

TRENDS AND LANDSCAPE OF CHARACTER EDUCATION RESEARCH IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the publication trends of character education in elementary schools, identify researchers and institutions that contribute significantly, and explore the dominant themes and keywords in the literature related to character education that affect the moral, social, and academic development of elementary school students.. The method employed was bibliometric analysis, utilizing VOSviewer and R-Studio software to map keyword networks, author collaborations, and citation patterns in character education research. Data sourced from Scopus searches totaled 59 articles over the last 10 years (2015-2025). The results of the study indicate that publications related to character education in primary schools exhibit an increasing trend from year to year, reflecting a growing emphasis on strengthening moral values. The dominant themes include character building, local wisdom, parental involvement, and thematic learning. In addition, academic collaboration between Indonesian researchers and foreign institutions continues to expand, particularly in studies that incorporate cultural values and contextual approaches. Several widely cited articles highlight the effectiveness of character education in improving students' moral, social, and academic development, as well as local culture-based implementation. This research confirms that character education plays a crucial role in shaping students' moral, social, and academic development. Students who receive a good character education exhibit higher levels of discipline, responsibility, and academic achievement. Further research is recommended to explore the effectiveness of traditional game-based approaches, ethnographic methods, and the relationship between character education and the SDGs, to expand contextual and actionable insights and practices in character education.

Keywords

Bibliometrics, Character Education, Elementary School.



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INTRODUCTION

Character education is one of the top priorities in Indonesia's national education system (Fathoni et al., 2024). This is reflected in the legal basis and government policies that aim to form students who not only excel academically but also possess strong character and integrity. One of the primary legal foundations of education in Indonesia is Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, particularly in Article 3 (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003, 2003). This article states that national education aims to develop students' potential to become human beings who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble morals, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens. This goal demonstrates that education in Indonesia is not only focused on enhancing knowledge and skills, but also on cultivating good character in accordance with the nation's noble values (Witasari, 2022). In addition, the government's commitment to strengthening character education is increasingly emphasized through Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 concerning the Strengthening of Character Education (PPK) (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003, 2003). This regulation regulates the importance of implementing character education in schools using a holistic approach.

Basic education, especially at the elementary level, is a crucial phase in instilling character values because children are in a pivotal period of moral and social development at this stage. The implementation of character education in elementary schools continues to grow in tandem with changes in education policies and advancements in science. Research on character education in various aspects has been conducted to understand how character values can be effectively instilled in students. Research on character education in primary school shows that there is a wide range of research topics that cover character education learning approaches and models (Supendi et al., 2020; Stuart et al., 2021), Character Education Learning Strategies (Andriani et al., 2023; Santoso et al., 2022; Stuart et al., 2024; Suroso et al., 2025), the implementation of character education in elementary schools (Hanim & Marjo, 2025; Prasetya et al., 2024; Umar et al., 2024; Yuliantri, 2024), and Integration of Character Education in the Independent Curriculum.

However, there is still no comprehensive mapping of research trends, patterns of collaboration between researchers, and key topics frequently discussed in related literature. To overcome these limitations, the bibliometric approach can be utilized as an analytical method that provides a comprehensive picture of publication trends, patterns of academic collaboration, and key

themes emerging in research on character education in elementary schools. By understanding these patterns, research can help future researchers determine relevant study directions, identify gaps in the literature, and find potential collaboration opportunities. Additionally, this information is also useful for policymakers and stakeholders in understanding how character education is taught in the academic world. This study aims to answer several questions, namely: How does the distribution of character education publications among elementary school students in Indonesia change from year to year, by state, and by university affiliation? Which Indonesian researcher has produced the most research on character education in elementary schools? Which countries or institutions collaborate most often with Indonesian researchers in character education research? Which article or study is the most cited in the study of character education in elementary school, and what is the reason behind its popularity? What are the most frequent themes or keywords in the literature related to character education in elementary school? What are the thematic trends and changes in this literature based on keyword analysis? Are there aspects of character education that are rarely researched and have the potential to be further developed? How does character education affect the moral, social, and academic development of elementary school students according to existing research?

METHOD

This study uses the design of bibliometric analysis methods using the VOSviewer and Biblioshiny (R-studio) applications. Bibliometric analysis is a robust methodological approach to capturing the quantitative essence of the academic literature (Ahmi, 2022; Borgohain et al., 2021). This bibliometric study examines the academic discourse surrounding character education in elementary schools, drawing on the Scopus database. A significant limitation of this approach is its reliance on the Scopus database, which has the potential to eliminate influential works that are not indexed within it.

Data obtained from databases sourced from Scopus with keywords ("TITLE -ABS-KEY ("Character Education" OR "Character Education" OR "Moral Education" OR "Moral Education") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Elementary School" OR "Elementary Education" OR "Elementary School" OR "Madrasah Ibtidaiyah") resulting in 214 databases. Then extracted by keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Character Education" OR "Character Education" OR "Moral Education" OR "Moral Education") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Elementary School" OR "Elementary School" OR "Elementary

School" OR "Madrasah Ibtidaiyah")) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar") AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "ENGLISH")) AND (LIMIT-TO(AFFILCOUNTRY, "Indonesia")) year of publication is limited only from 2020-2025, file is a journal article, the language of the article is limited to English, and the author from Indonesia, resulting in 59 articles. VOS Viewer and R-Studio are used to visualize bibliometric networks, which provide insights into the relationships between authors, articles, and keywords. Mendeley and Excel as tools to help extract data before it is mapped to VOS Viewer and R Study.

The VOSviewer software (version 1.6.20) and R-Studio were selected to perform this bibliometric analysis with the help of RIS and Excel. In the process of utilizing existing data, it can be interpreted through data mapping. VOSviewer displays and visualizes a network consisting of the original journal, keywords, the most cited citations, and links from the authors' bibliographies contained in the document (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The results of the data visualization will show items that represent the author's name, country, and keywords. The items that appear will consist of multiple networks and clusters. A different color and thickness distinguish each network and cluster. The thickness of the lines and colors will indicate the strength of the items, and the relationships between them can then be interpreted. Analyzing patterns of publications, citations, and collaborations provides a holistic view of the academic field related to a particular topic, such as R-Studio.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1 provides an overview of the data obtained from Scopus, which was then imported into Excel format and subsequently imported into R-Studio. This data illustrates that there are 59 documents from the 2020–2025 period, with an average document age of 3 years and a citation rate of 4,898 per document, indicating the research's relevance and impact quite well. The number of publications has decreased at an annual growth rate of -28.45%, yet the research still maintains a strong literature base with 2,351 references. Most of the research was conducted collaboratively, with an average of 3.83 authors per document, while only five documents were written by a single author. International collaboration reached 11.86%, reflecting limited global engagement. In terms of content, there are 166 keywords from the author and 10 Plus Keywords, which show a variety of research topics. All documents are scientific articles, which indicate that the research results are

mostly published in journals.

Table 1. Review Summary by Biblioshiny

Description	Result
Key information about data	
Time range	2020:2025
Source (Journal)	37
Document	59
Annual Growth Rate %	-28.45
Average Age of the Document	3
Average citations per document	4.898
Reference	2351
Document Contents	
Keywords Plus (EN)	10
Keywords Author (DE)	166
WRITER	
Writer	214
Sole author document author	5
Author Collaboration	
Single writing document	5
Co-Authors per Document	3.83
International co-authoring %	11.86
Document Type	
Article	59

Distribution of Research Publications on Character Education in Primary Schools by Year, State Collaboration, and Affiliation

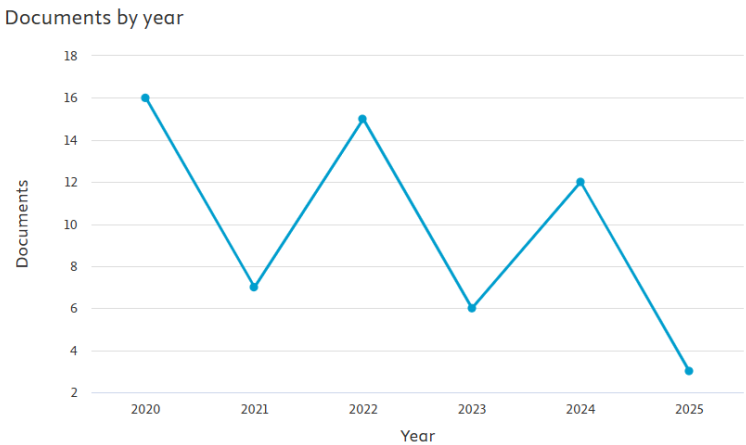


Figure 1. Distribution of Character Education Research Publications in Elementary Schools from Year to Year

Figure 1 shows the distribution of publications related to the character education of elementary school students by Indonesian authors from 2020 to 2025, with a pattern of fluctuations in the number of documents published each year. The year 2020 recorded the highest number of

publications of around 16 documents, but experienced a significant decline in 2021 with only about seven documents. This trend increased again in 2022 with the same number of publications as in 2020, which was around 16 documents, but it decreased drastically again in 2023 with only about six documents. 2024 shows a recovery with 12 publications, before finally dropping sharply to a low of around two documents in 2025. These fluctuations reflect the dynamics of research in this area, which are likely influenced by factors such as educational policy, academic trends, or researcher interest over a period of time.

Table 2. Distribution of Character Education Publications in Elementary Schools

From Year to Year	
Year	Article
2020	16
2021	7
2022	15
2023	6
2024	12
2025	3

Table 2 shows that the growth of research on Character Education in Elementary Schools fluctuates every year. In 2020 there were 16 documents (Aeni et al., 2020; M. T. Hidayat et al., 2020; Muhtar & Dallyono, 2020; Mukniah, 2020; Murti, 2020; Muzaki, 2020; Stuart & Stuart, 2020; Priatna, 2020; Prihono et al., 2020; Rihatno et al., 2020; Rina et al., 2020; Safitri et al., 2020; Sartibi & Supena, 2020; Siska & Japar, 2020; Suhra et al., 2020; Supeni et al., 2020) Published, in 2021 there were seven documents (Agustang et al., 2021; Diana et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2021; Suzana et al., 2021; Syamsi & Tahar, 2021; Syamsuddin et al., 2021; Winarni et al., 2021)(down from the previous year). However, in 2022 there were 15 documents (Ariani et al., 2022; Hafina et al., 2022; M. Hidayat et al., 2022; "Integrated Social Sciences in Improving Achievement and Character Education to Elementary School Students in Pandemic Era," 2022; Julia et al., 2022; Mahanani et al., 2022; Maulana et al., 2022; Muassomah et al., 2022; Nurasiah et al., 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2022; Rais et al., 2022; Scotland, 2022; Tohri et al., 2022; Wardhani et al., 2022; Zulela et al., 2022). In 2023 there are 6 documents (Abidin et al., 2023; Choiriyah, 2023; Kogoya et al., 2023; Maisyaroh et al., 2023; Ramlan et al., 2023; Winarni et al., 2023) published and the number continues to increase in 2024 there will be 12 documents (Azkiya et al., 2024; Fajarianto et al., 2024; Ferdi Hasan & Monita, 2024; Japar et al., 2024; Mahartini et al., 2024; Nizarudin Wajdi et al., 2024; Sabil & Ryan, 2024; Siswanto et al., 2024; Wardani et al., 2024; Winarno et al., 2024; Stuart et al., 2024; Yudha et al., 2024), but the curve in 2025 is declining because

in 2025 there will be only three documents (Nurbaya & Sutrisnowati, 2025; Prawiyogi et al., 2025; Sauri & Sanusi, 2025). Based on the graph, the highest number of Character Education in Elementary Schools published was carried out in 2020 (16 documents).

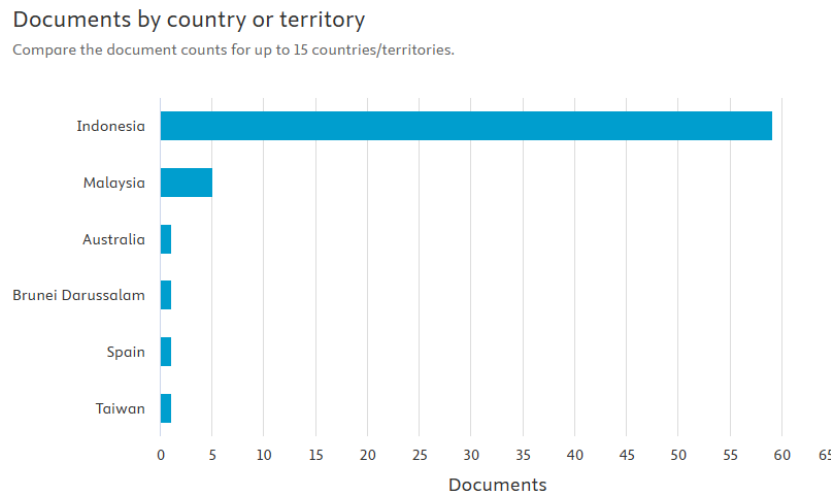


Figure 2. Distribution of Research Publications on Character Education in Elementary Schools by State Affiliation.

This graph shows the number of documents by country affiliation of the author researching character education in elementary schools. Indonesia dominates with 59 documents, showing the high attention and academic contribution of researchers in this country to the topic. Malaysia is in second place with about five documents, while Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Spain, and Taiwan each have only 1 document. This data shows that research on character education in elementary schools is more often conducted by academics from Indonesia compared to other countries.

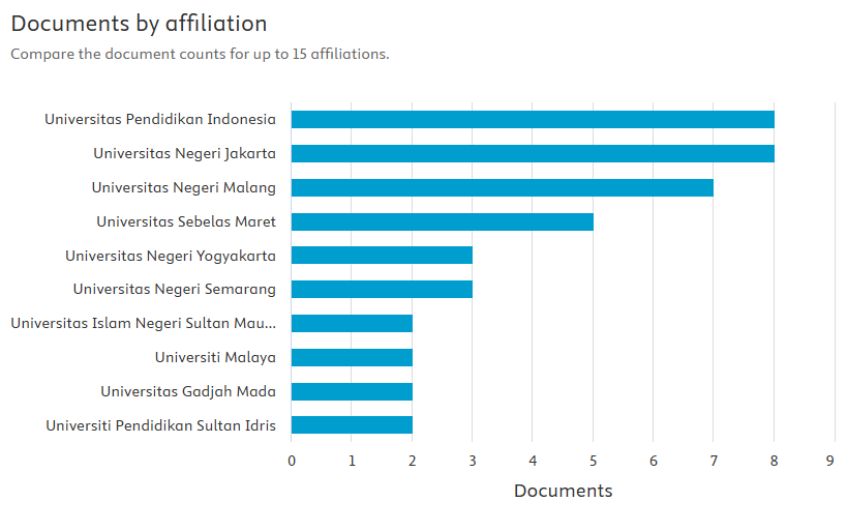


Figure 3. Distribution of Character Education Research Publications in Elementary Schools by University Affiliation

The "Documents by Affiliation" graph shows the number of publications on character education in elementary schools by contributing academic institutions. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) and Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) are the two institutions with the highest number of publications, each reaching around eight documents. Followed by the State University of Malang (UM) and Sebelas Maret University (UNS), with around five publications. Yogyakarta State University (UNY) and Semarang State University (UNNES) also make significant contributions, with the number of publications ranging from 4 to 5 documents. Meanwhile, the State Islamic University (UIN) Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin, Universiti Malaya, Gadjah Mada University (UGM), and Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) showed a lower number of publications, ranging from 2 to 3 documents. The data show that research on character education in primary schools is primarily conducted by universities with a primary focus on education, and there are some international collaborations, particularly with Malaysia.

Indonesian Researcher Who Produces the Most Research on Character Education in Elementary School

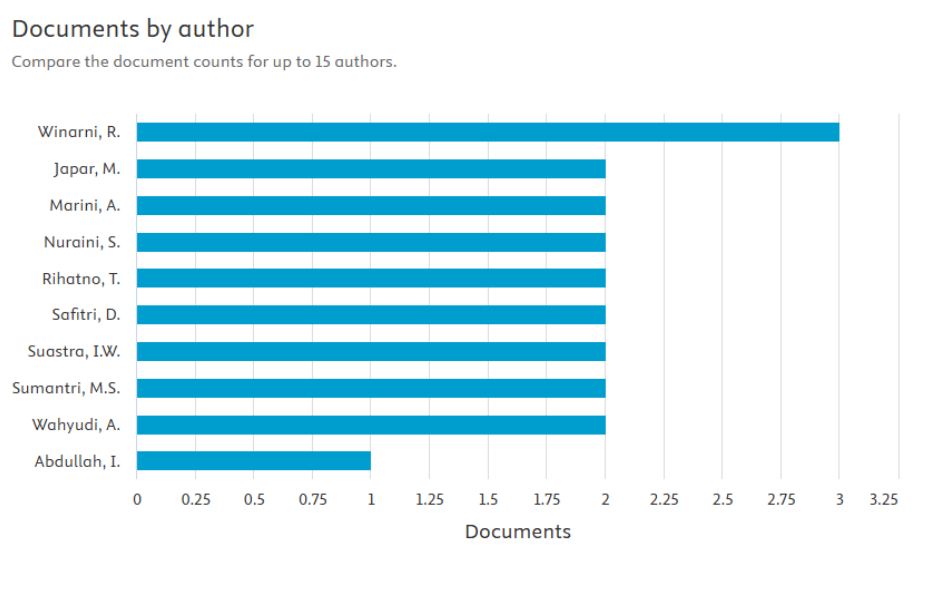


Figure 4. Top 10 Most Productive Writers Based on the Frequency of Authors' Names

Figure 2 shows the top 10 authors by number of publications. The author named Winarni, has three documents (Pratiwi et al., 2022; Winarni et al., 2021, 2023), Japar M 2 Document (Japar et al., 2024; Siska & Japar, 2020), Marine Document A 2 (Rihatno et al., 2020; Safitri et al., 2020), Nuraini S 2 document (Rihatno et al., 2020; Safitri et al., 2020), Rihatno T Document 2 (Rihatno dkk., 2020; Safitri dkk., 2020), Safitri D 2 document, Suastro IW 2 document (Mahartini dkk., 2024; Wiradnyana

dkk., 2024), Sumantri MS 2 document (Japar dkk., 2024; Nurasiah dkk., 2022), Wahyudi 2 documents, Abdullah I 1 document (Muassomah et al., 2022). Based on this data, Winarn, R. is the most prolific writer with the highest number of documents.

Which Article or Study is the Most Cited in the Study of Character Education in Elementary School, and What is the Reason Behind Its Popularity?

Table 3 presents the 10 articles with the highest number of citations in character education research in elementary schools, as analyzed by Biblioshiny. The most cited article is Setiawan B (2022) (Winarni et al., 2023) titled "How is the Character of Education Implemented? Case Study in Indonesian Elementary Schools," published in the Journal of Educational and Social Research, with a total of 27 citations and an annual citation rate of 6.75. This article shows a significant influence on the study of character education in elementary schools. Next position, article Hasanah U (2022) (Muassomah et al., 2022), which discusses "Academic Demoralization of Students in Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic," has seven citations with an annual citation rate of 1.75, showing the relevance of topics related to the impact of online learning on student academic morale. In addition, there are several articles with the same number of citations (7 citations), including research by Rihatno T. (Rihatno et al., 2020), Safitri D., Nuraini S., and Marini A. (2020). (Rihatno et al., 2020). On the use of stop motion animation in character education, published in the International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology. Another article that is quite widely cited is the work of Winarni R (2021) (Winarni et al., 2021), who developed Indonesian textbooks with a multicultural approach and character education (5 salutations). Overall, these data indicate that studies on innovative models of character education, particularly those utilizing animation and technology, receive considerable attention within the academic community.

Table 3. Top 10 Articles Cited by Biblioshiny

Author	Year	HE	SO	TC	Tcpy
B.	2022	How is Character Education Implemented? Case Study in Indonesian Elementary Schools	Journal of Educational and Social Research	27	6.75
Hasanah U	2022	Academic Demoralization of Students in Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic	Frontiers in Education	7	1.75
Rihatno T	2020	Development of Character Education Model Using Stop Motion Animation for Elementary School Students in Indonesia	International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology	7	1,16666667
Sapphire D	2020	Development of a Character Education Model Using Stop Motion Animation for	International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology	7	1,16666667

Nuraini S	2020	Elementary School Students in Indonesia Development of a Character Education Model Using Stop Motion Animation for Elementary School Students in Indonesia	International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology	7	1,16666667
Marine A	2020	Development of a Character Education Model Using Stop Motion Animation for Elementary School Students in Indonesia	International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology	7	1,16666667
Winarni R	2021	Development of Indonesian Textbooks with Multiculturalism and Character Education to Improve Traditional Poetry Writing Skills	European Journal of Education Research	5	1
Sapphire D	2020	Character Improvement of Six-Year-Old Elementary School Students Through the Implementation of Stop Motion Animation-Based Character Formation	International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology	4	0.66666667
Nuraini S	2020	Character Improvement of Six-Year-Old Elementary School Students Through the Implementation of Stop Motion Animation-Based Character Formation	International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology	4	0.66666667
Rihatno T	2020	Character Improvement of Six-Year-Old Elementary School Students Through the Implementation of Stop Motion Animation-Based Character Formation	International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology	4	0.66666667

Based on the data table, it can be seen that various studies conducted between 2020 and 2022 focused on the theme of character education in elementary schools, employing innovative approaches and models. Most of the research from 2020, especially by Rihatno T., Safitri D., Nuraini S., and Marini A., highlighted the development of a character education model based on stop motion animation as a learning medium. This model is aimed at developing the character of elementary school-age children through visual and interactive methods. Their average publication appears in the International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology with nearly uniform attendance and contribution rates (DIA/Tc_{py}), demonstrating collaborative work between several researchers on the same project.

In the following years (2021–2022), the focus of research began to shift from media development to the implementation and evaluation of character education in a contextual manner. For example, Hasanah U. (2022) in her article in the Journal of Education and Social Research

empirically discusses how character education is implemented in Indonesian elementary schools, while Winarni R. (2021) emphasizes the integration of multiculturalism in Indonesian textbooks as a form of internalizing character values. The research of Rihatno T. (2020) and Safitri D. (2020) strengthens the aspect of technology-based educational innovation. Overall, this research trend shows a paradigm shift from a conceptual approach to the practice of implementing character education in elementary schools with the support of animated media and the integration of socio-cultural values in the curriculum.

What are Some of the Most Frequently Occurring Themes or Keywords in the Literature Related to Character Education in Elementary School?

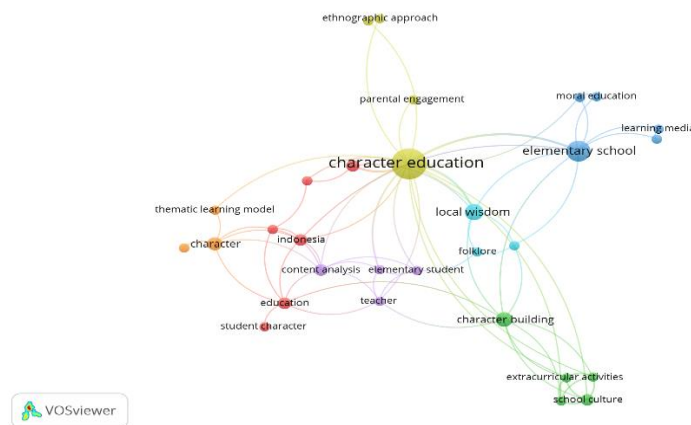


Figure 5. Co-Emergence by All Keywords

The Co-Occurrence by All Keywords visualization from VOSviewer shows the relationship between keywords in character education research in elementary schools. "Character education" is central to various related concepts, such as "elementary school", "moral education", and "learning media", which highlight the importance of learning methods in shaping students' character. The cultural aspect also stands out with the presence of "local wisdom", "folklore", and "ethnographic approach", which shows that the values of local wisdom are used in character education. In addition, the factors of the school environment and student activities are depicted through "character building", "extracurricular activities", and "school culture". Teacher and parent involvement are also emphasized through "teacher" and "parent involvement". The keywords "content analysis", "Indonesia", and "thematic learning model" indicate the research focus on contextual learning strategies in Indonesia. Overall, this study aims to explore how character education can be

effectively instilled through various approaches, taking into account cultural differences, school environments, and the involvement of parents and teachers.

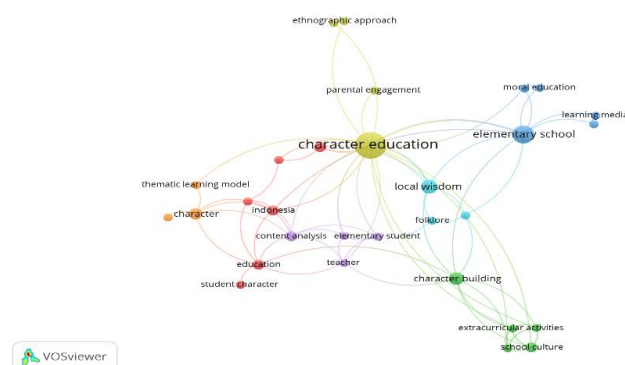


Figure 6. Joint Emergence According to the Author's Keywords

Co-Occurrence by Author Keyword visualization from VOSviewer shows the relevance of keywords in character education research in elementary schools. The main keyword "character education" is central to various thematic branches. Some of the important aspects that emerged include "elementary school", "moral education", and "local wisdom", which highlight the role of cultural values and local wisdom in character education. In addition, "character building", "school culture", and "community involvement" show that student character strengthening occurs not only in the classroom but also in the school and community environment. "Traditional games" and "ethnographic approaches" show culture-based learning methods in shaping students' characters. Meanwhile, the relevance of "student character", "education", and "Indonesia" shows the research focus on the context of character education in Indonesia, including the use of thematic learning models. Overall, this research focuses on how character education can be developed through various approaches that involve schools, families, and communities.

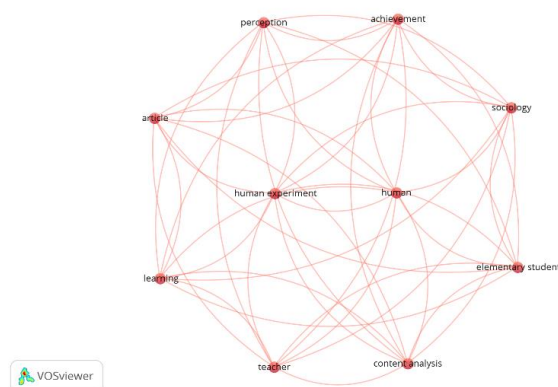


Figure 7. Co-Occurrence with Index Keywords

The Co-Occurrence by Index Keywords visualization from VOSviewer shows the relationship between keywords that often appear in character education research in elementary schools. The most prominent and interrelated keywords are achievement, perception, sociology, elementary students, learning, teachers, content analysis, human experiments, humans, and articles. This shows that research in this field focuses a lot on aspects of student achievement, teacher and student perception, sociological approaches, and learning methods. In addition, the use of content analysis methods and human experiments is also an important part of analyzing the effectiveness of character education. The close relationship between teachers, learning, and elementary school students shows that the role of teachers and learning methods is very influential in shaping the character of students at the elementary level.

What are the Trends and Thematic Changes in Character Education in Elementary Schools that are Still Rarely Researched and Have the Potential to be Further Developed Based on Keyword Analysis?

Based on the three visualizations of Co-Occurrence Keywords Index, Author Keywords, and All Keywords, there are several key trends in character education research in elementary schools. The current research focus tends to be on character education based on local culture (local wisdom, folklore), parental involvement, and character formation through the school environment and extracurricular activities (character formation, school culture, extracurricular activities). In addition, ethnographic approaches and thematic learning models are also a concern in the context of character education. However, some aspects still receive less attention, such as the use of technology in character education, the influence of digital media in shaping students' character, and the implementation of national policy-based character education at the elementary school level.

Research potentials that are still rarely explored include the use of digital technology in character education, for example, through educational games, interactive media, or artificial intelligence (AI) in building students' moral values. In addition, the integration of character education in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) based curricula can be an innovation to understand how character values can be formed in science and technology-based learning. Research related to the influence of social media and digitalization on the character of elementary school students is also still minimal, although the current digital era greatly affects the development of children's moral and social values. By developing studies in this field, character education research can become more relevant to the needs of modern education and the times.

How Character Education Affects the Moral, Social, And Academic Development of Elementary School Students According to Existing Research

Character education in elementary school plays a crucial role in fostering students' moral development, particularly by instilling values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and empathy. Lickona (1991) stated that structured character education programs can strengthen moral awareness and the habituation of ethical behavior, and these effects tend to last into adulthood. Research by Berkowitz & Bier (2005) also shows that integrating character education into the curriculum significantly suppresses deviant behavior, improves students' ability to make responsible decisions, and fosters positive habits that support daily life.

In addition to shaping morals, character education also enhances students' social aspects by fostering positive relationships with peers, teachers, and the school environment. A study by Bidang (Battistich et al., 1997) found that the implementation of the character curriculum in elementary schools can improve social skills, increase cooperation, tolerance, and empathy, and significantly reduce interpersonal conflicts in the school environment. By reinforcing the values of cooperation and tolerance from an early age, character education helps students develop social sensitivity, manage conflict constructively, and build healthy learning communities.

From an academic perspective, the integration of character education has been shown to have a positive impact on students' learning motivation, discipline, and academic achievement. (Duckworth et al., 2007) notes that characters such as perseverance and a sense of responsibility play a crucial role in enhancing internal motivation and independence in completing learning tasks. Students who possess strong character tend to exhibit better academic achievement and are more likely to overcome learning challenges. Thus, character education is an essential strategy in the primary school curriculum to form a generation that is not only intellectually superior but also has strong personal integrity and social skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature analysis, research on character education in elementary schools in Indonesia shows an increasing trend from year to year, reflecting the growing attention to strengthening moral values in primary education. Several Indonesian researchers are listed as major contributors to this research, with significant publications in national and international journals. In addition, research collaborations between Indonesian academics and institutions from other

countries continue to grow, especially with universities from Asian and European countries that have a strong focus on character education. The most cited articles or studies in this study are generally those that review the effectiveness of character education in improving students' moral, social, and academic performance, and that offer an implementation model based on local wisdom and thematic approaches. The popularity of this research stems from its relevance to education policy and its application in various primary school contexts in Indonesia.

From the analysis of keywords, it was found that themes frequently appearing in character education research in elementary schools include character formation, local wisdom, thematic learning, and parental and community involvement. However, some aspects are still rarely studied, such as the effectiveness of traditional game-based methods, ethnographic approaches, and the relationship between character education and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Research trends show a shift from an approach focused on moral theory to the integration of character values in an experiential curriculum. Additionally, the research confirms that character education plays a crucial role in shaping students' moral, social, and academic development. Students who receive a good character education exhibit a higher level of discipline, responsibility, and academic achievement. Therefore, strengthening character education in elementary schools is a strategic step in building a young generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also has good morality and social skills.

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