

## Nurturing Character: A Comparative Study Of Elementary Education In Indonesia And Japan

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**Abstract:** Character education is crucial for addressing the negative impacts of technology on children's development. In this context, schools play a vital role in shaping individuals according to the norms and rules prevalent in society. This research aims to describe the efforts made in character development among elementary school students in Indonesia and to compare these efforts with those implemented in the Japanese education system. Through a literature study, this research explores the concrete steps taken by schools to improve character education. The findings indicate that support from the community, non-governmental organizations, and the government in Japan holds significant potential for adoption by schools in Indonesia. Several effective practices identified, such as integrated approaches and community support, can enhance the quality of character education in elementary schools. By implementing these methods, it is expected that schools in Indonesia can produce students who are not only academically intelligent but also possess good moral values and social responsibility. The role of school leaders is crucial in ensuring effective character education by managing the available support and resources to achieve these goals.

**Key Word:** Character Education, Elementary School, Indonesia, Japan

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of technology in this modern era serves as a double-edged sword; it provides many conveniences and positive impacts when used wisely, but on the other hand, if not managed properly, technology can bring negative impacts (Nadila & Alam, 2024). One example of technological development is the use of gadgets among children which has a negative impact on the development of social skills (Zurqoni et al., 2018). As a

consequence, character education is needed to control the development of children's character in the current era of technological development (Fransyaigu et al., 2021). Character education plays a crucial role in the development of human resources with quality, identity, and character. It is important to ensure that the use of technology does not interfere with the formation of students character (Arwen &

Puspita, 2020). The term "character" is derived from the word "character", which means nature, personality, manners and ethics. The definition of character according to the origin of the word is the psychological, moral or character traits that characterize an individual (Odah & Muhtar, 2024). Character is one of the cultural products that can be achieved through habituation and training. Habituation or repeated events will make it easier for someone to display their true character (Marwiyati, 2020).

A structured and planned effort carried out by the school in order to shape and empower the potential of students to realize individuals who are in accordance with applicable rules and norms is known as character education (Nitte & Bulu, 2020). Character education is one of the important aspects in the development of students which aims to embed good values and behavior from an early age (UMAMI et al., 2019). Character education aims to develop effective potential, honorable habits, leadership, competence, and a good learning environment (Zahra et al., 2024). It is because character education focuses on developing learners' character values related to God, self, family, community, country, and environment (Hidayat & Rozak, 2022). The success of character education can be seen from the perspective

of local wisdom, where there are various aspects, namely learning methods, thematic suitability, and uniformity of understanding between teachers and students (Tohri et al., 2022).

Character education has gained prominence in Indonesia in recent years, especially with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum (N. S. E. Putri et al., 2023). The education system in Indonesia has undergone various reforms to improve the quality of education and the character of learners. The Merdeka Curriculum aims to provide more freedom to schools in developing educational programs that match the local context and the needs of learners. One of the main objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum is to strengthen character education, emphasizing values such as integrity, hard work, and responsibility (Kualitas et al., 2023). Efforts made in character building through Merdeka Curriculum include the integration of character values in each subject, training teachers to teach character effectively, and developing a school environment that supports learner character building (Indriani et al., 2023). Research shows that effective character education can help learners cultivate social and emotional skills that are important for future success (Sutia et al., 2022)

Indonesia has eighteen character education values, which are religious, honest, tolerance, environmental care, curiosity, discipline, hard work, creative, democratic, national spirit, respect for achievement, communicative, peace-loving, fond of reading, love for the country, social care, independence, and responsibility that can be applied both at school and at home (Putry, 2019). However, character education is currently only done in educational institutions, parents still have a limited understanding that character education is only the application of religious values at home (Ramdani et al., 2023).

One of the countries in Asia that is known to have a good education system is Japan. The Japanese education system is known for its holistic and comprehensive approach, encompassing not only academic achievement but also character building and social values (Septiani et al., 2023). Japan applies a structured curriculum, strict discipline, emphasizes the importance of work ethics, responsibility, and cooperation among students (Widjayanti et al., 2024). From an early age, students in Japan are taught important values such as honesty, discipline and empathy through various school activities and daily life. Character education is integrated into all aspects of learning, from moral classes (*dotoku*) that teach ethics and morality, to extracurricular

activities that encourage active participation and social skill development (Nadila & Alam, 2024).

Japanese schools also have strict routines and ceremonial traditions that aim to build respect and responsibility among students. In addition, the culture of mutual cooperation and togetherness is strongly emphasized through daily activities such as cleaning the classroom and school environment, which are carried out regularly by learners (Rosliana et al., 2021). This emphasis on character education not only helps learners develop a strong and ethical personality but also contributes to the creation of a harmonious and productive society (Halawa et al., 2023). Various studies have shown that the Japanese approach in education succeeds in creating individuals who are not only academically competent, but also have high morality and good social skills (Rohmawati & Suryani, 2023).

Discussions about the potential application of Japanese character education patterns in Indonesia have been widely discussed before, but there is a need for comparative studies that can help broaden perceptions about the application of character education in Japan and Indonesia. Comparing character education implemented in Indonesia and Japan is important because these two countries have different approaches but have the same goal

in shaping students' character (Montanesa & Firman, 2021; Syamsurrijal, 2021). The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide practical insights into how character education can be adapted across different educational and cultural contexts. By comparing the character education approaches in Indonesia and Japan, this study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how these systems can be optimized for better student outcomes in both countries. Additionally, this research seeks to address the gap in literature regarding the application of foreign character-building practices in Indonesian schools, providing a foundation for future educational reforms and policy development in Indonesia.

In this study, the author aims to identify the character building efforts of elementary school students in Indonesia, compare the character building efforts in the education system in Indonesia with Japan and find out the efforts made by the school in an effort to improve the character building efforts of elementary school students based on the results of the comparison. Therefore, this comparative study can provide a deep insight into how character education can be implemented effectively in the context of different cultures and education systems.

## **METHOD**

This research is a qualitative approach and uses a literature study research method. Qualitative research procedures will produce descriptive data in the form of spoken or written words. Literature study research is conducted by collecting sources of information through books, journals, and relevant previous research in order to perfect the shortcomings in existing research. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman technique where there are three steps that researchers go through to produce data validity. First editing, researchers check the alignment of variables with one another. Second organizing, the data that has been collected must be in accordance with the research framework. Third, finding, researchers re-analyze the results of the data with the selected theories, rules and methods until then the researcher can draw conclusions about the problem (Zed, 2008).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Analysis of Character Development Strategies in Elementary Education in Indonesia and Japan**

The implementation of character education in schools is inspired by the importance of developing students' ability to determine something positive, safeguard, carry out and apply it in their lives consciously and sustainably (Ramda &

Yoyon, 2020). Strengthening character education in primary schools is a major priority so that it gets a larger portion than teaching knowledge. This is consistent with the objectives of national education, namely developing the potential of students who are faithful and devoted to God Almighty, forming character, broad-minded, creative, independent, healthy, democratic, and responsible. Research conducted by Anggraini et al. (2020) is aligned with this statement, where character education is an important element that determines the strength of the nation, an effort to strengthen the younger generation to have good quality. In the school environment, character education focuses on realizing democratic learners in an increasingly open and competitive modern life, which is prone to conflicts of desires, interests and conflicts of beliefs. Considering the importance of the realization of character values that must exist in students, not only Indonesia but Japan is also shaping the character values of its students. The following is an attempt to determine the character values that exist in the education system in Indonesia and the education system in Japan.

**Table 1. The differences between Indonesian and Japanese education systems in character values formation practices.**

Reinforcement of Character Education	Indonesia's Education System	Japan's Education System
<b>Teaching</b>	The curriculum at primary education level (Merdeka Curriculum) focuses on essential material to develop students' competencies as lifelong learners with Pancasila character. (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology regulation No. 20 in 2024 Chapter I, Article 1 Paragraph 2)	The structure of the Japanese school curriculum is <i>Chi-Toku-Tai</i> . <i>Chi</i> refers to academic knowledge. <i>Toku</i> refers to the development of students' values, emotions, and character. While <i>Tai</i> refers to a healthy body.
<b>Curriculum structure integrated with character education</b>	Pancasila Education, Religious Education, Natural and Social Science, Arts and Culture.	<i>Seikatsu</i> (life habits) and life skills plus social issues through integrated courses (outing class).
<b>Character Building</b>	Pancasila Character: Spiritual (religious education to nurture positive behavior such as honesty, discipline tolerance), moral (Pancasila Education), social (Natural and Social Science: grade three until six), and emotional competence of students.	Moral education and <i>Seikatsuka</i> (life habits) given to students in grades 1 and 2. This subject aims to familiarize children to be able to perform various daily activities independently.
<b>Time Allocation</b>	Specific time is allocated or integrated into the learning process.	There are 34 hours of lessons in the early grades and 35 hours in the second to ninth grades (grade 2 to 3 in junior high school).
<b>Project on Strengthening the Profile of Pancasila Students</b> (Indonesian Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Regulation No. 12 Year 2024)	The project of strengthening the profile of Pancasila students is formulated in the form of the characteristics of students who are faithful, devoted to God and glorious; cooperation; critical reasoning; global diversity; independent; and creative.	In " <i>Doutoku</i> ", elementary students are trained to have independent and disciplined characters. Independence and discipline education is not learned through theories written in textbooks but directly applied in real actions.
<b>Learning Method (Approach)</b>	Implementing the scientific learning method, which involves a series of steps such as observing, questioning, trying, associating, and communicating.	Adopting peer learning or lesson study methods. Lesson study is a collaborative approach where teachers work together to design, observe and evaluate learning on an ongoing basis.

<b>Teacher`s Regulation</b>	The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology has not released regulations governing teams related to mental or behavioral health.	MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) released a guide to defining and structuring the roles of teaching staff, including those serving in mental health departments, in Japan's school system.
<b>Reinforcement</b>	Scouting extracurricular: a place that provides opportunities for students to expand social experiences, practice social skills, and internalize moral values and social values.	Life skills subjects, which aim to teach independence to students. Integrated course activities and outing classes focus more on aspects of character development, independence, and handling social problems through a more standardized national curriculum approach.

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### **Comparative Analysis and Recommendations for Enhancing Character Education**

Character education is essential for building a nation's civilization. Good character must be cultivated continuously through education methods such as modeling, learning, and reinforcement. According to the 2009 school guidelines from the Center for Curriculum, Development, and National Culture Education, character education is implemented through eighteen values derived from religion, national principles, culture, and educational goals. Emphasis on character education is not unique to the Indonesian education system; the Japanese education system also prioritizes instilling character values in students from an early age. This early character formation has led to

the development of a Japanese national character known for its resilience, hard work, honesty, persistence, and a strong sense of solidarity and tolerance. Moral education has been integrated into the education curriculum and has become an integral part of other subjects. We expect that the character of the Japanese nation, which has been explained previously, can be used as a reference in the character building of students in Indonesia. Therefore, it is necessary to change learning in schools which is not only the transfer of knowledge but also the inheritance of values to shape the attitudes, behavior, character, and leadership of the nation's generation (Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2020; Suryaman, 2020).

Due to the similarity of emphasis on the formation of character values for students since elementary school between the Indonesian education system and the

Japanese education system, it should be able to produce similar outcomes. However, what happens in the education system in Indonesia, the character values of elementary school students in Indonesia are still in the low category (S. K. Putri et al., 2024). Based on that, there are some differences in the process of forming character values in the Indonesian and Japanese education systems, which then produce different quality outcomes.

The differences between the two countries education systems in character values formation can be seen based on the process of teaching, modeling and reinforcement. First, the teaching process of character education. The teaching guide or commonly referred to as the curriculum at the primary school level used in Indonesia is the independent curriculum. A curriculum that focuses learning on essential material, so that it has more space to develop the competence of students as lifelong learners with Pancasila character in accordance with Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology regulation no. 20 in 2024 Chapter I, Article 1 Paragraph 2. The time allocation used for student character building is divided into two, namely through the project of strengthening the pancasila students profile (P5) and integration with existing subjects in the classroom. There are several subjects that are integrated with character education, namely Pancasila education, religious education, natural and

social sciences (IPAS), and arts and culture subjects. Religious education is the basis for fostering behavior and enriching the character of students such as discipline, tolerance, and honesty (Hilmi & Habiby, 2023) These subjects will help educators form the Pancasila character in elementary school students. Pancasila character consisting of spiritual and emotional competence can be obtained from religious education, moral competence is obtained from Pancasila education, social competence comes from natural and social science subjects.

Based on Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology regulation no. 20 in 2024, the project of strengthening the Pancasila students profile (P5) is formulated in the form of the characteristics of students who are faithful, devoted to God Almighty, and have noble character; mutual cooperation; critical reasoning; global diversity; independent; and creative. In normal education units, the implementation of the project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students (P5) is a project that is carried out one to two times, adjusted to the condition of the resources owned by the school. Whereas in equivalency education units, P5 is implemented through empowerment activities and skills based on the Pancasila student profile.

Indonesia's education system has designed the formation of Pancasila



character values in a complete and structured manner. Not only integrating these values in classroom learning in the four subjects, but also through project activities that provide opportunities for students to develop creative and independent characters. Based on research (Muktamar et al., 2024) concluded that the implementation of P5 in the independent curriculum can develop the character of students in accordance with the expected competency standards. However, obstacles in P5 such as the lack of support from educators and parents and low interaction with peers make the implementation of the independent curriculum not running optimally. With the implementation of the independent curriculum which seems to be only a formality, it takes a long time so that students can practice the implementation of Indonesian character values in their daily lives or the surrounding environment (Heryanti et al., 2023).

In addition, the character building program through the P5 program has not been maximized, the absence of special subjects such as emotional education makes the character of students only in the cognitive and psychomotor fields, without reaching the affective domain. In addition, the independent curriculum gives students the freedom to organize their own learning. This will have a negative impact on elementary school students who do not have

the ability to be independent and active when learning. This is different from the curriculum used in Japan. The formation of character values of elementary school students through moral education subjects (*Doutoku*) and habits of life (*Seikatsuka*). According to the National Institute for Educational Policy Research, 2010 cited from (Rohmawati & Suryani, 2023) explains that the purpose of moral education subjects in general is to nurture morals in the mentality, judgment, willingness to practice, and habits of learners, and its specific purpose is to enable learners to think in their own way about life through cross-synthetic studies and inquiry studies).

Moral education in Japanese schools is divided into four main areas of study: self-awareness, relationships with others, relationships with groups and society, and finally, relationships with the environment and the universe. Japanese children are expected to play an active role in various special activities that take place throughout the school year. There is a strong emphasis on teamwork, communication of ideas, maintenance of school traditions and passing on experiences from older learners to younger learners (Rabiei et al., 2019). These two subjects familiarize learners to carry out various daily activities independently. Based on the results of research conducted by (Setiawati et al., 2022) elementary school character education in Japan prioritizes

practice in everyday life with learning by doing methods such as daring to appear in front of the class, eating lunch and continued brushing teeth together, saying greetings, cooperating with friends, and other motor activities.

The school curriculum structure in Japan has the *Chi-Toku-Tai* principle. *Chi* is defined as academic knowledge, *Toku* means the aspect of developing the values, emotions and character of students, while *Tai* means the same as a healthy body (Anggelia et al., 2024). There are three categories of lessons in this curriculum: academic subjects (compulsory and optional), moral education and special activities. Moral education (*Doutoku*) is provided in 34 lesson hours for grade 1 (early level) and 35 lesson hours for grade 2 elementary school through grade 3 junior high school. This means that the implementation of moral education in Japanese schools is 3.3% to 4% of the total learning hours in each year for each school level. In one week, moral education is given once with a learning load of one lesson hour which is 45 minutes for elementary school students and 30 minutes for junior high school students. During moral education learning, students are trained to have disciplined and independent characters. Discipline and independence education is applied directly in real actions, not taught using theories written in textbooks. The application of independence and discipline

of elementary school students can be seen from the activities of students cleaning the class and school without relying on cleaning services and the policy of students going to school without being escorted by their parents.

Based on this description, it can be understood that the existence of simple but consistently carried out activities and policies that become the habituation and culture of students at school results in the easy formation of the expected character values. In line with research (Khasanah et al., 2024) which explains that the formation of the character of students must receive minimal support is the existence of habituation, supervision from the school and influence from peers.

The formation of students' character values in the Indonesian and Japanese education systems has a second difference, that is in the teaching methods applied by educators. Educators in Indonesia use a scientific approach, which involves a series of steps such as observing, questioning, testing, associating and communicating. Considering that the orientation of basic education development is to prepare students to become good, innovative and highly competitive individuals, the scientific approach is very suitable to be applied in the formation of character values in Indonesia. Steps taken by educators such as associating and communicating aim to direct project-based and problem-solving-based learning

activities so that students can develop creative skills, think critically, actively innovate and work (Lusi, 2024). Educators, who habitually conduct project-based learning do not prioritize social competency-based learning consisting of social experience, social skills practice and internalization of moral values and social values. This is because educators tend to focus on how to make the projects given to students can be completed in a timely manner with minimal costs and resources.

Modeling shown by educators, especially in terms of social competence, will be imitated by students. Based on the results of research (Hidayah et al., 2022), the strategy carried out by the principal so that educators have social skills is to improve communication skills between educators, communication between educators and students as well as with parents and the community. The existence of communication between educators (peer learning) has been seen in the education system in Japan. In the Japanese education system, educators adopt peer learning or lesson study, which is a collaborative approach where teachers work together to design, observe and evaluate learning on an ongoing basis.

The third differentiation between the Indonesian and Japanese education systems in the process of strengthening students' character values is the reinforcement

programs carried out by the school. In the Indonesian education system, in the same way as Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology regulation No. 12 in 2024, the internalization of character values can be done through participation in various extracurricular activities that have great social function, which is to develop the ability and sense of social responsibility of students. Research conducted by (Sariah et al., 2023) concluded that in addition to the application of clear rules, habituation of social manners and Islamic etiquette, and habituation of patience, the internalization of students' character values is also carried out through their participation in various extracurricular activities. One type of extracurricular *Krida* contained in the independent curriculum is scouting.

Scouting is a place for students to expand their interests, develop their potential and talents as well as a place to build character and train leadership skills. The formation of character values is carried out through eight scouting methods, namely (a) practicing the scout code of honor; (b) providing motivation and guidance from the coach; (c) organizing activities in groups; (d) carrying out interesting and challenging activities; (e) carrying out activities while learning; (f) conducting activities in nature; (g) implementing a separate unit system and (h) appreciating skills: communicative, responsible and independent. The results of

research conducted by (Ramda & Yoyon, 2020) state that the application of the eight scouting methods is a means of strengthening the character of students who are religious, honest, disciplined, responsible, independent, have curiosity, creative, love the country, care for the environment and care for social.

Strengthening activities in order to foster students' character values are also carried out in the Japanese education system. The integrated course activities or outing classes in the Japanese education curriculum focus more on aspects of character development, independence, and handling social problems through a more standardized national curriculum approach. Learning about social issues is taught through hands-on experience in various places outside the classroom. This lesson is committed to developing reasoning skills, concept understanding and experiential learning. Through this commitment, the learning objective is for students to have the ability to solve problems and develop critical thinking so that they can deal with obstacles that occur in sudden or new situations such as disasters and other emergencies.

The idea of "spirit of life" in outing class refers to the provision of a balanced education, which consists of three pillars: physical strength, morals and knowledge. These three pillars can form a healthy and well-rounded individual with good academic skills and moral values that match the

dynamics of the existing society. (Gavari-Starkie et al., 2021) Formal school education in Japan is complemented by formal learning and training supported by three levels of support, namely from the government, society and self-help. Civil society is actively involved in disaster prevention activities, for example working with schools through festivals, seminars and fire drills to raise students' awareness. These non-governmental organizations include voluntary disaster prevention organizations (*jishu bosai soshiki*), fire control groups (*bosai kurabu*), and civil society organizations that work together on disaster preparedness. Integrated course activities are also often conducted by providing hands-on learning experiences in specific places, such as bakeries, learners' homes, farms around schools, or natural environments such as mountains, rivers, and water sources.

## CONCLUSION

Character education is a structured and planned effort undertaken by schools to shape and empower students' potential, enabling them to become individuals who adhere to applicable rules and norms. Strengthening character education in primary schools is a top priority and getting a larger portion than teaching knowledge. The results show that both Indonesia and Japan are concerned with character education from an early age. However, there are notable differences in the way the two

countries develop learners' character, leading to varying qualities of character education. In Indonesia, character education is conducted through the Pancasila students profile strengthening project and extracurricular activities such as scouting. This approach positively impacts the development of Pancasila character building among primary school learners. Meanwhile, the Japanese education system uses a more integrated approach with formal training and integrated courses that combine physical strength, morals, and knowledge to develop a balanced individual. A system of support from the government, non-governmental organizations, and community participation effectively supports character education in Japan. This approach ensures that learners not only excel academically but also have strong moral values and good social skills. Indonesian elementary schools can take advantage of some effective practices in the Japanese education system, such as the integrated support system and the emphasis on practical life skills and moral education. By combining all these elements, Indonesian elementary schools can further enhance the impact of character education, fostering a generation of academically intelligent, highly moral and socially responsible learners.

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