

DIGITAL INTEGRATION IN VALUES EDUCATION: A PATHWAY TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Devi Melani

SDN 36 Bathin Solapan, Riau, Indonesia
devimelani205@gmail.com

Received October 13, 2024; Revised November 4, 2024; Accepted November 20, 2024; Published November 25, 2024

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how digital-based values education can be integrated effectively to support character development in elementary school students. Using a qualitative literature review method, the research analyzed 22 peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2025 from databases such as Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring strategies, challenges, and theoretical frameworks related to digital values education. Findings reveal that integration of digital tools—such as storytelling platforms, gamified learning apps, and digital project tools—enhances students' moral understanding, empathy, and responsibility when aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy and teacher modeling. Despite this potential, several systemic barriers persist, including lack of teacher training, insufficient digital infrastructure, limited character assessment tools, and weak collaboration between schools and families. The novelty of this study lies in its ecosystemic approach that connects school culture, teacher behavior, and student agency with participatory digital learning design. It also emphasizes the importance of localized digital content and student co-creation in fostering meaningful values internalization. Unlike prior studies that focus either on general character education or isolated use of technology, this research presents an integrated framework that links moral development with digital pedagogy in early-grade contexts. In conclusion, digital integration in values education is promising but requires systemic alignment, professional capacity building, and culturally adaptive strategies to ensure sustained character development in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital values education, character development, elementary school, ecosystemic approach, participatory learning

INTRODUCTION

Values education plays a pivotal role in shaping moral reasoning, empathy, discipline, and social responsibility in elementary-aged children. The early school years represent a critical period for character development, as children are highly receptive to moral modeling and habituation through school routines and teacher behavior (Djafri & Syakhrani, 2025). Contemporary frameworks, such as ecological systems theory and moral development theory, emphasize that values must be reinforced through consistent interaction between school, family, and community (Hadi, Nursyam, & Lestari, 2025). Effective values education requires integration into curricula, classroom practice, and broader school culture to ensure holistic internalization (Farida, Yulianti, & Rachmawati, 2024). However, character education remains fragmented in many systems, often sidelined by academic demands and lack of teacher preparedness (Yuliana, 2025). A

systemic, embedded approach helps bridge the gap between rhetoric and real behavioral outcomes among students (Junaidi & Rohmani, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to conceptualize values education not as an add-on, but as a structural core of elementary education (Ramadhani, Kusumawardani, & Alfian, 2024). Recent studies consistently support the need for contextualized and participatory methods to embed moral values effectively (Fitriah et al., 2025).

With the rise of digital technology, education systems face the dual challenge and opportunity of using digital tools to enhance values education in the 21st century. While concerns persist over the moral disruption caused by excessive digital media exposure, scholars argue that well-designed digital interventions can foster student engagement and reinforce character learning (Mahmuddah, Fitriah, & Setiawan, 2025). Digital platforms such as educational apps, storytelling media, and interactive games have been shown to support value internalization when aligned with pedagogical goals (Astawa, Sadri, & Temaja, 2025). This aligns with constructivist learning theory, where students actively construct moral understanding through guided digital experiences (Casmana, Widiyantje, & Fadillah, 2022). Furthermore, character development through digital values education must consider cultural context and inclusivity to ensure relevance and accessibility (Fitriah et al., 2025). Studies highlight that digital integration in values education promotes not only moral awareness but also digital literacy and ethical behavior online (Megawati & Prahmana, 2024). The combination of digital content with teacher facilitation creates a hybrid learning ecosystem for values education (Judijanto, Arifin, & Herawan, 2025). As schools adapt to global digital shifts, integrating values into digital instruction becomes a strategic imperative for character formation in primary education (Mahmuddah et al., 2025).

Despite the growing emphasis on values education in national education policies, its implementation in elementary schools remains inconsistent and superficial. Many programs exist only at the policy level, lacking structured practices for daily classroom activities and behavior modeling (Yuliani, Kurniawan, & Suryani, 2024). Teachers often feel unprepared or lack the training to embed values pedagogically, especially in digital contexts (Yuliana, 2025). Standardized testing and overloaded curricula further deprioritize character instruction, relegating values to occasional activities rather than integrated learning (Hadi, Nursyam, & Lestari, 2025). Moreover, most schools lack evaluation tools to measure changes in student behavior or moral growth effectively (Judijanto, Arifin, & Herawan, 2025). This results in a fragmented approach where values education becomes rhetorical rather than experiential (Junaidi & Rohmani, 2024). The absence of longitudinal assessments also weakens the ability to track the long-term impact of these interventions (Fitriah et al., 2025). Therefore, the disconnect between policy ambition and classroom realities remains a significant problem in values-based education (Hasibuan & Nasution, 2024). While digital technology offers transformative potential for values education, its integration into character-building practices in elementary schools presents significant challenges. Many educators are unfamiliar with how to use digital tools effectively for moral instruction, leading to underutilization or

misuse (Mahmuddah, Fitriah, & Setiawan, 2025). In some cases, digital media are seen more as distractions than as pedagogical assets, especially when unaccompanied by clear ethical frameworks (Sudirman, 2024). Additionally, there is limited research on how digital content can be culturally adapted to reflect local values while engaging young learners (Farida, Yulianti, & Rachmawati, 2024). Teacher training programs often do not address digital ethics or the use of character-based educational technology (Astawa, Sadri, & Temaja, 2025). Furthermore, most character education efforts remain teacher-centered, with limited student agency in designing or interacting with digital moral content (JIPEUradeun Study, 2025). This undermines the potential of participatory learning, which is key to value internalization (Junaidi & Rohmani, 2024). Finally, inconsistent infrastructure and unequal access to digital devices hinder equitable implementation across school systems (Megawati & Prahmana, 2024). Addressing these issues is essential to unlock the full promise of digital character education in primary education settings (Casma, Widiyanti, & Fadillah, 2022).

Although numerous studies affirm the importance of character education in primary schools, few have explored how digital media can be meaningfully integrated with culturally responsive values pedagogy. Most current research focuses either on general character outcomes or digital learning tools, rarely connecting the two in a coherent, context-specific framework (Fitriah et al., 2025). Additionally, many studies lack empirical depth, often offering theoretical or policy-based analyses without observing classroom realities (Mahmuddah, Fitriah, & Setiawan, 2025). There is limited exploration of how digital tools are perceived, adapted, and applied by teachers to reinforce moral behavior among young learners (Astawa, Sadri, & Temaja, 2025). Moreover, few frameworks examine student agency in using digital media for values internalization in local school environments (JIPEUradeun Study, 2025). While global initiatives push for digital transformation in education, values education remains on the periphery of such innovation (Sudirman, 2024). Therefore, research needs to address how character education can be simultaneously digital, cultural, and ecosystemic within elementary contexts (Megawati & Prahmana, 2024). This gap is critical to ensure that values education remains relevant in the era of rapid technological and social change (Casma, Widiyanti, & Fadillah, 2022).

This study presents novelty by combining digital integration with culturally responsive pedagogy in the context of values education for elementary students. Unlike previous studies that treat digital tools as isolated learning instruments, this research proposes a holistic framework where technology supports moral development through teacher facilitation and community relevance. It highlights how digital platforms—when localized and intentionally designed can enhance student engagement in character-building activities. Furthermore, this study introduces student agency into values education by promoting participatory content creation using digital tools. Most prior literature focuses on secondary education or abstract policy analysis, whereas this study centers on early-grade learners and classroom-level realities. It also advances the field by proposing an ecosystemic model involving school culture, teacher behavior, curriculum,

and digital media. This integrated lens fills a gap in both global and Indonesian scholarship on digital character education. Hence, the research offers a timely and innovative approach to moral learning in the digital era.

This study aims to explore how digital-based values education can be integrated effectively into elementary school settings to support character development. Specifically, it seeks to examine the strategies, challenges, and contextual conditions that influence the success of such integration in daily teaching practices. The research intends to analyze how teachers, students, and school systems utilize digital tools to reinforce moral values in ways that are meaningful and sustainable. Another objective is to identify how culturally relevant content and pedagogical approaches can align with digital formats to enhance internalization of character traits. Additionally, the study aspires to propose a conceptual framework that reflects an ecosystemic, student-centered, and technologically supported model for values education. This includes mapping out how digital platforms, school culture, and teacher modeling interact in shaping moral behavior. Finally, the research aims to fill empirical and theoretical gaps in the current literature by offering practical recommendations for educators and policymakers. These objectives will guide the overall structure and direction of the study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative literature review method to explore the integration of digital-based values education in character development among elementary students. The method involves systematically identifying, reviewing, and synthesizing peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, focusing on themes of values education, digital learning, and elementary school contexts (Aryasutha, 2025). Academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and ERIC were used with keyword combinations like “character education,” “values education,” “digital integration,” and “elementary school” (Syafika & Marwa, 2024). Articles were selected based on inclusion criteria such as educational relevance, methodological clarity, and publication recency. A total of 22 studies were analyzed through thematic coding to identify strategies, barriers, and theoretical insights (Hadi, Nursyam, & Lestari, 2025). The analysis involved both deductive and inductive coding to ensure comprehensive coverage of recurring patterns and unique contributions (Junaidi & Rohmani, 2024). The literature review method is suitable for capturing broad trends while also identifying critical gaps in digital values education. Ultimately, this approach supports the construction of a conceptual framework relevant to contemporary educational practice (Fitriah et al., 2025).

The data in this literature review were collected through a structured process involving multiple academic databases such as Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and DOAJ. The researcher applied Boolean keyword combinations including “character education,” “values education,” “digital integration,” and “elementary school,” filtered by publication years (2020–2025) and peer-reviewed status (Syafika & Marwa, 2024). Articles included in the final analysis were written in English or Bahasa Indonesia and directly focused on primary school contexts. From an initial pool of 45 studies, 22 articles

were selected based on relevance, methodological clarity, and thematic alignment (Aryasutha, 2025). Exclusion criteria included studies lacking educational context, duplicate findings, or those without full-text access. Zotero was used as a reference management tool to organize all articles and extract metadata such as title, author, year, research design, and main findings. The process ensured a diverse representation of geographic locations and educational systems. This structured approach enhanced both the credibility and depth of the review (Fitriah et al., 2025).

Data analysis in this study followed a thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying patterns and recurring concepts from the selected literature. Articles were first read thoroughly and coded deductively based on predetermined themes such as teacher roles, digital tools, values strategies, and contextual barriers (Junaidi & Rohmani, 2024). Inductive coding was also applied to uncover emerging themes that were not anticipated but relevant to the study's focus (Hadi, Nursyam, & Lestari, 2025). The studies were then grouped by theme, educational context, and geographical setting to identify cross-case patterns and contrasts. A thematic matrix was constructed to visually organize the relationships among concepts and their relevance to digital-based character education. Special attention was given to under-researched themes such as student agency and digital cultural adaptation (Fitriah et al., 2025). Thematic synthesis allowed the researcher to extract conceptual insights while mapping the gaps in current literature. This qualitative approach ensured that the review produced both analytical depth and actionable conclusions (Syafika & Marwa, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review revealed that the most effective strategy for values education in elementary schools is multi-channel integration, where values are embedded across curriculum, teacher modeling, digital tools, and school routines. Project-Based Learning (PjBL), digital storytelling, and gamified ethics apps were frequently cited as engaging students while reinforcing values like responsibility and empathy. The presence of culturally contextualized digital media such as folklore-based animations or character-building games enhanced student understanding and participation. Table 1 shows the most frequently applied strategies for digital values education, along with their reported outcomes and implementation levels.

Table 1. Common Digital-Based Strategies for Values Education

Strategy Type	No. of Studies	Target Grades	Reported Values	Example Tools
Digital storytelling	9	Grades 1–4	Empathy, honesty	Puppet Sukuraga, Animaker
Gamified character learning	7	Grades 3–6	Discipline, respect	Kahoot, Quizizz

Project-based with digital tools	10	Grades 4–6	Responsibility, teamwork	Canva, Padlet
Interactive moral dilemmas	5	Grades 5–6	Ethical thinking	Digital comics, role-play

Despite promising strategies, the analysis also identified persistent barriers that hinder the effective implementation of digital values education. Chief among these are lack of teacher readiness, insufficient digital infrastructure, and inconsistent parental involvement, especially in under-resourced schools. Teacher unfamiliarity with technology for moral instruction often leads to passive or superficial integration of digital tools. In addition, many schools lack appropriate assessment methods to track whether values are actually internalized by students. These findings are summarized in Table 2, which outlines the most common challenges and the corresponding recommendations proposed across studies.

Table 2. Challenges in Implementing Digital-Based Character EducationResponses				
Barrier Type	Frequency	Impacted Grades	Reported Effects	Recommendation
Lack of teacher training	11	Grades 1–6	Inconsistent values delivery	Continuous digital pedagogy PD
Weak infrastructure	9	Grades 3–6	Limited access to media tools	Improve school ICT facilities
Absence of assessment	7	Grades 4–6	No behavioral progress metrics	Develop formative evaluation
Low parental support	6	All grades	Values conflict at home	Strengthen school-home dialogue

The findings affirm that the successful implementation of digital-based values education in elementary schools depends not only on the availability of technological tools but also on their pedagogical alignment and contextual relevance. Strategies such as digital storytelling and project-based learning allow students to internalize values through active, relatable experiences, especially when integrated with culturally adapted content. However, the presence of systemic barriers like insufficient teacher training and limited infrastructure highlights the need for institutional readiness and holistic policy support (Mahmuddah, Fitriah, & Setiawan, 2025). These results suggest that the integration of technology into character education must be accompanied by professional development, inclusive planning, and value-oriented curriculum reform. The synergy between digital engagement and moral instruction can only be achieved when teachers are empowered, schools are digitally equipped, and families are included in the value reinforcement process. Without this ecosystemic alignment, the potential of digital media to support character development remains underutilized. Therefore, sustainable implementation

requires not just digital tools, but also shared vision and coordinated practices across educational stakeholders.

Recent studies highlight the importance of digital tools in fostering character development, particularly when integrated into project-based and thematic learning models. Astawa, Sadri, and Temaja (2025) demonstrated that digital storytelling can enhance empathy, honesty, and social awareness among young learners by immersing them in culturally relevant moral narratives. Similarly, Junaidi and Rohmani (2024) found that interactive platforms like Kahoot and Padlet increase engagement and allow students to reflect on ethical dilemmas collaboratively. These platforms not only promote digital literacy but also enable teachers to reinforce moral concepts in meaningful ways (Casmana, Widiantie, & Fadillah, 2022). Moreover, Megawati and Prahmana (2024) argued that digital tools should not merely be add-ons, but need to be embedded within pedagogical planning and classroom culture. When values education is integrated with media that reflect students' lived experiences, such as local folklore or animation, internalization becomes more natural and memorable (Farida, Yulianti, & Rachmawati, 2024). The effectiveness of these strategies relies heavily on teacher facilitation, indicating the need for structured digital pedagogy training (Judijanto, Arifin, & Herawan, 2025). Without intentional design and training, digital values education may remain superficial (Mahmuddah, Fitriah, & Setiawan, 2025).

Despite these innovations, multiple scholars underline systemic barriers that constrain the impact of digital values education. Yuliana (2025) emphasized that teacher confidence in using technology for character instruction remains low, especially in public schools with minimal infrastructure. Furthermore, the lack of standard assessment tools makes it difficult to monitor whether digital values learning translates into observable behavior (Hasibuan & Nasution, 2024). Hadi, Nursyam, and Lestari (2025) noted that values education is often inconsistently applied due to competing academic priorities, leading to a gap between policy rhetoric and classroom realities. To address these issues, Rif'an (2025) proposed a collaborative ecosystem model involving schools, families, and communities, stressing that values education must extend beyond the classroom. Studies by Fitriah et al. (2025) and Ramadhani, Kusumawardani, & Alfian (2024) support this, asserting that culturally adapted digital media and community involvement are critical for sustainability. Moreover, JIPEUradeun Study (2025) introduced participatory models where students co-create moral content, enhancing agency and ownership. These findings call for a shift from isolated digital interventions to holistic, ecosystemic character education frameworks (Sudirman, 2024).

This study introduces a novel ecosystemic framework that positions digital values education not merely as a technological enhancement, but as a comprehensive moral learning system involving teachers, students, school culture, families, and media. While previous studies often isolated character education within classroom settings or traditional curricula, this research emphasizes synergy between digital tools, culturally relevant content, and school-wide practices (Ramadhani, Kusumawardani, & Alfian, 2024). The integration of interactive apps, storytelling platforms, and digital project tools into values

education remains under-researched, particularly in Southeast Asian elementary contexts (Astawa, Sadri, & Temaja, 2025). Moreover, this study addresses the limited empirical focus on early-grade learners in digital ethics instruction most research prioritizes secondary or general populations (Fitriah et al., 2025). By doing so, this work responds to calls for values education that is technologically adaptive and culturally grounded (Farida, Yulianti, & Rachmawati, 2024). The study also fills the gap in understanding how teacher modeling and school rituals intersect with digital media to foster internalized character (Judijanto, Arifin, & Herawan, 2025). Its ecosystemic lens helps bridge theory and practice in digital moral pedagogy.

Another innovation of this research lies in its focus on student agency through participatory digital learning for values education a dimension still rarely explored in current literature. While most digital character interventions are teacher-centered, this study highlights the potential of involving students in co-creating digital moral content such as digital posters, storytelling videos, and online reflective journals (JIPEUradeun Study, 2025). Such participatory design fosters greater internalization of values and allows students to actively reflect on ethical behavior (Junaidi & Rohmani, 2024). Moreover, the research leverages recent technological tools like digital comics, Padlet, and Animaker in localized formats to make learning more engaging and culturally sensitive (Casmana, Widiantie, & Fadillah, 2022). Unlike prior frameworks that treat digital media as supplementary, this study centers it as a main conduit for value transmission and behavioral development (Megawati & Prahmana, 2024). The novelty also lies in the proposed alignment between digital moral instruction and the national character education framework an area seldom linked in practice (Hadi, Nursyam, & Lestari, 2025). Therefore, this study not only offers theoretical innovation but also proposes practical tools for participatory, student-centered digital values education in elementary settings.

This research holds global relevance as it provides a culturally adaptable and digitally responsive framework for values education, particularly suited for primary education in both developing and developed countries. In the face of globalization, digitalization, and rising moral complexity among children, schools worldwide need effective strategies to embed values meaningfully. By integrating local wisdom, participatory pedagogy, and digital tools, the study offers a flexible model that can be contextualized across diverse educational systems. Its emphasis on student agency, teacher modeling, and technological ethics reflects the universal challenge of balancing character formation with digital fluency. Moreover, the study aligns with global education goals, such as UNESCO's focus on inclusive, equitable, and values-driven learning. It can serve as a guide for policymakers and curriculum developers seeking to revitalize character education using 21st-century media. The findings are especially useful for multicultural societies striving to harmonize moral instruction with modern educational demands. Therefore, this research contributes not only to academic discourse but also to cross-border pedagogical innovation in digital moral learning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of digital-based values education in elementary schools is most effective when approached holistically combining digital tools, culturally relevant content, teacher modeling, and participatory learning. Strategies such as project-based learning, digital storytelling, and gamified moral instruction significantly enhance student engagement and support internalization of values like empathy, responsibility, and respect. However, implementation remains challenged by inadequate teacher training, limited infrastructure, and lack of standardized assessment tools. The review reveals that success depends on systemic readiness and alignment across stakeholders, including schools, families, and communities. Digital integration alone is insufficient without a pedagogical and cultural framework that supports character formation. The study also highlights the need to empower students as active agents in the learning process through co-creation and reflection. Thus, future efforts must prioritize both innovation and ecosystemic support to ensure sustainable moral development in the digital age.

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