

REVITALIZING CHARACTER EDUCATION CURRICULA IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A LITERATURE REVIEW AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

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Abstract:

This article examines the urgency of revitalizing character education curricula at the junior high school (SMP) level in response to profound transformations driven by digital culture. The study aims to analyze existing models of character education implementation, identify the impacts of the digital era on students' character formation, explore emerging challenges, and propose strategic directions for curriculum revitalization. Employing a qualitative descriptive literature review design, this study systematically analyzed peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and policy documents published over the last decade, sourced from reputable digital databases. The findings indicate that character education in Indonesian SMPs has been institutionally implemented through integrated intrakurikular, kokurikular particularly the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) and ekstrakurikular pathways grounded in Pancasila values and national education policy. While digital culture offers opportunities to enhance creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy, it simultaneously poses risks to students' discipline, self-control, empathy, and integrity when not accompanied by adequate guidance. The study further identifies persistent challenges related to teacher preparedness, digital safety, cyberbullying, plagiarism, and assessment systems that remain predominantly oriented toward offline behavior. The implications of this study highlight the need to reconceptualize character education as a holistic integration of moral

values, digital ethics, and civic responsibility, and to explicitly embed these dimensions within curriculum standards and assessment frameworks. As a limitation, this study relies on secondary data and does not capture direct empirical evidence from school practices. Future research is recommended to conduct empirical investigations that assess the effectiveness of digitally integrated character education models and explore the lived experiences of teachers and students in digital learning environments.

Keywords:

character education, digital literacy, junior high school

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital culture has fundamentally transformed the socialization patterns, learning behaviors, and moral landscapes of contemporary societies, making character education an increasingly urgent global concern. Adolescents at the junior high school level are situated in a critical developmental phase marked by identity exploration, heightened peer influence, and growing emotional autonomy, all of which are now deeply mediated by digital environments. Empirical evidence indicates that digital spaces have become dominant arenas for interaction, often surpassing face-to-face encounters in shaping values, attitudes, and social norms among young people.¹ While digital technologies offer unprecedented educational opportunities, they simultaneously expose students to ethical risks, such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and moral disengagement, which challenge traditional models of schooling.² Consequently, education systems are increasingly called upon to respond not only to cognitive demands but also to the moral and character-related implications of digital life.³

¹ A Maimakova et al., "The Impact of Mass Media on Shaping the Moral Character of University Students: An Interdisciplinary Study with Economic Implications," *Economic Annals-XXI* 208, no. 3-4 (2024): 40-54, <https://doi.org/10.21003/ea.V2o8-06>.

² H Mayrita et al., "LANGUAGE POLITENESS IN DIGITAL STREAMING: THE IMPLICATIONS TO EDUCATION AND ETHICS IN COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE TECHNOLOGICAL ERA," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Terapan Universitas Jambi* 9, no. 3 (2025): 1079-90, <https://doi.org/10.22437/jiituj.v9i3.44388>.

³ P Anggraeni et al., "CHANGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS: 6Cs-ORIENTED RADEC LEARNING MODEL FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS," *Journal of Engineering Science and Technology* 19, no. 6 (2024): 33-40, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85207003249&partnerID=40&md5=64bf7257bda5f347d75d3f73601e136d>.

Existing scholarship has widely acknowledged that character education remains a foundational pillar in fostering responsible, ethical, and socially engaged citizens within rapidly changing societies. Research across diverse educational contexts demonstrates that character formation is most effective when integrated holistically into curriculum design rather than treated as an ancillary component.⁴ Studies further suggest that moral development is closely linked to experiential learning processes that engage students cognitively, emotionally, and socially.⁵ In this regard, digital media are increasingly recognized as influential cultural texts that shape moral imagination and ethical reasoning, particularly among adolescents.⁶ However, the pedagogical implications of this influence remain unevenly addressed across formal curricula.⁷

A growing body of literature highlights the potential of digital-based pedagogies to support character development when intentionally designed and ethically grounded. Digital storytelling, immersive games, and virtual learning environments have been shown to enhance empathy, reflection, and moral engagement by situating learners in meaningful narrative and social contexts.⁸ Similarly, technohumanistic approaches emphasize the need to balance technological innovation with the cultivation of human values, such as empathy, integrity, and social responsibility.⁹ Research on digital citizenship education also demonstrates positive outcomes in fostering responsibility, tolerance, and critical awareness when digital

⁴ M Rawson, "Translating, Transmitting and Transforming Waldorf Curricula: One Hundred Years after the First Published Curriculum in 1925," *Frontiers in Education* 9 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1306092>.

⁵ M Botes and A Rossi, "At the Verge of 'Is' and 'Could Be': Storytelling as Medium to Develop Critical Ethical Skills," in *International Library of Ethics, Law and Technology*, vol. 42 (University of Luxembourg, Interdisciplinary Center for Security, Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg: Springer Science and Business Media B.V., 2024), 313–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51560-6_17.

⁶ D.-S. Nopas and C Ueangchokchai, "From Blade to Belief: Moral Learning through Demon Slayer among ASEAN Youth," *Qualitative Research Journal*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-05-2025-0158>.

⁷ G M Cavaletto and A Miglietta, "Cooperative and Competitive Learning as Transformative Factors of Educational Processes for Extracurricular Skill Enhancement," *Frontiers in Education* 9 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1388937>.

⁸ A Dörringer, M Klopp, and R Rossmann, "Digital Storytelling in Serious Games: Empirical Research on the Impact of Narrative in 3D Learning Worlds" (Fachhochschule Aschaffenburg, Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science, Aschaffenburg, Bayern, Germany: Association for Computing Machinery, Inc, 2025), 96–105, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3723010.3723027>.

⁹ Anggraeni et al., "CHANGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS: 6Cs-ORIENTED RADEC LEARNING MODEL FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS."

competencies are aligned with ethical frameworks.¹⁰ These findings collectively affirm that technology can serve as a meaningful medium for character education rather than merely a neutral instructional tool.

Within the Indonesian context, curriculum reform has explicitly positioned character education as a core educational mandate through the Kurikulum Merdeka and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila framework. This policy orientation underscores the importance of nurturing faith, integrity, critical reasoning, creativity, independence, and social collaboration as integral student outcomes.¹¹ Empirical studies at the primary and secondary levels indicate that the Kurikulum Merdeka has contributed positively to student autonomy and character awareness, although implementation challenges persist.¹² Moreover, the integration of digital tools within curriculum delivery has been shown to enhance engagement and accessibility, particularly when supported by teacher readiness and pedagogical innovation.¹³ Nevertheless, alignment between digital practices and character-oriented objectives remains inconsistent across schools.¹⁴

Several studies further reveal that current implementations of character education tend to remain procedural and symbolic rather than transformative, especially in digitally saturated learning environments. Character instruction is often limited to moral messaging or ceremonial activities, without addressing students' lived digital experiences and ethical dilemmas.¹⁵ Research on teacher practices indicates that technology is frequently perceived as a delivery mechanism for content, rather than as a

¹⁰ N Nurhayati et al., "Assessing the Knowledge and Skills of Prospective Physics Teachers in Designing 4C Skills-Oriented Learning: Rasch Analysis," *Qubahan Academic Journal* 5, no. 1 (2025): 718–41, <https://doi.org/10.48161/qaj.v5n1a1544>.

¹¹ Dewi Maharani Rachmaningsih and Kata Kunci, "Islamic Management: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, Special Issue," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 2024, 247–56.

¹² A D Alirahman, M S Sumantri, and M Japar, "THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CHARACTER MATERIALS ONLINE BASED IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS," *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development* 11, no. 6 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i6.550>.

¹³ B Omarov et al., "Innovative Approaches in the Management of an Educational Institution," *Management in Education*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08920206231198631>.

¹⁴ H L Negreiros et al., "Competencies in High School Curriculum: Dialogues with Hannah Arendt," *Educacao and Realidade* 49 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-6236132540vs02>.

¹⁵ O Borihantanachot et al., "Developing Learning Innovation of Digital Open Badge in Social Studies to Enhance Citizenship Characteristics of Secondary School Students," *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching* 13, no. 4 (2024): 55–70, <https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v13n4p55>.

space for value formation and ethical reflection.¹⁶ At the same time, adolescents' high adaptability to digital platforms is not always matched by reflective moral awareness, increasing vulnerability to negative online behaviors.¹⁷ These patterns suggest a growing disconnect between curriculum intentions and the moral realities of students' digital lives.

Despite extensive research on digital learning innovations and character education, significant gaps remain in the literature. Many studies focus on higher education or early childhood settings, leaving junior high school students who are particularly vulnerable during early adolescence underexplored.¹⁸ Furthermore, existing research often examines technology integration and character education as parallel domains rather than as interdependent processes requiring curricular coherence. There is also limited synthesis of how character education frameworks can be systematically revitalized to address digital culture as a moral ecosystem rather than a technical challenge alone.¹⁹ This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive review that connects curriculum theory, digital ethics, and adolescent character development.

In response to these challenges, this study focuses on the revitalization of character education curricula at the junior high school level in the digital era through a systematic literature review. The article aims to identify key patterns, strategies, and theoretical insights that can inform curriculum design capable of integrating digital culture with character formation in a coherent and sustainable manner.²⁰ By synthesizing multidisciplinary perspectives, this study seeks to contribute a conceptual

¹⁶ S Schön et al., "Early Findings from Pilots in AI-Driven Education: Effects of AI-Generated Courses and Videos on Learning and Teaching," in *Learning and Analytics in Intelligent Systems*, vol. 44 (Technische Universität Graz, Graz, Styria, Austria: Springer Nature, 2025), 23–44, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-80388-8_2.

¹⁷ M Khanzadeh, "Resilience in Education: Unveiling the COVID-19-Induced Evolution of Architecture Pedagogy" (T. C. Nuh Naci Yazgan Üniversitesi, Kayseri, Turkey: Emerald Publishing, 2024), 127–49, <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83797-052-020241009>.

¹⁸ O Linge, "Chinese Character Learning for All Students" (Uppsala Universitet, Department of Education, Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden: Taylor and Francis, 2024), 247–49, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003285779-18>.

¹⁹ S Zein, "English Language Teacher Education in Indonesia: Providers, Policies, Innovations, and Future Directions" (The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, Australia: Springer Nature, 2022), 465–88, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9785-2_23.

²⁰ A Trisiana and R D H Utami, "'Smart Mobile Civic' Based on the Project Citizen Model as an Effort to Optimize Citizenship Learning in the Independent Campus Era," *Journal of Internet Services and Information Security* 12, no. 4 (2022): 74–83, <https://doi.org/10.58346/jisis.2022.i4.005>.

foundation for aligning character education with the moral realities of adolescents' digital lives. The findings are expected to offer practical implications for curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers in strengthening character education within the framework of contemporary educational reform. Ultimately, this research positions character education not as a static moral agenda, but as a dynamic curricular response to the ethical demands of the digital age.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive literature review design to systematically examine concepts, policies, and empirical findings related to the revitalization of character education curricula at the junior high school (SMP) level in the digital era. A library research approach was selected to enable comprehensive synthesis of theoretical and empirical insights across diverse sources, allowing for an in-depth understanding of curriculum challenges and opportunities within digitally mediated educational contexts.

The research was conducted through a structured and sequential procedure consisting of identification, screening, and analysis of relevant literature. Initially, the scope of the review was defined by focusing on character education, digital culture, and curriculum implementation at the SMP level. Subsequently, inclusion criteria were established, namely relevance to the research focus, academic credibility, and direct linkage to character education, digital literacy, Kurikulum Merdeka, or the Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Publications were limited to those produced within the last ten years to ensure alignment with recent technological developments and contemporary educational policy dynamics.

Data retrieval was supported by digital academic databases and journal portals, including Google Scholar, Garuda, and national journal repositories. These platforms facilitated systematic access to peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, official policy documents, and institutional reports. Keyword-based searches were employed using terms such as *character education*, *digital era*, *junior high school*, *Kurikulum Merdeka*, *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, and *digital literacy* to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature.

Data collection involved compiling and organizing selected literature that met the established criteria. The analysis process followed qualitative analytical stages comprising data reduction, thematic categorization, and synthesis of findings. Literature content was examined to identify recurring themes, patterns, and divergences related to the implementation of character education in intrakurikular, kokurikular particularly the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) and ekstrakurikular domains. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the challenges and opportunities emerging from digital culture, enabling the formulation of an integrated analytical framework for curriculum revitalization.

To ensure reliability and validity, the study applied source triangulation by comparing findings across different types of literature, including empirical studies, theoretical works, and policy documents. Consistency of interpretations was maintained through cross-checking themes and conclusions derived from multiple sources. This systematic comparison strengthened the credibility of the synthesized findings and supported the development of well-grounded recommendations for adaptive, contextual, and relevant character education curricula for junior high school students in the digital era.²¹

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Character Education at the Junior High School Level

The implementation of the character education curriculum at the junior high school (SMP) level in Indonesia aims to develop students who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded in accordance with Pancasila values. This implementation is legally anchored in Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which defines education as a deliberate and systematic effort to create learning conditions that enable students to actively develop their spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills required for personal, social, national, and civic life. Within this framework,

²¹ Devina Norlita et al., "Systematic Literature Review (Slr) : Pendidikan Karakter Di Sekolah Dasar," *JISPENDIORA Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Pendidikan Dan Humaniora* 2, no. 1 (2023): 209–19, <https://doi.org/10.56910/jispendiora.v2i1.743>.

character education is positioned as a core mandate rather than a supplementary component of schooling.

At the SMP level, character education is implemented through an integrated approach encompassing intrakurikular, kokurikular, and ekstrakurikular pathways, emphasizing the application of values in complex and contextual learning environments. First, character education is embedded within intrakurikular activities across all subjects, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Pancasila and Civic Education (PPKn), and Bahasa Indonesia. PAI holds a central role in shaping students' spiritual, moral, and social character, as character values are integrated across competencies in creed (aqidah), ethics (akhlak), jurisprudence (fiqh), and Islamic cultural history. Under both the 2013 Curriculum and the Kurikulum Merdeka, values aligned with the Profil Pelajar Pancasila such as religiosity, mutual cooperation, and integrity are enacted through reflective worship practices, social engagement, and community-based projects. Similarly, PPKn serves as a foundational subject for cultivating civic character, nationalism, and public morality through learning themes related to citizens' rights and responsibilities, democracy, and social diversity, thereby reinforcing values such as patriotism, responsibility, tolerance, social care, discipline, and cooperation.

Second, character education is implemented through the kokurikular pathway, which has evolved into a structured and innovative domain through the Projek Pengembangan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) within the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. P5 functions as a "character laboratory" in which Pancasila values are practiced rather than merely memorized, bridging the gap between cognitive understanding and affective or behavioral enactment. Through project-based learning, the six dimensions of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila faith and noble character, independence, collaboration, global diversity, critical reasoning, and creativity are translated into observable behaviors. For instance, the dimension of critical reasoning is assessed not only through test performance but through students' ability to analyze real community problems and propose project-based solutions. While P5 themes are nationally determined, their implementation is adapted to local school contexts to ensure relevance and authenticity.

Third, character education is strengthened through ekstrakurikular activities, which provide opportunities for students to develop interests, talents, and character beyond formal classroom instruction. Extracurricular programs such as scouting (Pramuka), which is often compulsory, foster independence, discipline, and cooperation through structured individual and group tasks. Sports activities, including futsal and volleyball, cultivate teamwork and sportsmanship, while student organizations such as OSIS and MPK represent authentic spaces for leadership development, organizational independence, and social responsibility. Through these organizations, students are trained to make decisions under pressure, manage budgets, and respond to criticism, thereby reinforcing integrity, accountability, and assertiveness. Moreover, student leaders are expected to serve as role models, reinforcing consistent disciplinary and ethical behavior under sustained social observation.

The Impact of the Digital Era on Junior High School Students' Character

The digital era has brought profound changes to students' character formation, often reshaping values such as discipline, cooperation, and respect through the proliferation of instant and individualistic digital cultures. On one hand, digitalization offers substantial opportunities for creativity, knowledge access, and collaborative learning through online platforms. On the other hand, it introduces serious challenges to moral development, necessitating proactive educator involvement in guiding students' ethical and character growth amid rapid technological change. Character education in the digital era must therefore adopt creative, adaptive, and contextually relevant approaches that position technology as a tool for personal development rather than merely a source of entertainment or information.

One of the most prominent challenges is unrestricted access to unfiltered information. The internet enables rapid information consumption, yet not all accessible content is educational or constructive. Exposure to misinformation, hate speech, and harmful digital content can negatively influence students' character development. Nevertheless, digital technology also produces significant positive impacts when accompanied by appropriate guidance and strong digital literacy. Technology enhances

creativity and innovation by enabling students to express ideas through design applications, digital videos, and coding platforms. Empirical findings demonstrate that tools such as Canva can effectively foster students' digital creativity and support the production of high-quality visual learning materials. Additionally, technology can reinforce religiosity, independence, and intellectual curiosity when used to access educational and value-oriented digital content.

Digital platforms also strengthen cooperation and mutual assistance through collaborative learning tools such as Google Classroom, Zoom, and WhatsApp groups. One of the most strategic benefits of digitalization is the enhancement of digital literacy and online ethics. With appropriate mentoring, students learn to evaluate information credibility, identify hoaxes, and practice ethical online communication. Studies indicate that digital literacy significantly influences students' character development, particularly in communication ethics and integrity. Consequently, positive character values including creativity, religiosity, independence, collaboration, responsibility, and ethical awareness can be cultivated through guided digital engagement.

Despite these advantages, the digital era also generates negative consequences when technology is used without supervision or adequate literacy. Excessive gadget use weakens discipline and self-control, as students may become easily irritated, disengaged, or even aggressive. Furthermore, reduced face-to-face interaction diminishes social skills, empathy, and communal values that traditionally develop through direct interpersonal engagement. Misuse of digital technology, including addiction to social media, online games, and non-educational entertainment, further undermines learning motivation and encourages imitation of negative online behaviors. Thus, while the digital era offers valuable opportunities, it simultaneously poses substantial risks to students' discipline, empathy, integrity, and self-regulation.

Challenges in Implementing Character Education at the SMP Level

The implementation of character education in the digital era encounters multifaceted challenges shaped by technological advancement, social dynamics, and institutional readiness. First, the challenge of balance requires educators to guide students in managing time and responsibility

across learning, social media use, and digital entertainment. Students must develop discipline and ethical awareness in digital engagement, yet many educators lack sufficient training to implement effective character education strategies in digital contexts, resulting in approaches that remain textual and insufficiently transformative.

Second, safety and security issues present critical challenges, including personal data protection, respect for others' privacy, and the ability to recognize inappropriate or harmful online content. Low awareness and sensitivity toward digital security increase students' vulnerability to data loss and identity theft, necessitating structured educational programs that foster responsible digital habits. Third, cyberbullying constitutes a serious ethical challenge, involving deliberate digital aggression through harmful content dissemination. Educators must address the psychological and moral consequences of cyberbullying by reinforcing values of integrity, responsibility, and compassion. Such behaviors may occur both within and beyond school environments, posing persistent risks to students' well-being.

Fourth, copyright violations and plagiarism represent ongoing challenges in digital learning environments. Students must be educated on intellectual property rights and ethical content usage, as plagiarism may occur intentionally or unintentionally due to limited understanding of proper citation practices.

Strategies for Revitalizing the Character Education Curriculum in the Digital Era

Revitalizing the character education curriculum at the SMP level requires comprehensive and integrated strategies. First, digital literacy should be systematically embedded within character competencies, encompassing ethical communication, data privacy management, information evaluation, and digital footprint awareness. Digital literacy thus functions as a bridge between technological proficiency and moral character development, requiring curriculum indicators that address both offline and online behavior.

Second, strengthening project-based learning within P5 is essential for meaningful character formation. Digitally oriented projects—such as anti-bullying campaigns, digital portfolios, educational comics, and innovative

learning media enable students to internalize values through creative production and reflective practice. Third, enhancing teacher competence is critical, as educators must serve as digital role models and facilitators of ethical technology use. Continuous professional development in digital pedagogy, media ethics, and character assessment is necessary to ensure effective guidance.

Fourth, character assessment systems should be revitalized through authentic and digital-based evaluation methods, including electronic portfolios, self-reflection, peer assessment, and digital progress tracking, thereby improving transparency, objectivity, and accountability. Fifth, strengthening collaboration with families and communities is essential, as character formation extends beyond formal schooling. Synergistic partnerships between schools, parents, and communities enable consistent character reinforcement across both physical and digital environments.

In summary, revitalizing character education in the digital era at the SMP level requires the integration of digital literacy into character competencies, meaningful digital project-based learning, sustained teacher development, authentic digital assessment mechanisms, and strong collaboration among schools, families, and communities. These strategies emphasize that the synergy between technology and character values must be intentionally designed and continuously sustained.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the urgency of revitalizing the character education curriculum at the junior high school (SMP) level in response to the transformative influence of digital culture. It analyzed current implementation practices, the impacts of digitalization on students' character development, emerging challenges, and strategic directions required to maintain the relevance of character education in contemporary contexts. The findings show that character education in Indonesian SMPs has been implemented through integrated intrakurikular, kokurikular—particularly the Projek Pengembangan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)—and ekstrakurikular pathways grounded in Pancasila values. While digital culture provides opportunities to enhance creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy, it also poses risks to students' discipline, self-control, empathy, and integrity when not accompanied by proper guidance.

Persistent challenges include limited teacher readiness, digital safety issues, cyberbullying, plagiarism, and assessment systems that remain focused on offline behavior. In response, this study highlights the need to integrate digital literacy into character competencies, strengthen digital project-based learning, enhance continuous teacher professional development, adopt authentic digital-based character assessment, and reinforce collaboration among schools, families, and communities. The study implies that character education in the digital era must be reconceptualized as a holistic integration of moral values, digital ethics, and civic responsibility, with curriculum policies explicitly embedding these dimensions. As a literature-based study, this research is limited by the absence of empirical data from school settings. Future research is therefore recommended to employ empirical approaches to evaluate the effectiveness and long-term impact of digitally integrated character education models in diverse educational contexts.

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