring that character is internalized through daily routines.
8	Mainuddin et al. (2023)	"Character Education Thoughts of Al-Ghazali, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Thomas Lickona"	Descriptive qualitative research (literature study)	The study found complementarity among Al-Ghazali, Lickona, and Kohlberg. Al-Ghazali emphasizes religious-ethical foundations; Lickona stresses universal moral values; and Kohlberg focuses on moral reasoning through ethical dilemmas. Together, they form a balanced and sustainable model of holistic character education.

No	Researchers & Year	Title	Method	Research Findings
9	Saiful (2021)	"Reconstruction of Child Education Based on Character in the Digital Era"	Qualitative library research	Character-based child education requires curriculum integration, collaboration among schools, families, and communities, and digital tools for relevance. The focus is on moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, with school culture reinforcing honesty, discipline, and cooperation through role modeling.
10	Luthfi et al. (2024)	"The Role of Character Education in Forming Student Characteristics in the 21st Century"	Qualitative literature study	The study emphasizes that character education is vital for developing morally strong and intellectually capable youth. Amid rapid technological change, character education strengthens ethical awareness and supports Indonesia's national Character Education Strengthening Program (PPK).

Table 1, summarising the reviewed articles, shows a clear pattern of emphasis on technology-supported character formation, with the most significant proportion of studies focusing on how digital tools, media, and online learning environments strengthen moral development. A smaller number of studies address school culture and daily routines as the basis for character formation, while only a limited portion examines curriculum-embedded approaches. This distribution indicates that current research attention is shifting toward digital approaches in character education, particularly within learning ecosystems aligned with Society 5.0. At the same time, the low representation of curriculum-based studies suggests that character integration at the planning stage remains underdeveloped. Overall, the table shows that character education research increasingly prioritizes technological adaptation over structural curriculum Design, revealing an imbalance that shapes current findings and reinforces the need for comprehensive integration across educational components.

Discussion

The findings of this systematic literature review reinforce and extend existing international scholarship that positions character education as a critical response to the moral challenges intensified by digital transformation in the Society 5.0 era. Consistent with global studies highlighting increased risks of cyberbullying, digital misconduct, and reduced socio-emotional engagement, the

reviewed articles confirm that character formation cannot rely solely on classroom instruction but must be managed institutionally (Misra et al., 2024; Sahin-Ilkorkor & Brubaker, 2025). Prior research has warned that digitally mediated learning environments may weaken moral reasoning when schools lack intentional ethical guidance and leadership structures (Huang et al., 2025; Li, 2025). The present findings align with this view by demonstrating that Lickona's pillars of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action are most effective when embedded in organizational policies, leadership decisions, and school-wide programs. However, this review advances the literature by emphasizing that character education in Society 5.0 should be explicitly framed as a managerial foundation rather than merely a pedagogical supplement, thereby highlighting a structural dimension often underemphasized in prior studies.

In relation to curriculum integration, the findings partially align with the existing literature, which recognises curriculum Design as a key mechanism for developing moral reasoning and social awareness through reflective and collaborative learning activities (Winterbottom & Schmidt, 2022; Zhou et al., 2025). The reviewed studies confirm that when character values are explicitly embedded in learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment criteria, students are more likely to internalise moral expectations. However, this review also reveals a divergence from the broader literature: while curriculum-based character education is widely acknowledged as important, it remains less empirically grounded than technology-oriented approaches. This imbalance suggests that contemporary research tends to prioritise innovation and digital adaptation over structural curriculum planning. The findings, therefore, challenge the assumption that technological integration alone is sufficient, underscoring the need for greater alignment among curriculum planning, school culture, and management systems to reinforce character values across learning contexts consistently.

The role of school culture identified in this review strongly corroborates international research emphasising the importance of ethical climate, habitual routines, and adult modelling in shaping students' moral behaviour. Studies on school leadership during periods of digital transition have shown that schools with strong ethical cultures and shared values provide more stable moral environments for students (Mphatsoane-sesoane, 2025; Reis-Andersson, 2024). The reviewed articles support this perspective by demonstrating that character formation is significantly strengthened through daily routines, collective practices, and consistent teacher behaviour, which foster moral feeling and moral action more effectively than isolated instructional interventions. Compared to some technology-centred studies that focus primarily on tools and platforms, these findings highlight that character education is deeply relational and experiential. This reinforces the argument that school culture functions as a living system in which values are enacted continuously, suggesting that digital innovation must be accompanied by cultural coherence to avoid moral fragmentation.

Regarding the use of digital technology, the findings are consistent with international evidence that digital media can enhance moral engagement when designed intentionally and aligned with ethical goals. Prior studies have demonstrated that interactive videos, simulations, and reflective digital tasks can strengthen students' emotional connection to moral dilemmas by making abstract values more concrete and relatable (Mittmann et al., 2022; Ntumi et al., 2024). The reviewed studies confirm these benefits, particularly in terms of visualisation, engagement, and behavioural monitoring across learning environments. At the same time, this review echoes critical perspectives in the literature that caution against unregulated digitalisation. Research on AI ethics in education emphasises that without value-based governance, digital technologies may foster moral disengagement and weaken ethical sensitivity (Ghimire & Edwards, 2024; Nouri et al., 2025). The present findings, therefore, align with a growing consensus that technology should serve as a moral amplifier rather than a neutral or purely technical instrument, reinforcing the necessity of character-oriented digital management.

Taken together, these findings carry important theoretical and practical implications for educational management in the Society 5.0 era. Theoretically, this review contributes to the literature by repositioning Thomas Lickona's character education framework within an educational management paradigm, demonstrating that moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action can be operationalised at the institutional level rather than confined to instructional practice. This extends existing character education theory by integrating it with leadership, governance, and organisational culture in digital contexts. In practice, the findings suggest that school leaders and policymakers should Design management systems that align curriculum, school culture, digital technology, leadership development, and community collaboration around a coherent character vision. Character education thus emerges not as an additional program, but as a strategic foundation that guides ethical decision-making, digital innovation, and stakeholder collaboration. By embedding character values into educational management, schools can better prepare students to navigate technological advancement with responsibility, empathy, and moral resilience.

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that Thomas Lickona's pillars of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action remain a foundational framework for addressing contemporary moral challenges in the Society 5.0 era. The most important lesson from the synthesis of 10 peer-reviewed studies is that character education achieves its most significant impact when it is managed holistically rather than implemented sporadically. Embedding character values within curriculum planning, reinforcing them through a value-driven school culture, and extending them into technology-mediated learning environments enables schools to respond more effectively to digital-era issues such as cyberbullying, academic dishonesty, and declining socio-emotional engagement. These findings highlight that character education functions not merely as moral instruction but as a stabilising ethical system that guides student behaviour across both physical and digital learning spaces.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes by reconceptualising Lickona's character education framework as a comprehensive educational management paradigm rather than a classroom-centred pedagogical model. By integrating leadership practices, organisational culture, and digital governance into the operationalisation of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, this review offers a theoretical reorientation that remains underrepresented in the existing literature. Nevertheless, the study is limited by the small number of eligible articles, the dominance of technology-oriented themes over curriculum and cultural dimensions, and the qualitative nature of thematic synthesis, which may restrict the generalizability of the conclusions. Future research is therefore encouraged to explore character-value integration within the Merdeka Curriculum, to develop empirical, quantitative models for AI-supported moral learning, and to investigate how digital leadership practices can more effectively institutionalise Lickona's pillars within whole-school management systems.

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