

Value Clarification Technique as a Character Education Strategy in Social Studies Learning for Elementary School Students

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Abstract

The complexity of contemporary social challenges demands character education that not only transmits values but also deeply internalizes moral values in elementary school students, particularly through Social Studies (IPS) learning. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Value Clarification Technique (VCT) in strengthening moral knowing and tolerance attitudes, map variations in implementation practices, and identify factors influencing its successful application. The method employed is a systematic literature review (SLR) using the PRISMA protocol, with primary research articles sourced from Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Portal Garuda databases for the period 2021–2025. Twenty articles meeting the inclusion criteria were thematically analyzed. The results show that VCT consistently and significantly enhances students' moral reasoning, tolerance, empathy, and responsibility through a structured value reflection mechanism. Implementation variations include integration with innovative media (such as Pop Up Books, puzzles), project-based assessments, and structured philosophical dialogues. The success of VCT implementation is influenced by teachers' pedagogical competence, students' initial moral readiness, family environment support, duration of exposure, and the quality of presented moral dilemmas. Practical implications emphasize the importance of teacher training and VCT integration in character education curricula. This study affirms VCT as a holistic and adaptive approach to strengthening elementary students' character, while recommending further experimental and longitudinal research to examine its long-term impact.

Keywords

Value Clarification Technique, Moral Knowing, Tolerance Attitude, Character Education, Systematic Literature Review (SLR).



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INTRODUCTION

Character education currently occupies a strategic position within global education systems, particularly at the elementary school level, which serves as the primary foundation for shaping students' personalities and moral identities. Social Studies learning at the elementary level plays a central role in internalizing moral values and fostering tolerance, both of which are essential for building harmonious life in a pluralistic society. The increasing complexity of contemporary social challenges—ranging from the intense currents of globalization and cultural heterogeneity to the rising frequency of intergroup interactions—demands learning approaches that not only transfer knowledge but also deeply facilitate value internalization among students. The phenomena of intolerance, horizontal conflict, and signs of moral degradation among the younger generation further underscore the urgency of strengthening the moral dimension within the learning process, especially during the crucial stage of character development in elementary education (Mustoip et al., 2023).

Previous research has extensively discussed the implementation of various character education approaches in elementary schools, including the use of conventional methods that tend to be indoctrinative and teacher-centered. However, empirical findings reveal that such methods often result merely in rote moral knowledge, lacking critical reflection skills and the ability to apply values in real-life situations. As a consequence, students often lack moral resilience and social sensitivity when confronted with value dilemmas in a diverse society. The Value Clarification Technique (VCT) has increasingly been highlighted as a pedagogical alternative, offering a process of value clarification through active, reflective, and contextual learning experiences—such as moral dilemma discussions, case analyses, and personal reflection—that encourage students to independently explore, analyze, and internalize moral values (Astutik, 2023).

Nonetheless, existing studies are generally partial in scope, often focusing only on improvements in cognitive learning outcomes or the formation of specific attitudes, without examining the complex interconnection between moral knowing and tolerance as an integrated process in character education (Dabdoub et al., 2024). Furthermore, most prior research consists of individual case studies with limited geographical and cultural contexts, thus failing to provide a comprehensive overview of the patterns, mechanisms, and determinant factors influencing the success of VCT implementation in various educational settings. As a result, there remains a lack of holistic understanding regarding how VCT can be optimized as a systematic and responsive strategy

for developing students' moral and social competencies.

The novelty of this study lies in the application of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to integrate empirical findings from diverse studies, thereby comprehensively identifying patterns of VCT effectiveness in elementary Social Studies learning. Unlike conventional narrative reviews, this SLR employs a rigorous methodological protocol to trace, select, and synthesize empirical evidence related to the mechanisms of VCT in facilitating the construction of moral knowledge and the transformation of tolerance attitudes. This approach also enables the exploration of variations in practice, contextual conditions, and moderating factors that influence the success of VCT implementation in diverse educational environments (Gkintoni & Dimakos, 2023).

The main objective of this research is to systematically analyze the effectiveness of the Value Clarification Technique in strengthening moral knowing and tolerance attitudes among elementary school students in Social Studies learning. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) analyze the effectiveness of VCT in building students' moral reasoning and tolerance attitudes; (2) identify variations in VCT implementation practices found across different Social Studies learning contexts; and (3) map the factors influencing the success of VCT application at the elementary level. This study is also directed toward formulating evidence-based strategic recommendations for the development of relevant, applicable, and character-oriented Social Studies instruction.

This research holds substantial theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretically, the findings are expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of value education theory and moral pedagogy at the elementary level, expanding the understanding of effective value internalization mechanisms through the VCT approach and strengthening the conceptual foundation of reflective, experience-based character education. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference and evidence-based implementation guide for teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers in designing Social Studies learning strategies that foster sustained moral knowing and tolerance attitudes (Davidson et al., 2008; Schuitema et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2022).

METHOD

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol to ensure a transparent and standardized process of identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant literature

(Page et al., 2021). The SLR design was selected to gain a comprehensive and integrative understanding of the effectiveness of the Value Clarification Technique (VCT) model in strengthening moral knowing and tolerance attitudes within Social Studies (IPS) instruction at the elementary school level. Literature searches were systematically conducted across six leading electronic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, as well as national sources such as Portal Garuda and the Indonesian Publication Index, with publication years restricted to 2021–2025 to ensure the currency of the findings reviewed.

The search terms employed a combination of Boolean operators and included “value clarification technique”, “VCT”, “moral knowing”, “moral understanding”, “tolerance”, “elementary education”, “primary school”, “social studies”, and their Indonesian equivalents such as “teknik klarifikasi nilai”, “pengetahuan moral”, “sikap toleransi”, “sekolah dasar”, and “pembelajaran IPS”. Inclusion criteria comprised primary research articles—observational studies, experiments, quasi-experiments, action research, or case studies—that explicitly examined the implementation of VCT in Social Studies (or equivalent subjects) at the elementary school level, focusing on the development of moral knowing and tolerance attitudes as primary variables. Eligible articles had to be published in either Indonesian or English, have accessible full texts, and present clear research methodologies with measurable results. Exclusion criteria were applied to editorials, opinion pieces, book reviews, duplicate publications, and studies that did not specifically discuss VCT or did not measure the dimensions of moral knowing or tolerance attitudes.

The literature selection procedure followed four main PRISMA flow diagram stages: (1) identification of articles via database searching, (2) removal of duplicates using reference management software, (3) screening of titles and abstracts, and (4) eligibility assessment through full-text review, culminating in the inclusion of final articles meeting all criteria. Each selection stage was independently conducted by two researchers to minimize potential bias, and in cases of disagreement, consensus was reached through discussion or by involving a third reviewer (Hong et al., 2018). The methodological quality of included articles was appraised using relevant critical appraisal tools, such as the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for observational studies and the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool for experimental studies.

Data extraction was performed systematically using a matrix format, covering variables such as author, year, study location, study design, sample size and characteristics, description of VCT implementation, instruments for measuring moral knowing and tolerance attitudes, main findings,

key success factors, and reported research limitations. Data analysis was conducted narratively using a thematic approach, categorizing findings according to the dimensions of moral knowing (moral awareness, knowledge of moral values, moral reasoning) and tolerance attitudes (acceptance of differences, appreciation of diversity, readiness for cross-cultural interaction). The synthesis of results was presented descriptively and interpretatively to map the patterns of VCT effectiveness, variations in implementation practices, and factors influencing its success within elementary Social Studies education (Gough et al., 2017). All research procedures adhered to the principles of transparency, replicability, and scientific integrity, with careful consideration of ethical aspects in the use and reporting of secondary data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

A. Article Selection Process

The article selection process in this systematic review followed the PRISMA protocol to ensure methodological transparency and replicability. During the identification stage, 309 articles were collected from six major databases: Scopus (68 articles), Web of Science (52), ERIC (47), ScienceDirect (61), Google Scholar (53), and Portal Garuda (28). After duplicate elimination using reference management software, 207 unique articles remained. Title and abstract screening further selected 112 articles relevant to the topic of implementing the Value Clarification Technique (VCT) in elementary social studies (IPS) education.

Of the 112 articles, 56 were inaccessible in full-text or unavailable in the languages mastered by the researchers, resulting in 56 articles that could be fully reviewed. Through full-text eligibility assessment, 46 articles were excluded: 20 did not explicitly measure moral knowing, 16 did not assess tolerance attitudes, and 10 were excluded due to methodological reasons. Thus, 20 articles met all inclusion criteria and formed the core data set for this analysis.

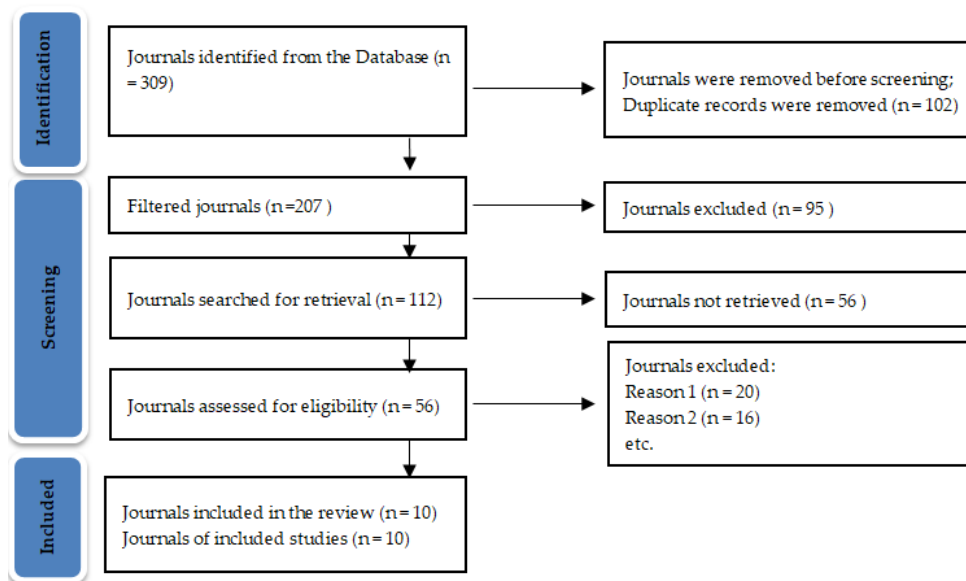


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart of Article Selection

B. Summary of Key Research Findings

Table 1. Main Findings of 20 Reviewed Articles

No	Author (Year)	Main Findings
1.	Maharani et al., 2023	Pluralism values increased from 54.8%–74.2% to 83.9%–90.3% (highly developed category)
2.	Doring et al., 2024	Value transmission occurs implicitly and explicitly via curriculum, school culture, and environment
3.	Widiana et al., 2020	VCT + project-based assessment resulted in higher civic learning outcomes than conventional models
4.	Jannah et al., 2025	Religious character, tolerance, and responsibility rose to a highly developed category
5.	Khairat et al., 2025	VCT-puzzle effective for students with high morality; conventional model better for low-morality students
6.	Lukomska, 2025	“Thick” ethical concepts require authentic interpretation and motivation
7.	Pratiwi et al., 2024	VCT post-test mean: 81.67; control: 72.14 (sig. 0.000 < 0.05)
8.	Nirmayani & Yudiana, 2025	Critical thinking 81.45 vs 72.30; social attitude 84.10 vs 76.80 (experiment vs. control)
9.	Rombout et al., 2024	Structured philosophical dialogue improved critical reasoning and moral value referencing
10.	Seran et al., 2022	Cognitive mastery 66.66% to 95%; tolerance 68.14% to 76%; psychomotor 67.98% to 86.5%
11.	Habibi et al., 2024	VCT + Pop Up Book increased students’ awareness of life values
12.	Febriany et al., 2021	VCT improved motivation & moral value awareness in civic education
13.	Hidayati & Minsih, 2023	Good character rose by 45% in line with the five Pancasila principles after VCT
14.	Karunia &	VCT increased tolerance, discipline, empathy,

	Mahpudin, 2023	responsibility, and learning motivation
15.	Nisa et al., 2020	Significant differences between VCT, PBL, direct instruction on social problem-solving ($p=0.01$)
16.	Ofianto & Ningsih, 2020	VCT significant for student character in history ($t=3.888$, $\text{sig}=0.000<0.05$)
17.	Susilowati et al., 2023	Moral knowing developed through both formal and non-formal learning (extracurriculars, routines)
18.	Wibowo et al., 2022	Responsibility increased from 79% (pre-cycle) to 80% (cycle I), 86% (cycle II)
19.	Widiana et al., 2022	VCT significant for critical thinking skills in grade IV ($\text{sig}=0.000<0.05$)
20.	Yusrizal & Hariati, 2022	VCT positive for post-pandemic character; high national insight → better character

C. Synthesis of Thematic Findings

1. Effectiveness of VCT in Strengthening Moral Knowing

Analysis of the 20 articles shows that VCT implementation consistently produces significant improvements in students' moral knowing. Quantitative findings, such as from Pratiwi et al. (2024), indicate that the experimental group's post-test score reached 81.67, higher than the control group's 72.14 ($\text{sig. } 0.000 < 0.05$). Nirmayani & Yudianta (2025) reported increased critical thinking in the VCT group (81.45) compared to the control (72.30). Widiana (2022) also confirmed the positive impact of VCT on students' critical thinking through statistical testing ($\text{sig. } 0.000$).

VCT implementation enables value clarification through moral dilemma analysis, allowing students to identify and reflect on their value systems. Hidayati & Minsih (2023) recorded a 45% increase in good character after structured VCT intervention. The strengthening of moral knowing was also found in both formal and non-formal school activities (Susilowati et al., 2023).

2. Strengthening Tolerance Attitudes through VCT

The tolerance attitude dimension also increased through VCT implementation in elementary social studies classes. Seran et al. (2022) reported an increase in tolerance from 68.14% to 76%. Maharani et al. (2023) demonstrated a rise in pluralism values to 83.9%–90.3% (highly developed category). Karunia & Mahpudin (2023) stated that VCT improved tolerance, discipline, empathy, responsibility, and learning motivation. Nirmayani & Yudianta (2025) found that the average social attitude score in the VCT group (84.10) was higher than the control (76.80). The transformation in tolerance was facilitated by reflective activities, group discussions, and value dialogue, familiarizing students with pluralism and social diversity.

3. Variations in VCT Implementation

Based on the analysis of twenty articles, it was found that variations in the implementation of VCT at the elementary level are highly diverse in terms of methods, media, and integration with other instructional models. VCT can be integrated with innovative media such as Pop Up Books, as evidenced by Habibi et al. (2024), who reported increased awareness of life values among students using this medium. Furthermore, Khairat et al., 2025 demonstrated the effectiveness of using puzzles as a value clarification tool, especially for students with high levels of morality. The integration of VCT with project-based assessment has also been proven to improve learning outcomes, as shown by Widiana et al. (2022). Meanwhile, the combination of VCT with structured philosophical discussion, as reported by Rombout et al. (2024), was able to develop critical reasoning and reinforce students' reference to moral values. These variations in implementation cover not only formal classroom learning, but also non-formal learning such as extracurricular activities and value routines in the school environment, as identified by Susilowati et al. (2023). In addition, VCT can be flexibly applied at various educational levels and across subjects, including social studies, civics, and history, each showing effectiveness in strengthening both moral knowing and tolerance.

4. Determinant Factors of VCT Success

The successful implementation of VCT in elementary social studies is determined by several interrelated factors. First, students' moral readiness is a key determinant, with students who have a high initial level of morality gaining greater benefits from VCT, as reported by Khairat et al. (2025). Furthermore, students' national insight also moderates the effectiveness of VCT in character formation, as found by Yusrizal and Hariati (2022). The family environment plays a significant role in reinforcing the internalization of values obtained from school learning, as identified by Widiana et al. (2022). The duration and consistency of exposure to VCT also influence the depth of value internalization, with progressive increases in responsibility noted in Wibowo et al., (2022). Another crucial factor is the quality of moral dilemmas used in the value clarification process, with authentic and relevant dilemmas being more effective in encouraging deep reflection and active student engagement, as described by Jannah et al. (2025). In addition to these factors, teachers' pedagogical competence in facilitating value discussions, posing probing questions, and managing classroom dynamics also contribute significantly to optimizing learning outcomes based

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Results and Relationship with Previous Literature

The results of this study, obtained through a systematic literature review of 20 primary articles, demonstrate that the implementation of the Value Clarification Technique (VCT) consistently and significantly strengthens moral knowledge and tolerance attitudes among elementary school students in Social Studies (IPS) learning. Both quantitative and qualitative data synthesis confirms that VCT-based interventions meaningfully improve scores in moral knowing and tolerance, both in formal and non-formal learning settings. These findings support and extend empirical understanding as previously reported in other studies (e.g Habibi et al., 2024; Hidayati & Minsih, 2023; Jannah et al., 2025; Karunia & Mahpudin, 2023; Maharani et al., 2023; Nirmayani & Yudiana, 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2024; Rombout et al., 2024; Seran et al., 2022; Widiana et al., 2022).

Specifically, the data show an average increase in pluralism values from 54.8%–74.2% to 83.9%–90.3% (Maharani et al., 2023), a rise in post-test moral knowledge scores in the VCT experimental group (81.67) compared to the control group (72.14) (Pratiwi et al., 2024), and an increase in tolerance dimensions from 68.14% to 76% (Seran et al., 2022). This improvement is not only statistical but also impacts the quality of value internalization, as students become more reflective, critical, and empathetic when facing moral dilemmas or social differences in the school environment.

These results align with the findings of Widiana et al. (2022), who emphasized that the integration of VCT with project-based assessments in civics learning yields higher learning outcomes than conventional models. Similar observations were made in the development of religious character, tolerance, and responsibility, which rose to the “highly developed” category following VCT intervention (Jannah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the VCT-puzzle method was found to be highly effective for students with initially high morality, while conventional models were more optimal for students with lower moral starting points (Khairat et al., 2025), indicating the importance of personalization and differentiation in VCT implementation. On the other hand, the use of innovative media such as Pop Up Books (Habibi et al., 2024) and integration with structured philosophical discussions (Rombout et al., 2024) further enrich value learning experiences, affirming the flexibility of VCT across various contexts and instructional media.

Relevance to Theoretical Foundations of VCT and Moral Education

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the foundation of VCT rooted in moral development theory and humanistic psychology, particularly in strengthening moral autonomy, reflective value-based decision-making, and the development of authentic tolerance. The core principles of VCT—active, explorative, and dialogical value clarification—have proven to be effective mechanisms for building deep moral knowing.

Value reflection through authentic moral dilemmas, group discussions, and dialogical experiences within VCT enables students not only to understand values cognitively but also to internalize and consistently motivate moral behavior (Hidayati & Minsih, 2023; Susilowati et al., 2023). This positions VCT as the antithesis of indoctrinative approaches, which tend to produce rote moral knowledge lacking moral resilience in real-world practice.

Meanwhile, the development of tolerance attitudes within VCT occurs by habituating students to accept diversity, appreciate different perspectives, and engage in social interactions across backgrounds. The findings of Karunia & Mahpudin (2023), Maharani et al. (2023) and Nirmayani & Yudiana (2025) further affirm that VCT can foster pluralism, inclusive social attitudes, as well as increase empathy and responsibility within the learning community.

Contribution to the Literature and Scientific Advancement

This research provides significant contributions to the literature on character education and moral pedagogy at the elementary level, particularly through three main aspects:

1. **Integration of Cognitive and Affective Dimensions.** Unlike previous studies that often separated the aspects of moral knowledge and tolerance, this study emphasizes that VCT is effective as a holistic model facilitating both dimensions integratively. The enhancement of moral knowledge and tolerance occurs through simultaneous, mutually reinforcing learning mechanisms.
2. **Mapping Implementation Variations and Contextual Adaptation**

By examining variations in VCT practices, this study shows that VCT is highly flexible and can be adapted through innovative media (Pop Up Books, puzzles), formats (project-based assessment, philosophical discussions), and across subjects. These findings enrich the literature on context-responsive models of VCT implementation tailored to students' needs.

3. **Identification of Success Factors**

This research maps out the key factors for successful VCT implementation, including students' initial moral readiness, national insight, family environment, duration and consistency of

VCT exposure, quality of moral dilemmas, and teachers' pedagogical competence. This mapping contributes to the development of evidence-based and locally contextualized VCT implementation models.

Practical Implications for Character Education in Elementary Schools

1. Implications for Teachers and Curriculum Developers

The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening teachers' pedagogical competence in facilitating reflective, dialogic, and non-indoctrinative value learning. Teachers need intensive training in designing moral dilemmas, value clarification techniques, and managing inclusive value discussions to ensure effective value internalization. Continuous professional development should become a priority in teacher capacity-building programs.

2. Implications for Curriculum Development

VCT is highly compatible with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile. Integrating VCT into Social Studies can be a primary strategy for internalizing the noble values of Pancasila, faith, noble character, and global diversity. The curriculum should provide space for value exploration through reflective, dialogic, and socially relevant project-based activities connected to students' real-life experiences.

3. Implications for Educational Policy

Policymakers need to encourage the systematic integration of VCT into character education programs at the elementary level. Resource allocation for the development of moral dilemma banks, innovative learning media, and internal value monitoring and evaluation systems is crucial. Moreover, cross-sector collaboration (schools, families, communities) must be strengthened to create a holistic and sustainable character education ecosystem.

Research Limitations

Despite its significant contributions, this study has several limitations that must be critically acknowledged. First, the literature analyzed was limited to publications from 2021 to 2025, leading to potential temporal bias and constraints in assessing the long-term impact of VCT implementation. Second, the predominance of studies from Indonesia makes these findings most relevant to the national education context, while generalizations to other education systems and cultures require further validation. Third, the heterogeneity of research designs—ranging from experiments and quasi-experiments to case studies and action research—results in varying methodological quality and measurement instruments. This limits the possibility of conducting quantitative meta-analysis

and necessitates narrative synthesis. Additionally, access limitations to full-text articles and potential publication bias—where studies with less significant results tend not to be widely published—are also important considerations in interpreting these results.

Recommendations for Future Research

In light of these limitations, future research should be directed towards several strategic agendas. First, it is important to conduct more rigorous and controlled experimental studies, with randomized designs and representative comparison groups, to strengthen the internal and external validity of research. Second, the development of more comprehensive, valid, reliable, and culturally sensitive instruments for assessing moral knowledge and tolerance is essential for generating more accurate data. Third, longitudinal research is crucial to evaluate the sustainability of VCT's impact on character development over a longer time span. Furthermore, exploring VCT implementation in diverse regions and among students with varying cultural, social, and geographical backgrounds is necessary to ensure the model's adaptability and universality. Cross-disciplinary collaboration among academics, teachers, and curriculum developers is also highly recommended to design evidence-based, relevant, and applicable VCT implementation models suited to today's student needs.

CONCLUSION

This study answers the research objective by demonstrating that the Value Clarification Technique (VCT) is consistently effective in strengthening both moral knowledge and tolerance attitudes of elementary school students within social studies learning. Through reflective and dialogical processes involving moral dilemmas, group discussions, and innovative learning media, VCT significantly improves students' moral reasoning, character formation, and inclusive social behaviors.

The implications of these findings emphasize the necessity of enhancing teacher competencies, developing supportive family and school environments, and systematically integrating VCT into the curriculum as a core strategy for character education. Implementing VCT not only supports the cognitive and affective development of students, but also aligns with the goals of transformative education in pluralistic societies.

For future research directions, further studies should employ more rigorous experimental and longitudinal designs to evaluate the long-term impact of VCT, develop culturally sensitive and comprehensive assessment instruments for moral knowledge and tolerance, and explore VCT implementation in various cultural, social, and geographical settings. Interdisciplinary collaboration and strengthened teacher professional development are also recommended to ensure that VCT achieves its full potential as a transformative approach to character education.

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