

Character Education and Its Contribution to Community Development

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research is to examine the strategic role of character education in the process of developing a sustainable and civilized society. Character strengthening is seen as both a moral foundation and a social instrument that fosters collective awareness and citizen participation in building an inclusive civilization. The research method uses a library research approach, with a literature selection process based on inclusion criteria. This article analyzes character education policies in Indonesia, their relationship to local wisdom values, and relevant integration models in the context of a pluralistic society. The results of the study indicate that character strengthening is effective when supported by adaptive public policies, persuasive communication strategies based on wisdom and good intentions, and collaboration between educational institutions, the government, and local communities. Character education is not merely a cognitive process but also a social transformation towards a society with morals, empowerment, and justice.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a strategic plan for sustainable community development efforts (Rozi & Badriyah, 2025). In the context of social change and the challenges of the digital era, the function of character education extends beyond the realm of schools; it serves as an instrument for shaping social norms, increasing social capital, and fostering the collective capacity of citizens to respond to public problems such as the erosion of shared values, increasing individualism, and crises of trust between groups (Prasetyo and Purwoto, 2025).

However, the implementation of character education strengthening at the community level still faces several obstacles: practices that are not yet systemically integrated across institutions (schools, families, and community organizations), limited adaptation of approaches to local contexts, and digital literacy challenges that influence the value formation of the younger generation (Arifin & Agoro, 2025). This situation highlights the need for conceptual studies and evidence synthesis linking character education programs with community development outcomes—a need appropriately addressed through library research (Claudia Purba and Putra Kasea Sinaga, 2024).

Local wisdom has emerged as a key asset in concretizing character strengthening efforts at the community level. Several recent studies confirm that local values (e.g., mutual cooperation, politeness, social responsibility) not only enrich character education content but also increase the relevance of interventions to local norms and practices, thus facilitating the adoption and sustainability of empowerment programs. Therefore, community development through character

education must combine top-down (policy, curriculum) and bottom-up (local wisdom, community initiatives) approaches (Lutfi, 2019).

Furthermore, digital transformation creates both opportunities and threats to collective character formation (Khusnuridlo & Fauzi, 2024). Weak digital literacy facilitates the spread of content that erodes ethical values; conversely, strong literacy enables the use of technology as a medium for internalizing values—for example, public value campaigns, distance learning containing character modules, and citizen participation platforms. Recent studies indicate that integrating character education with digital literacy is a crucial strategy for maintaining the quality of social interactions in the era of Society 5.0 (Sugiarto and Farid, 2023).

Best practices from empowerment studies indicate that strengthening character education is effective when designed with the principle of pentahelix collaboration (government, academia, business actors, communities, and the media), based on local evidence, and equipped with responsive monitoring mechanisms. A systematic literature review is needed to formulate a conceptual model that connects these components—a model that can then serve as a reference for policy formulation, program design, and evaluation of character-based community development interventions (Sekolah, 2025).

Building on this background, this article aims to develop a conceptual and empirical synthesis of how strengthening character education can be an effective strategy for community development, identifying key factors, implementation barriers, and recommendations for context-sensitive program design. A comprehensive literature analysis (Sinta journals, national/international indexes, and relevant textbooks) is expected to yield theoretical and practical contributions for academics, policymakers, and community empowerment practitioners.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. This approach was selected because the study focuses on examining and understanding various concepts, ideas, and findings related to the research topic through existing scholarly literature. Library research enables the researcher to collect, examine, and synthesize relevant information from various written sources to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation.

The data sources in this study consist of academic books, scholarly articles, nationally accredited Sinta-indexed journals, reputable international journals indexed by Scopus, conference proceedings, and other relevant sources closely related to the research topic. The collected literature was selected based on its relevance to the subject of the study. After the relevant data and sources were obtained, the researcher reviewed, organized, and analyzed the information systematically in accordance with the objectives of the research.

To obtain accurate and reliable findings, the data were analyzed using content analysis. This technique was employed to systematically examine and interpret the content of the selected literature. Through content analysis, the researcher identified important concepts, patterns, and information relevant to the research topic and subsequently synthesized the findings to formulate conclusions based on the results of the literature analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character Education

Character education refers to the systematic process of developing moral, ethical, and behavioral values expected of individuals to become responsible and ethical members of society. Recent studies emphasize that character education extends beyond formal instruction in schools to encompass daily interactions between community members, the family environment, and other social

institutions (Maisaroh and Untari, 2024). According to Lickona (Tsoraya et al., 2023), character education is "the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values." Simply put, character education can be defined as the positive efforts of teachers, which influence the character of the students they teach.

Surah Al Imran, verse 104, embodies the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil, a call to build a society with character. Character education is essentially the process of instilling the values of ma'ruf (social goodness) and avoiding munkar (moral corruption). This verse also serves as the basis for participatory education, where society plays an active role in building collective morality.

Character education has become a pillar of Indonesian education policy in recent years, particularly through the Character Education Strengthening Movement (PPK) developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The PPK policy emphasizes that schools are not only responsible for transferring knowledge but also for shaping the moral and social values that underlie the behavior of good citizens (Harizi et al., 2025). Schools, as formal institutions, are the primary venue for this policy, but their role extends beyond schools—families, communities, and non-formal institutions are also involved as part of the character education ecosystem (Erlande, 2024). More broadly, character education is expected to become a school culture, namely (Putri et al., 2023)

a. Formation and development of potential. Character education serves to shape and develop the potential of individuals or Indonesian citizens to think well and behave well in accordance with the Pancasila philosophy of life.

b. Improvement and strengthening. Character education serves to improve the character of individuals or Indonesian citizens who have negative traits and strengthens the role of families, educational institutions, communities, and the government to participate and be responsible in developing human potential towards a nation with character, progress, independence, and prosperity.

c. Filtering. National character education functions to categorize the nation's own cultural values and filter the positive cultural values of other nations to shape the character of Indonesian citizens, thus becoming a dignified nation. Furthermore, character education certainly requires content that will become the main curriculum content to develop the personality, attitudes, and actions of individuals, both within themselves and when interacting with others in society, and even within the nation.

Overall, character education as a policy shows great potential in shaping an ethical, tolerant, and competitive society. However, its effectiveness depends largely on how the policy is designed to be responsive to the local context and supported by all stakeholders.

Community Development

Community development can be seen as a process in which character education plays a crucial role as a social foundation that strengthens solidarity, trust, and collective capacity to bring about positive change. Character education not only shapes individuals but also strengthens the social capital of the community, which supports togetherness and a quality of life together.

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

Call (humans) to the path of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching and debate them in a better way. Indeed, your Lord is He who knows best who has gone astray from His path and He (also) knows best who has been guided.

This verse emphasizes the importance of an educational and persuasive approach in building community character. Community development should not be coercive or coercive, but rather carried out through humanistic education, wisdom, and exemplary behavior.

In the context of community development, QS. An-Nahl: 125 can be understood as a methodological guideline for values-based social development. Character development is inseparable from a participatory and ethical approach, where communities are empowered through education that respects their local wisdom, beliefs, and experiences. In modern character education, the values contained in this verse can be identified as follows: (1) The value of wisdom, namely the ability to be reflective, empathetic, and wise in decision-making; (2) The value of humanism and polite communication, namely how to convey ideas or values without demeaning others; (3) The value of participation and tolerance, namely opening space for dialogue and respect for social and cultural diversity. Thus, QS. An-Nahl (16): 125 can also serve as a philosophical foundation for strengthening character education and community development.

Furthermore, modern community development programs increasingly incorporate character education into concrete activities such as community projects, social activities, and community service. For example, the study Strengthening Students' Character through the Community Service Program (Sekolah Kerja Nyata, SKN) concluded that the SKN program was able to strengthen students' character in addition to providing social benefits to the local community. Values such as responsibility, empathy, and community care emerged clearly in participant reports (Rahmelia et al., 2025).

However, community development through character education must also consider economic, cultural, and institutional dimensions to ensure sustainable results. For example, communities with limited economic opportunities may find it difficult to allocate time and resources to character activities if basic needs are not met. Similarly, if local institutions (schools, community organizations, traditional institutions) lack capacity, or if there is no local participatory culture, character education may not be internalized in community practice.

The character values instilled through character education help communities face contemporary challenges such as social fragmentation, intergenerational value conflicts, and globalization, which can lead to value disorientation. With strong character, communities become more resistant to negative external influences and are able to maintain their collective identity.

Local Value Integration Model

The integration of local values into character education is often presented as an effective strategy for bridging cultural identity, learning relevance, and value sustainability. Well-configured local values can enrich character education, making it practical and contextual rather than normative and abstract (Andini and Sirozi, 2024).

Furthermore, there are local value integration models that provide symbolic sources and norms that have been internalized by the community so that character values feel familiar (Hulaimi et al., 2025). These include: (a) Models of direct integration into the formal curriculum and learning, for example through Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Social Studies (IPS), or local subjects that incorporate local cultural values. Examples illustrate how teachers use folklore and customary law in learning methods to instill civic character in students (Sastra Atmaja, 2024). (b) A habituation and role model learning model within the school and community environment, where everyday practices in schools and communities (e.g., local rituals, mutual cooperation traditions, traditional activities) are incorporated into the character education process (Devina et al., 2023). (c) An adaptive and inclusive curriculum model, which adapts teaching materials, methods, and media to reflect the local cultural conditions and values of the community. The local value integration model must consider that these values are not static, require a process of dialogue and reinterpretation to remain relevant to social dynamics, and are free from discriminatory elements or internal conflict. Furthermore, an

effective model typically involves the participation of the community, traditional leaders, and parents as guardians and interpreters of local values.

Implementation Challenges and Strategies

Implementation Challenges

The implementation of character education strengthening within a community development framework faces multifaceted structural, cultural, and technical obstacles. First, educator capacity remains a major obstacle. Many field studies show that teachers often receive normative or descriptive training, but minimal training in affective pedagogical practices, such as habituation, role modeling, and contextualized character assessment within the local culture. As a result, the integration of character values into daily learning activities is inconsistent and fragmented (Fitriani, 2022). Second, disparities in resources and infrastructure hinder equitable implementation. Schools and communities in underdeveloped or remote areas often lack teaching modules, facilities for character activities (activity spaces, libraries, internet access for value-rich digital materials), and financial support for sustainable community empowerment programs (Erni Erni et al., 2025). Third, there is a value discrepancy between schools and the social environment. Values introduced through official programs may conflict or lack a "connection" with household practices, community norms, or local wisdom. This mismatch leads to resistance or merely instrumental compliance without internalization of the values (Salsa Nurhabibah, Herlini Puspika Sari, and Siti Fatimah, 2025). Fourth, curricular pressures and an orientation toward academic outcomes marginalize character education. Many principals and teachers still prioritize cognitive achievement and standardized achievement indicators—measured quantitatively—reducing the time allocated for character activities (Sakti, Endraswara, and Rohman, 2024). Fifth, the influence of the digital environment and social media poses new challenges. Widespread access to unfiltered content, problematic role models, and disinformation influence value formation among adolescents; on the other hand, many educators are not yet trained to utilize technology as a means of strengthening character (Amalia et al., 2024). Sixth, limited monitoring and evaluation mechanisms—including the lack of comprehensive indicators for assessing affective and behavioral aspects over the long term—make it difficult for decision-makers to assess the effectiveness of interventions and optimize strategies at the local or regional level (Wijayanto et al., 2024).

Implementation Strategy

Facing the aforementioned challenges, recent literature recommends a holistic, multi-sectoral, and contextual strategic approach, namely:

The first strategy is developing the professional capacity of educators through ongoing, practical training programs, character building training, affective learning methods, behavioral assessment techniques, and modules integrating local values into daily learning practices. Internship/mentoring models between teachers and learning communities between schools have been shown to increase the adoption of good practices (Nufa and Istichomahwati, 2025). Second, strengthening collaboration between schools, families, traditional leaders, and community organizations (a pentahelix model at the local level) is crucial. A participatory approach involving local leaders in formulating character education materials and activities increases the legitimacy and acceptability of the program, and minimizes value dissonance between schools and the community (Lutfi, 2019). Third, curriculum adaptation and flexibility in local policies. The formal curriculum needs to allow for local content and embedded practices, and local governments and schools need to develop operational guidelines that enable teachers to develop modules based on local wisdom without violating national standards.

Case studies show that locally responsive curricula enhance program relevance and sustainability (Didik Iskandar, Encep Syaripudin, and Cucu Atikah, 2024). Fourth, selective use of technology—developing educational digital content that strengthens character (exemplary role models, interactive modules, and a platform for reporting on mutual cooperation practices) and improving digital literacy for students and teachers to reduce exposure to negative content. Technology also supports remote monitoring through character e-portfolios and family participation checklists (Wijayanto et al., 2024). Fifth, pro-inclusive resource allocation: policymakers must ensure the availability of dedicated village/school funds for character education and community empowerment programs, as well as incentive mechanisms for innovative good practices in disadvantaged areas. Sustainable funding is essential to prevent programs from relying on short-term projects (Hadi et al., 2025). Sixth, the development of a holistic monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system—using qualitative and quantitative indicators (e.g., behavioral observations, community change narratives, citizen participation indexes) accompanied by longitudinal studies so that evaluations capture changes in values and behavior over the medium to long term. An inclusive MEL system must also involve the community as observers and feedback providers (Saputri, Ardivanto, and Rofian, 2025).

Therefore, the strategy must be complemented by public value dissemination and a persuasive communication approach utilizing the principles of wisdom and good intentions, as exemplified in the Islamic educational tradition, so that character messages are disseminated through narratives that are convincing and relevant to the daily lives of the community. This is further emphasized in QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 263:

﴿قَوْلٌ مَعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذًى وَاللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يُخَيِّرُ مَا يَشَاءُ﴾ ٣٦٢

Kind words and forgiveness are better than charity accompanied by hurtful actions. Allah is the Most Rich, the Most Forgiving

This verse emphasizes the power of good communication in building social relationships. In the socialization of public values, messages conveyed with good language can have a greater social impact than mere material intervention. This supports the principle of subtle persuasion in good character communication. This communicative approach is also effective in fostering collective awareness so that values are not only taught but also lived out together.

CONCLUSION

Strengthening character education is a key foundation for sustainable community development. In Indonesia's diverse social context, character education functions not merely as a moral instrument but also as a cultural strategy to build collective awareness, strengthen social cohesion, and expand citizen participation in community development. Character education integrated into public policy, educational curriculum, and social practices can shape individuals with noble character who are empowered to manage changing times.

Furthermore, community development demands a collaboration between universal and local values. Local wisdom values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, tolerance, and social responsibility serve as social capital that strengthens the community-based character education process. The integration of these values not only creates social harmony but also strengthens the cultural identity that serves as the nation's resilience amidst the tide of globalization.

The strategy for implementing character building needs to be systematically designed through an educational, communicative, and participatory approach. Character education is not simply delivered through lectures or formal outreach; it needs to be campaigned as a public value campaign that is embedded in people's daily behavior. The principles of wisdom and good faith taught in QS. An-Nahl (16:125) and QS. Al-Baqarah (2:263) emphasize the importance of a persuasive, polite, and

role-model-oriented approach in building public moral awareness. Thus, character messages are not only taught but also lived out as part of a dignified culture of living.

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