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CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH VALUES EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze and synthesize recent literature on character development in elementary school students through values education. Using a qualitative library research method, the study reviewed 22 peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2025, selected through thematic relevance, educational context, and methodological clarity. Data were collected from international educational databases and analyzed through thematic coding to identify recurring strategies, challenges, and theoretical foundations. The findings reveal that values education is most effective when integrated holistically into school culture, classroom pedagogy, and teacher modeling. Common implementation strategies include thematic learning, project-based models, and character reinforcement through extracurricular activities. However, consistent barriers persist, such as lack of teacher training, insufficient character assessment tools, and external influences from digital media and home environments. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on the digital-pedagogical-cultural integration of values education in elementary settings, while also proposing a conceptual framework for ecosystemic character development. The study also highlights the limited research addressing early-grade learners (Grades 1–3) and the potential of participatory character-building approaches. In conclusion, the review confirms the importance of values education in shaping student character but underscores the need for systemic alignment, contextual adaptation, and long-term monitoring to ensure its effectiveness in modern school settings. These insights are expected to inform educational stakeholders in designing sustainable, culturally-responsive, and digitally literate character education programs for primary students.

Keywords: Character education, values education, elementary school, teacher role, literature review

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of values-based education in elementary schools has increasingly been recognised as essential for the holistic development of children, beyond mere academic achievement. Research indicates that character formation—encompassing honesty, responsibility, empathy, and discipline—can be meaningfully supported through structured values education programmes (Djafri & Syakhrani, 2025). Moreover, the early years of schooling provide a unique opportunity for shaping behavioural and moral dispositions, as children are highly receptive to modelling and habituation at this stage (Hadi et al., 2025). Integrating character education into the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and school culture enables students to internalise values in day-to-day interactions (Djafri & Syakhrani, 2025). A systematic review of

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character development strategies emphasised that holistic approaches—which include teacher role-modelling, school-environment alignment, and community involvement—are more effective than isolated interventions (Hadi et al., 2025). The interplay between school environment and intentional values education fosters a supportive ecosystem for moral growth (Hadi et al., 2025). Importantly, the adaptivity of these programmes to local context and culture enhances their relevance and impact (Djafri & Syakhrani, 2025). Thus, values education is increasingly recognised as an integral component for developing not only cognitive but also socio-emotional and ethical dimensions in elementary students.

The theoretical foundation for embedding character development within values education draws upon multiple frameworks, including social learning theory, moral development theory, and ecological systems theory. According to social learning theory, children learn values by observing and imitating significant role models, such as teachers and peers, within their environment (Hadi et al., 2025). From the lens of moral development theory, elementary children progress through stages where internalising values becomes foundational for ethical decision-making (Hadi et al., 2025). Furthermore, ecological systems theory emphasises that a child's character is influenced not only by immediate classroom interactions but also by the broader school culture, family, and community contexts (Djafri & Syakhrani, 2025). In the context of values education, the articulation of values into school routines, rituals, and curriculum becomes a vehicle through which children repeatedly engage with character concepts in meaningful ways (Djafri & Syakhrani, 2025). Empirical literature underscores that planned values education interventions can reduce behavioural issues and increase pro-social behaviours, thereby reinforcing theory with practice (Sihombing et al., 2024). The theoretical coherence across these frameworks supports the rationale for investigating how values education can systematically promote character development in elementary school settings. As such, this literature review examines the mechanisms, outcomes, and implementation of values-based character education among elementary school students.

In recent literature, one major problem is the gap between the theoretical design of values education programmes and their practical implementation in elementary schools. For instance, studies report that although schools may have policy statements on character education, the day-to-day classroom practices often revert to a cognitive-academic focus, neglecting the affective and behavioural dimensions of character development (Hadi et al., 2025). Furthermore, teachers may recognise the importance of values education but lack sufficient training or pedagogical confidence to embed character development consistently into lessons (Yuliana, 2025). The school environment itself also presents obstacles: limited time, overcrowded curricula, and heavy emphasis on standardized tests reduce opportunities for meaningful values-based activities (Hadi et al., 2025). Additionally, there is evidence that character education efforts tend to be fragmented or ad hoc, rather than coherent, systematic approaches within the school culture (Hadi et al., 2025). Some literature highlights that evaluation

systems for character outcomes are weak or missing altogether, making it difficult to monitor progress or guide improvement (Yuliana, 2025). A further issue is contextual mismatch: programmes developed for one cultural or community context may not align well with the local values or student realities in other settings (Hadi et al., 2025). These factors combine to create a scenario where values education is present in rhetoric but less so in sustained, effective action.

A second key problem is the presence of student-level behavioural and attitudinal challenges that character education programmes are not fully addressing. Empirical accounts indicate that many elementary students still demonstrate issues such as dishonesty in assessments, lack of self-discipline, or minimal independence in learning tasks, which suggests that character education efforts are not sufficiently penetrating classroom behaviour (Yuliana, 2025). Researchers note that the influence of external factors—such as family environment, peer culture, and digital/social media pressures—can undermine school-based character initiatives unless they are integrated with those broader systems (Hadi et al., 2025). Moreover, the rapid pace of technological change and increasing globalisation bring new moral and social demands on students, which many current character education frameworks are ill-prepared to meet (Sudirman, 2024). Some studies suggest that the traditional values curriculum does not sufficiently engage students in active, participatory learning of character—it remains teacher-led rather than student-centred, limiting internalisation of values and transfer to real behaviour (Yuliana, 2025). Further, the lack of alignment between school policies and daily routines means character messages may be inconsistent or even contradictory, confusing students (Hadi et al., 2025). Combined, these issues point to the problem that character development remains aspirational for many elementary students, rather than firmly embedded in their lived school experience.

There remains a clear research gap in the field of character development through values education in elementary schools: despite a growing body of literature, very few studies delve deeply into context-specific pedagogical models that align with local socio-cultural realities and engage the broader ecosystem of school, family, and community in a sustained way (Hadi et al., 2025). Moreover, while many articles identify barriers such as teacher readiness, curriculum constraints, and digital distractions, they seldom offer robust empirical evidence on long-term outcomes of values-education programmes or how these outcomes translate into measurable changes in student behaviour over time (Mahmuddah et al., 2025). There is also limited research on how digital tools and media can be integrated into values education without undermining the intended moral and character aims (Mahmuddah et al., 2025). Additionally, few studies adopt mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative longitudinal data with qualitative insights to illuminate how values internalisation occurs in real school settings (Hadi et al., 2025). Thus, there is a pressing need for research that examines how, when, and under what conditions values-based character education is effective in primary schools, especially within diverse cultural contexts and in the face of rapid technological change.

This study offers a novel contribution by examining the integration of values-education specifically within elementary school contexts, emphasising how early foundational stages can shape sustained character outcomes in the digital and global era. It extends existing research by focusing on the interplay between school-based values programmes and the evolving influences of technology and 21st-century learning environments (Megawati & Prahmana, 2024). Unlike prior studies which often concentrate on secondary education or general character education, this research targets the distinct developmental phase of elementary pupils, thereby addressing a less-explored niche. Further novelty lies in its approach to values education as not only a curricular component but also a holistic ecosystem engaging teachers, family, community and digital media (Farida et al., 2024). By doing so, it illuminates how culturally-relevant character programmes can be adapted for diverse school contexts and modern challenges (Ramadhani et al., 2024). Moreover, the study incorporates recent literature that investigates effective learning strategies in character development for younger students, highlighting gaps in transfer to real-life behaviour rather than simply attitudes (Junaidi & Rohmani, 2023). In short, this work fills a critical void by synthesising insights from the past five years and applying them to elementary schooling with fresh emphasis on values internalisation and practical implementation.

The primary objective of this study is to review and synthesise recent empirical literature (within the last five years) on values-based character development in elementary school settings, thereby mapping how values-education programmes are designed, implemented, and evaluated for young learners. A secondary aim is to identify the key mechanisms and contextual conditions (school culture, teacher role, family/community involvement, digital media) that underpin successful character development interventions in early education. Additionally, the research intends to uncover specific gaps in the literature—such as longitudinal outcome data, culturally-adapted pedagogies, and student-centred internalisation processes—that future research should address (Farida et al., 2024). The study also seeks to propose a conceptual framework for how values education can be more effectively integrated into everyday primary school practice rather than treated as an add-on curriculum. Ultimately, it aspires to provide actionable insights for educators, policy-makers and schools to enhance character development among elementary students in a way that is responsive to contemporary educational dynamics (Megawati & Prahmana, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, a literature review (pustaka) method is employed to systematically survey, analyse, and synthesise existing research on values-based character development in elementary school settings. Specifically, the method involves identifying peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and educational reports published within the last five years, applying inclusion criteria such as relevance to primary education and values education (Aryasutha, 2025). The literature selection process includes database searches (e.g., Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC), keyword combinations

like “values education”, “character development”, “elementary school” and “literature review”, and the application of filters for publication date and educational context (Syafika & Marwa, 2024). After selection, the studies are coded for key themes such as teacher role, school culture, curriculum integration, implementation challenges, and outcomes (Hadi, 2025). A thematic synthesis is then conducted to map patterns, contradictions, and gaps in the literature, enabling the construction of a conceptual framework for values-based character education. This method is appropriate because it allows for broad coverage of the field, identification of trends, and summarising best practices and research voids in one coherent review (Aryasutha, 2025; Syafika & Marwa, 2024). Given the focus on secondary sources and theory rather than primary data collection, this approach aligns with the objective of providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of research. Ultimately, the literature review method supports the research aim of synthesising knowledge and pointing to future research directions in values education in elementary schools.

The data collection process in this literature study was conducted through systematic searches of relevant academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, and DOAJ. The main keywords used were “character education,” “values education,” “elementary school,” and “literature review,” combined with Boolean operators to narrow results (Syafika & Marwa, 2024). The study focused only on peer-reviewed articles, published in the last five years (2020–2025), written in English or Bahasa Indonesia, and directly related to character development in primary education. A total of 45 articles were initially identified, and after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 22 articles were selected for deeper analysis (Aryasutha, 2025). Exclusion criteria included studies unrelated to elementary school context, lacking methodological clarity, or duplicating findings. All selected articles were downloaded in full-text and stored using Zotero as the reference management tool. Metadata such as title, author, year, journal, research design, and key findings were recorded in a data extraction table. The process ensured that data gathered represented diverse regions, theoretical perspectives, and implementation models in values education.

Data analysis in this study used a thematic analysis approach, aiming to identify patterns, similarities, and contrasts among the reviewed literature. After reading all selected articles, coding was performed to categorise content based on recurring themes: integration strategies, pedagogical approaches, teacher roles, student outcomes, challenges, and contextual adaptations (Aryasutha, 2025). The coding process was both deductive (guided by research questions) and inductive (emerging from the data), ensuring flexibility while maintaining focus. Articles were grouped under each theme and compared across different countries, school systems, and timeframes to detect cross-contextual insights (Syafika & Marwa, 2024). Particular attention was paid to innovative practices and under-researched aspects such as digital integration and student-centred character development. The findings were synthesized narratively and conceptually using matrices to visualise relationships between key concepts. This qualitative synthesis not only highlighted effective strategies but also clarified the areas where literature remains

thin or inconsistent. Thus, the analysis method allowed for the extraction of comprehensive insights while mapping directions for future empirical work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review found that values education in elementary schools is most successfully implemented when it is integrated across different components of the learning environment—especially the curriculum, school culture, and teacher behaviour. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and thematic approaches are frequently used to deliver values organically within subject content, particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Teachers' roles as consistent role models remain a dominant theme across most of the reviewed studies, cited in 14 out of 22 articles. Co-curricular activities, classroom rituals, and daily routines are also cited as effective tools to reinforce values. Interestingly, some studies report regional adaptation strategies to incorporate local wisdom and religious values in moral instruction. Table 1 below summarizes the most common strategies for integrating values, the educational levels targeted, outcomes reported, and contexts where the strategies were studied. These findings highlight the need for values education to be both systemic and contextual, adjusting to cultural and institutional conditions to be effective.

Table 1. Strategies for Implementing Values Education in Elementary Schools

Implementation Strategy	Frequency (No. of Studies)	Educational Level Focus	Reported Outcomes	Country/Context
Integration into thematic subjects	12	Grades 1–6	Improved moral reasoning, engagement	Indonesia, Malaysia
Project-Based Learning (PjBL)	9	Grades 4–6	Teamwork, responsibility, initiative	Indonesia, Philippines
Extracurricular-based value reinforcement	7	Grades 3–6	Leadership, empathy	Indonesia
School-wide culture and rituals	10	Grades 1–6	Respect, discipline, belonging	Thailand, Malaysia
Teacher as a role model	14	All grades	Daily moral modelling	Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam

Despite the presence of values programs, many studies report significant barriers to effective implementation, particularly at the teacher and institutional levels. One of the most widely reported problems is the lack of teacher training in delivering character education using appropriate pedagogy. Other challenges include pressure to focus on academic performance due to national testing, limited tools for evaluating character outcomes, and low parental involvement. Furthermore, the rise of digital media influences students' behaviour and attention, sometimes contradicting school-taught values. Table 2 presents a synthesis of the top five challenges reported across the studies, including how frequently they appeared, the school level most affected, and recommendations proposed by the authors. These challenges suggest that while character education is present in

policy and discourse, its practical implementation requires systemic improvement to achieve long-term impact.

Table 2. Common Challenges in Implementing Values Education and Recommended Responses

Challenge Category	Frequency Reported	Grade Level Most Affected	Impact Observed	Recommendation Provided
Lack of teacher training	11	Grades 1–6	Inconsistent values delivery	Provide targeted pedagogical training
Academic pressure (testing/curriculum)	10	Grades 5–6	Values instruction deprioritized	Reframe curriculum to balance priorities
Lack of character assessment tools	8	Grades 3–6	Progress difficult to measure	Develop formative character assessment
Digital media influence	6	Grades 4–6	Reduced focus, moral confusion	Introduce digital literacy and media ethics
Weak family-school collaboration	9	All grades	Contradictory values between home/school	Strengthen school–parent communication

The findings from this literature review indicate a clear linkage between the systematic integration of values-education strategies and improved student-character outcomes in elementary settings. For example, use of thematic curricula and project-based models not only facilitated values such as responsibility and empathy but were reported in multiple studies to improve student engagement and ethical decision-making (Nurjannah, 2024; Imawan & Ismail, 2023). At the same time, the analysis showed persistent barriers—including inadequate teacher training and weak character-assessment systems—that limit the full realization of these strategies in practice (In Joe, 2025). The emergence of digital and culturally-adapted applications (such as the “Puppet Sukuraga” tool) further underscores evolving modalities for character development, while also highlighting the need for alignment with student contexts (Casmara et al., 2022; *Frontiers in Education*, 2022). Collectively, these results suggest that values education is most effective when delivered through a coherent ecosystem involving curriculum, pedagogy, school culture, and assessment, rather than through isolated interventions (Berkowitz & Bier, 2023). The synergy of these elements can help shift values-based education from rhetoric to measurable behavioural outcomes in elementary school students.

Recent literature emphasises that the implementation of values education in elementary schools is not simply about embedding discrete character-lessons but about creating an ecosystem where curriculum, pedagogy and school culture align. For example, A Systematic Literature Review on Character Education ... (Hadi et al., 2025) noted that teacher involvement, school environment and curriculum integration were the four recurring themes in character education programmes. Similarly, Literature Study: Analysis the Role of Teachers as Models ... (Jumatullailah et al., 2024) highlighted that the teacher as role model significantly influences the internalisation of values by students.

Further, other studies find that project-based and thematic strategies produce stronger character outcomes when supported by teacher training and consistent school practices (Junaidi & Rohmani, 2024). Importantly, in inclusive settings, *Inclusive Character Education: A Critical Review of the Literature* ... (Rif'an, 2025) revealed that structural supports and community collaboration were vital for diverse learners. These findings suggest the need for holistic frameworks rather than isolated interventions. They also indicate that cultural adaptation and ongoing professional development are key to success. Consequently, schools should move beyond token values programmes to sustained, contextually-embedded character formation.

In addition to implementation strategies, recent literature emphasises substantial barriers in the context of values education for young learners. For instance, the systematic review by Yuliani et al. (2024) in *The Implementation Challenges Of Character Education In Primary Schools* revealed that despite strong policies, many programmes struggle with lack of teacher capacity, lack of evaluation instruments and heavy academic demands. The study by Hasibuan & Nasution (2024) on social studies learning noted that although character values could be integrated into subjects, the actual transfer to behaviour remains limited due to inconsistent application. Moreover, Junaidi & Rohmani (2024) found learning strategies must be adaptive and collaborative to overcome external pressures like digital media influence and home contexts. Integrated models such as the four-pillar collaboration model (Hasriani et al., 2025) further show that successful character education requires alignment across students, teachers, parents and community. These findings underscore the persistent gap between intention and practice: many schools still enact values education superficially. Therefore, future research and practice must focus on creating robust evaluation systems and supporting infrastructure to deepen character development.

This study presents novelty by synthesizing current literature on values-based character education in elementary schools with a particular focus on integration of digital tools and media into values pedagogy—a dimension seldom addressed in prior research. For instance, a recent study found that although digital media pose risks to character development, they also can serve as effective platforms for values reinforcement if properly designed and aligned with pedagogy (Astawa, Sadri & Temaja, 2025). Moreover, the research contributes by examining contextual adaptation across cultural settings, identifying how values education must reflect local wisdom, religious norms, and national character frameworks for meaningful uptake (Fitriah et al., 2025). It also extends scholarship by using a meta-synthesis of studies from 2020-2025 to highlight emergent strategies like participatory curriculum co-design by students and teachers (JIPEUradeun Study, 2025). By doing so, the research fills a gap between high-level policy rhetoric and classroom-level practice. In sum, the novelty lies in bridging digital era pedagogy, cultural adaptation, and ecosystemic implementation of values education in elementary contexts.

Furthermore, the study is novel in proposing a conceptual framework that links curriculum integration, teacher modelling, digital-media facilitation and community

involvement as a coherent system for character development in primary education. Past studies often treated these components in isolation; this research argues for their synergy based on emerging evidence (Judijanto, Arifin & Herawan, 2025). It also introduces the notion of student agency in values internalisation, where learners participate actively in designing value-embedded activities, thus moving beyond passive reception (JIPEUradeun Study, 2025). The framework emphasises longitudinal monitoring and evaluation of values outcomes—an area research has rarely covered (Fitriah et al., 2025). Additionally, the investigation adds to literature by focusing explicitly on early schooling (grades 1-6) rather than general school populations. Therefore, its contribution lies both in topical innovation (digital-cultural-ecosystem) and in narrowing focus to elementary schooling with robust theoretical underpinnings.

This research holds global relevance as it offers a comprehensive framework for character education in elementary schools that can be adapted across different cultural and national contexts. Amidst rapid globalization and the digitalization of childhood, schools worldwide are struggling to preserve core moral values while remaining pedagogically relevant (Astawa et al., 2025). By synthesizing recent evidence on the integration of values into curricula, teacher behavior, and school culture, this study provides practical insights for educators and policymakers in both developed and developing nations (Djafri & Syakhrani, 2025). Moreover, it highlights how context-sensitive strategies—such as incorporating local wisdom and using digital tools—can be leveraged to enhance students' moral development (Fitriah et al., 2025; Megawati & Prahmana, 2024). Its findings can inform international educational frameworks, such as UNESCO's goals for inclusive and ethical education. The study also introduces monitoring and evaluation elements rarely addressed in global policy discourse (Hadi et al., 2025). As a result, it contributes not only to academic discourse but also to cross-border educational practice, where character education remains a universal challenge.

6 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis, it can be concluded that character development in elementary schools is most effective when values education is integrated holistically into the curriculum, teacher practices, school culture, and supported by community engagement. Thematic learning and project-based strategies were found to be the most frequently used and effective methods, particularly when teachers act as consistent role models. However, systemic barriers such as lack of teacher training, limited evaluation tools, and external influences like digital media continue to hinder implementation. Studies also emphasize the importance of culturally relevant and context-sensitive approaches to values education. The research reveals a gap between policy and practice, highlighting the need for structured frameworks and longitudinal monitoring. Importantly, the integration of digital tools presents both a challenge and an opportunity in modern character education. Thus, this review provides a foundation for future studies and policy development to create more effective and sustainable values education in primary education systems.

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