

Research Article

Character Education Within A Policy Framework: Bridging Conceptual Definitions and School Practices

Muhammad Zein*, Rival, Bahtiar, Santi Muhammadun, Isbat Talib

Postgraduate Program, IAIN Ternate, Maluku Utara, 97727, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: muhammadzein@iain-ternate.ac.id | Phone: +6281340137313

ABSTRACT

Character education is one of the strategic agendas in national education policy aimed at shaping students who are faithful, have noble character, and possess a complete personality amidst the challenges of globalization and digital transformation. The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to students' learning patterns and behavior, which on one hand opens up opportunities for competence development, but on the other hand raises ethical challenges and value degradation. This article aims to analyze character education within the framework of educational policy, focusing on the connection between concepts, policies, and implementation practices in schools during the digital era. This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study design and educational policy analysis enriched by the results of initial observations in the school environment. Data were obtained from national education policy documents, scientific literature, and previous research findings, and then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The research findings indicate that, conceptually and normatively, character education policies have been formulated comprehensively and are relevant to the challenges of the digital era. However, its implementation at the educational unit level still faces various obstacles, particularly in integrating character values into technology-based learning. This research emphasizes the importance of strengthening character education implementation strategies to align with the dynamics of digital education.

Keywords: Character Education; Education Policy; Digital Era

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of globalization and digital transformation has brought about fundamental changes in social and educational life (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). Unlimited access to information thru digital media and communication technology provides great opportunities for students' knowledge development, but at the same time also poses serious challenges to character formation (Sasson, I. y Miedijensky, 2022) Phenomena such as declining communication ethics in the digital space, increasing individualistic behavior, and weak self-control in technology use are indicative of a degradation of moral values among students, which requires serious attention from the education sector (Aleshkovski et al., 2020). Various previous studies have shown that the digital era not only affects how students learn, but also shapes their mindset, attitudes, and social behavior (Qayyum, 2018). Exposure to unfiltered digital content, instant culture, and the tendency to use social media without adequate ethical literacy have the potential to erode character values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy (Abumchukwu et al., 2025). This condition underscores the urgency of character education as a strategic instrument to equip students with the ability to filter information and act ethically amidst the digital globalization current (Mescher, 2020)

Character education in the context of the digital era cannot be separated from the national education goals that emphasize the formation of individuals who are faithful, have noble morals, and possess lofty personalities (Heni Julaika Putri et al., 2025). In Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, education is affirmed as a means of developing students' potential holistically, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. This principle serves as a normative foundation for strengthening character education in the face of increasingly complex social and technological changes (Walker et al., 2015a)

In response to these global and digital dynamics, the Indonesian government has formulated various character education policies, including through the Character Education Strengthening Program (PPK) and its implementation in the Merdeka Curriculum (Zainuddin et al., 2025). This policy explicitly places character values as an integral part of the learning process, which is manifested through the Pancasila Student Profile. These values are designed to shape students who are not only academically competent, but also have integrity and ethics in real and digital life (Suratmi et al., 2024). A

number of previous studies have revealed that, conceptually, character education policies have been designed comprehensively and are relevant to the demands of the digital age. Religious values, nationalism, integrity, independence, and mutual cooperation are considered capable of serving as moral filters in the face of the negative influences of globalization and digital technology (Walker et al., 2015a). However, these studies also note that the clarity of the policy concept has not been fully followed by implementation strategies that are adaptive to the digital context at the school level.

The implementation of character education policies in the digital age requires educators to be prepared to integrate character values into technology-based learning (Herak, 2025). Previous studies have shown that some teachers still focus on the technical aspects of learning when using technology, while the dimensions of digital ethics and character building have not been a major concern (Sirait, 2023). As a results, the use of technology in learning has not been fully directed towards strengthening the character of students. Initial observations in schools show that character education has been included in the vision, mission, and planning documents of schools, but its implementation in the digital age still faces various obstacles (Saminan et al., 2025). The use of gadgets and social media by students, for example, has not been fully balanced with character building such as digital discipline, responsibility, and communication ethics (Zvereva, 2023). This condition shows a gap between the policies formulated and actual practices in the school environment.

Previous studies have also confirmed that school leadership and school digital culture play a strategic role in the success of character education (Zvereva, 2023) Schools that are able to build a healthy digital culture, including monitoring the use of technology and instilling digital ethics, tend to be more successful in internalizing character values (Blau & Shamir-Inbal, 2017). Conversely, weak internal school regulations regarding the use of technology can increase the risk of student behavioral deviations (Aleshkovski et al., 2020). In addition to internal school factors, parental and community involvement has become increasingly important in the digital age (Nurhayati, 2019) Research shows that inconsistencies between the character values instilled in school and the practice of technology use in the family environment can hinder the character formation of students. Initial observations show that the synergy between schools and parents in monitoring and nurturing character in the digital space still needs to be strengthened (Berges Puyo, 2020).

From an educational policy perspective, the main challenge of character education in the digital age is not a lack of regulation, but rather the effectiveness of policy implementation at the school level. Several policy studies show that top-down policies have not been fully accompanied by guidance, training, and evaluation oriented towards strengthening digital character (Kong et al., 2014). This has caused schools to face difficulties in translating policies into contextual learning practices that are relevant to the digital lives of students (Gustafsson, 2022). Unlike most previous studies, which tend to focus on the conceptual aspects of character education or on implementation practices separately, this study positions character education within a policy framework as a space for dialogue between concepts, regulations, and school realities in the digital age. This article not only reads character education policies normatively, but also examines how these policies are translated, understood, and implemented in the context of the digital transformation of education. Thus, this article attempts to fill the limited research gap in comprehensively linking character education policies with the ethical and behavioral challenges of students in the digital space. Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze character education within the framework of education policy by focusing on the relationship between concepts, policies, and implementation practices in schools in the digital era.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review and educational policy analysis enriched with preliminary observations in the school environment (Jamal et al., 2013). This approach was chosen to analyze the relationship between the concept of character education, the national education policy framework, and its implementation in schools in the digital age. Research data were obtained from relevant educational policy documents, previous research results, and scientific literature discussing character education and the digital transformation of education (Hadi et al., 2025) Data collection was conducted through documentation studies and preliminary observations, while data analysis used content analysis techniques with stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Mezmir, 2020). This methodological approach enabled researchers to identify gaps between character education policies and their implementation in schools in a comprehensive and contextual manner.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Character Education in the Conceptual Framework and National Education Policy

An analysis of the national education policy framework shows that character education is a fundamental element in the Indonesian education system. The formulation of educational objectives in Law No. 20 of 2003 emphasizes that education is directed at holistic human development, encompassing spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social dimensions. The emphasis on shaping the character and personality of students in these regulations shows that character education is positioned as the philosophical orientation of national education, not merely as an additional technical or administrative program.

In line with this normative framework, the Character Education Strengthening (PPK) policy was designed as a strategic response to social changes and global dynamics that influence student behavior. A number of educational policy studies confirm that PPK represents a paradigm shift in education from an approach that focuses on cognitive achievement to one that emphasizes a balance between knowledge, attitude, and action. Character education in this policy is understood as a process of internalizing values that takes place continuously through all educational activities, both inside and outside the classroom. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum further emphasizes the position of character education through the construction of the Pancasila Student Profile as a framework of ideal values and competencies for students. This profile not only formulates normative moral values, but also integrates critical thinking, creativity, and independence as part of the students' character. A number of previous studies have emphasized that this approach reflects efforts to harmonize character education and the demands of 21st century competencies, so that character is not separated from the intellectual and social skills of students.

In the context of digital transformation, the character values formulated in national education policy have become increasingly relevant. Various studies show that the digital environment has the potential to shape instant thinking, weaken self-control, and blur social ethical boundaries if not balanced with strong character education. Therefore, the values of religiosity, integrity, independence, mutual cooperation, and nationalism are positioned as ethical foundations to guide students in responding to the flow of information, virtual interactions, and global dynamics in a responsible and civilized manner. These findings indicate that, conceptually and regulatory, character education in national education policy has been designed comprehensively and adaptively to meet the challenges of the digital age. However, a number of critical studies also show that the conceptual strength of the policy does not automatically guarantee effective implementation at the school level. The clarity of the values and objectives of character education in national policy requires adequate institutional and pedagogical capabilities so that character education does not stop at the normative level, but is realized in contextual and meaningful educational practices for students in the digital era

Implementation of Character Education in Schools in the Digital Age

A review of the literature and initial observations in school environments show that the implementation of character education in the digital age still faces a number of structural and pedagogical limitations (Lavasani & Khandan, 2011). Although character education has been integrated into the vision, mission, and planning documents of schools, its application in technology-based learning practices tends not to be systematically internalized. Character education more often appears in the form of general habits and normative slogans, while its integration into digital learning strategies has not been explicitly and measurably designed. A number of previous studies indicate that the use of technology in learning at school is more oriented towards increasing efficiency and variety in the methods of delivering material. Ethical and digital character dimensions, such as responsibility in the use of technology, academic honesty, and communication ethics in virtual spaces, have not been the main focus of learning planning. This condition shows that digital transformation in schools has not been fully accompanied by pedagogical transformation that places character education as a substantial goal.

From the educators' perspective, the analysis results show a gap between technical mastery of learning technology and pedagogical skills in integrating character values. Some teachers have utilized digital platforms and technology-based learning media, but their implementation has not been consistently directed at building ethical and reflective awareness among students. This finding is in line with studies that mention that teachers' digital competencies often develop faster than their pedagogical and ethical competencies in the context of digital learning. In addition, the digital culture of schools also influences the effectiveness of character education implementation. Schools that do not yet have clear internal regulations regarding the ethical use of devices and digital media tend to experience difficulties in controlling the digital behavior of students. This condition shows that character education in the digital age does not only depend on classroom learning practices, but also on the formation of a school ecosystem that supports the consistent internalization of character values.

The Gap between Character Education Policy and Practice in the Digital Age

The results of policy analysis and preliminary empirical findings indicate a gap between the formulation of character education policy and the reality of its implementation at the school level. Comprehensive character education policies designed at the national level tend to be normative and general, while schools are faced with diverse social, cultural, and technological contexts that require a more adaptive implementation approach. This gap is one of the factors that hinders the optimization of character education in the digital age. A number of educational policy studies show that a top-down approach to policy implementation is often not accompanied by adequate assistance, whether in the form of training, operational guidelines, or sustainable evaluation mechanisms (Fraser et al., 2006). As a results, schools tend to interpret character education policies administratively, without being followed by a substantial transformation of learning practices. Character education then has the potential to be reduced to the fulfillment of planning documents, rather than a process of internalizing values that are alive in the daily lives of students.

This gap between policy and practice is also reinforced by the limited synergy between schools, families, and communities in character building in the digital space. Several studies show that inconsistencies in values and parenting patterns between school and family environments can weaken the effectiveness of character education. In the context of the digital age, the lack of coordination in monitoring technology use further widens the gap between the character values formulated in policy and the actual behavior of students.

In addition to structural policy factors, the results of the study also show that there are problems with the education evaluation system, which is not yet fully aligned with the objectives of character education. A number of studies confirm that learning evaluation in schools is still dominated by the measurement of cognitive aspects, while character dimensions, especially digital character, do not yet have operational and standardized indicators. This condition causes character education to tend to be positioned as a hidden curriculum, making its success difficult to measure objectively and sustainably. Other relevant findings show that character education in school practice is often reduced to symbolic and ceremonial activities. Character education is manifested in the form of slogans, rules and regulations, or incidental activities, but has not been fully integrated into the daily learning process. This phenomenon shows that normative character education policies have not been fully internalized as a pedagogical paradigm by educational units.

In addition, policy studies also reveal the limitations of schools and educators as implementers of character education policies. Although teachers understand character values conceptually, not all educators have the pedagogical competence to integrate these values into technology-based learning. The fragmentation of responsibilities between schools, families, and communities in character building in the digital age further widens the gap between character education policy and practice. This finding confirms that character education needs to be understood as a dynamic and contextual policy process, rather than a static regulatory product. The gap between policy and practice highlights the importance of ongoing dialogue between policy makers, education practitioners, and other stakeholders. Thus, character education can serve as a bridge connecting the conceptual framework of policy with relevant and meaningful educational practices in the digital age.

3.2 Discussion

The results of this study indicate that character education within the framework of national education policy has been formulated comprehensively and based on a holistic education paradigm. The formulation of national education objectives emphasizes that character building is an integral part of the education process, in line with the theoretical view that positions education as an effort to develop the whole person. Character education is not understood merely as the instillation of normative values, but as a process of internalizing values that are manifested in the habits of thinking, behaving, and acting of students in social life, including in the increasingly dominant digital space. Research findings indicate that character education policies, both through the Character Education Strengthening Program and the Pancasila Student Profile in the Merdeka Curriculum, have adopted a value framework that is relevant to the demands of globalization and digital transformation. The values of religiosity, integrity, independence, mutual cooperation, and nationalism are consistent with character education theory, which emphasizes a balance between moral, social, and intellectual dimensions. From this perspective, national education policy has provided a strong conceptual foundation for the development of character education that is adaptive to changing times (Solihin et al., 2020). However, the results of the study also show that the conceptual strength of the policy has not been fully implemented effectively at the educational unit level. In practice, character education in schools is still tends to be understood as an additional part of the learning process, rather than as a pedagogical paradigm that informs all educational activities. This phenomenon is in line with theoretical studies which state that normative and top-down education policies have the potential to experience a reduction in meaning when not accompanied by contextual and sustainable implementation strategies.

In the context of digital transformation, the challenges of implementing character education become even more complex. Contemporary character education theory emphasizes that the learning environment, including the digital environment, has a strategic role in shaping student behavior. The results of the study show that the use of technology in school learning is more directed at technical aspects and learning efficiency, while the dimensions of ethics and digital character have not been systematically integrated (Walker et al., 2015b). This condition indicates a gap between the idealism of character education as formulated in policy and the reality of technology-based learning practices. This gap can also be understood through the perspective of educational policy implementation theory, which emphasizes the importance of implementer capacity, clear operational guidelines, and consistent evaluation mechanisms. The findings show that character education is often reduced to symbolic and administrative activities, such as slogans, rules and regulations, or incidental activities, without being integrated into the daily learning process. In addition, the dominance of cognitive-oriented learning evaluation reinforces the position of character education as a hidden curriculum that is difficult to measure and evaluate systematically.

The results of the study also confirm that character education in the digital age cannot be separated from the broader context of the educational ecosystem. Character education theory emphasizes the importance of consistency of values between schools, families, and communities. However, the research findings show that the fragmentation of responsibilities among stakeholders remains an obstacle to character building in students. The lack of synergy between the

values instilled in schools and the use of technology in the family environment has the potential to weaken the effectiveness of character education, especially in the digital space, which is difficult to control institutionally. Theoretically and in terms of policy, this discussion reinforces the view that character education needs to be positioned as a systemic and contextual process that requires ongoing dialogue between educational concepts, policies, and practices. Effective character education in the digital age cannot rely solely on regulations and value formulations, but requires pedagogical transformation, strengthening of school culture, and integration of digital ethics into the entire learning process. Thus, character education can function optimally as a strategic instrument in shaping students who are ethical, responsible, and have good character amid global and digital dynamics.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that character education within the framework of national education policy has been formulated conceptually and normatively in a fairly comprehensive manner. National education policy, ranging from the National Education System Law to the implementation of Strengthening Character Education and the Pancasila Student Profile in the Merdeka Curriculum, demonstrates the state's strong commitment to making character building the main orientation of education. The formulated value framework is relevant to the challenges of globalization and digital transformation that influence the behavior and mindset of students. However, this study found that the conceptual and regulatory strength has not been fully followed by effective implementation at the educational unit level. Character education in schools still tends to be positioned as a complement to learning and has not been systematically integrated into technology-based learning practices. The use of digital technology in learning focuses more on technical and cognitive aspects, while the ethical and digital character dimensions have not been a major concern in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning. The gap between character education policy and practice shows that the main challenge lies not in a lack of regulation, but in the ability of the education system to translate policy into contextual and meaningful practice. Limited educator capacity, the dominance of cognitive evaluation, weak school digital culture, and a lack of synergy between schools, families, and communities are factors that widen the gap between policy objectives and their implementation. Thus, character education needs to be understood as a systemic, adaptive, and sustainable policy and pedagogical process. Strengthening character education in the digital age requires the integration of values into the entire education ecosystem, the development of educators' competencies in digital character education, and policy evaluation that is oriented towards the internalization of values, not merely administrative achievements. This conclusion emphasizes that the success of character education is not only determined by the clarity of concepts and policies, but by the ability of schools and all stakeholders to realize them in educational practices that are real and relevant to the lives of students.

REFERENCES

- Abumchukwu, E. R., Chidimma, E. J. A., George, A. O., Uche, O. B., Ijeoma, N. H., Ukeje, I. O., & Amarachi, U. M. (2025). Transiting from Social Media interaction to Character Formation: implications for Behaviour Modification and Personality Development. *Nigerian Journal of Social Psychology*, 8(1), 48–72.
- Aleshkovski, I., Bondarenko, V., & Ilyin, I. (2020). Global values, digital transformation and development strategy for global society: Conceptual framework. *International Journal of Foresight and Innovation Policy*, 14(2–4), 120–134. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijfip.2020.111243>
- Berges Puyo, J. G. (2020). A Value and Character Educational Model: Repercussions for Students, Teachers, and Families. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 4(1), 100–115. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jeve.2020.7>
- Blau, I., & Shamir-Inbal, T. (2017). Digital competences and long-term ICT integration in school culture: The perspective of elementary school leaders. *Education and Information Technologies*, 22(3), 769–787. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-015-9456-7>
- Fraser, E. D. G., Dougill, A. J., Mabee, W. E., Reed, M., & McAlpine, P. (2006). Bottom up and top down: Analysis of participatory processes for sustainability indicator identification as a pathway to community empowerment and sustainable environmental management. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 78(2), 114–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2005.04.009>
- Gustafsson, U. (2022). of National School Digitalisation Policy. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27, 11741–11758.
- Hadi, Y., Kholis, N., Remanita, Y., & Harta, L. I. (2025). Systematic Literature Review on Character Education Strategies in Primary and Secondary Schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 3(2), 321–340. <https://doi.org/10.70376/jerp.v3i2.389>
- Heni Julaika Putri, Eva Dewi, & Via Novelia Najmi. (2025). Character Education Based on Al-Gazālī's Spirituality: A Solution to Moral Crisis in the Digital Era. *Bulletin of Indonesian Islamic Studies*, 4(1), 162–179. <https://doi.org/10.51214/biis.v4i1.1499>

- Herak, R. (2025). Character Education in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities Amidst Technological Developments. *MSJ: Majority Science Journal*, 3(2), 245–252. <https://doi.org/10.61942/msj.v3i2.367>
- Jamal, F., Fletcher, A., Harden, A., Wells, H., Thomas, J., & Bonell, C. (2013). The school environment and student health: A systematic review and meta-ethnography of qualitative research. *BMC Public Health*, 13(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-798>
- Kong, S. C., Chan, T., Griffin, P., Hoppe, U., Huang, R., Kinshuk, Looi, C. K., Milrad, M., Norris, C., Nussbaum, M., Sharples, M., So, W. M. W., Soloway, E., & Yu, S. (2014). International Forum of Educational Technology & Society E-learning in School Education in the Coming 10 Years for Developing 21st Century Skills : Critical Research Issues and Policy Implications Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article: *International Forum of Educational Technology & Society*, 17(1), 7078.
- Lavasani, M. G., & Khandan, F. (2011). Transformation model for character education of students. *Cypriot Journal of Education*, 2(5), 61–74.
- Mescher, M. (2020). The Moral Impact of Digital Devices. *Journal of Moral Theology*, 9(2), 65–93.
- Mezmir, E. A. (2020). Qualitative Data Analysis: An Overview of Data Reduction, Data Display and Interpretation. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(21), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.7176/rhss/10-21-02>
- Mohamed Hashim, M. A., Tlemsani, I., & Matthews, R. (2022). Higher education strategy in digital transformation. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27(August 2021), 3171–3195. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10739-1>
- Nurhayati, S. (2019). Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education for Family Empower. *Jurnal EMPOWERMENT; Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Pendidikan Luar Sekolah*, 10(2252), 54–62.
- Qayyum, A. (2018). Student help-seeking attitudes and behaviors in a digital era. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-018-0100-7>
- Saminan, S., Razali, R., & Silahuddin, S. (2025). Bridging Technology and Tradition: Strategies for Integrating Education and Character Development in Aceh's Schools in the Era of Society 5.0. *Preprints.Org*, 0–20. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202506.0403.v1>
- Sasson, I. y Miedijensky, S. (2022). Education Sciences. *Education Sciences*, 12(1–13), 10–25. <https://doi.org/10.3390/%0Aeducsci13121166>
- Sirait, I. (2023). Character Education in Islamic Education. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Indonesia (JPAAI)*, 4(1), 5–8. <https://doi.org/10.37251/jpaii.v4i1.643>
- Solihin, I., Hasanah, A., & Fajrussalam, H. (2020). Core Ethical Values of Character Education Based on Islamic Values in Islamic Boarding Schools. *International Journal on Advanced Science, Education, and Religion*, 3(2), 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.33648/ijoaser.v3i2.51>
- Suratmi, S., Hartono, H., & Diana. (2024). Literacy Character Education Planning to Strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile through Local Culture in Early Childhood Education. *Golden Age: Jurnal Ilmiah Tumbuh Kembang Anak Usia Dini*, 9(1), 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jga.2024.91-13>
- Walker, D. I., Roberts, M. P., & Kristjánsson, K. (2015a). Towards a new era of character education in theory and in practice. *Educational Review*, 67(1), 79–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.827631>
- Walker, D. I., Roberts, M. P., & Kristjánsson, K. (2015b). Towards a new era of character education in theory and in practice. *Educational Review*, 67(1), 79–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.827631>
- Zainuddin, Z., Nafisah, A., & Muttaqin, M. (2025). Transforming Character Education through the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 5(3), 560–572. [https://doi.org/10.58557/\(ijeh\).v5i3.346](https://doi.org/10.58557/(ijeh).v5i3.346)
- Zvereva, E. (2023). Digital ethics in higher education: Modernizing moral values for effective communication in cyberspace. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.30935/ojcm/13033>