

## Global Insights into the Effectiveness of Moral and Character Education: Implications for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

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### Abstract

Moral-based character education plays a vital role in developing individuals with integrity, responsibility, and empathy, particularly in the context of Society 5.0, where technological advancement must be balanced with strong moral values. This study aims to examine the global effectiveness of moral and character education interventions in enhancing students' moral understanding and character development. A systematic literature review and meta-analysis were conducted following PRISMA guidelines, synthesizing findings from experimental and quasi-experimental studies published between 2018 and 2025, sourced from major international and national databases. Using a random-effects meta-analytic approach, the results indicate a statistically significant positive effect of moral and character education interventions, despite variations across study contexts. These findings demonstrate that moral and character education contribute meaningfully to the formation of moral identity and ethical awareness. In practice, this study underscores the importance of integrating moral values into curricula and learning practices to strengthen integrity, empathy, and responsibility as essential competencies in 21st-century education. This research provides a comprehensive global synthesis that highlights the original contribution of meta-analytic evidence to the field of moral and character education.

**Keywords:** character education, moral education, values education

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## INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing need for individuals who demonstrate integrity and responsibility in the era of Society 5.0 (Tavares et al., 2022), this can certainly be developed through character education through morality values (Pike et al., 2021) that are in accordance with the state of society (Boiliu, 2025) and the progress of globalization (McKenzie & Jensen, 2024) and increasingly developing technology (Duarte et al., 2023). Character education, which is rooted in moral values (Le Khanh & Thanh, 2025), is a major challenge for educational institutions in fostering moral development among the younger generation (Gen-Z) (Hukubun et al., 2024; Suciati et al., 2023). Previous research suggests that character education is fundamental in fostering the development of individuals' attitudes (Peng et al., 2024), prosocial behaviors (Saleem & Hawamdeh, 2023), and moral identities for students in the school environment and outside school (Gaya et al., 2022), (Kasanova et al., 2025).

In the age of digital transformation, integrating moral values into character education becomes increasingly important, which affects all aspects of life (Lv et al., 2024; Le Khanh & Thanh, 2025). Generation Z, who are growing and developing in technological advancements, face great (Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025) challenges in forming strong self-identity and character. Generation Z faces a major challenge in defining their identity amid the rapid technological progress of the Society 5.0 era (Aryani & Yuliarti, 2023) and character formation (Hanafiah et al., 2024), so this needs to be overcome through character education (Eliyanti et al., 2021), the study of morality, such as moral intelligence (Markula & Aksela, 2022), the cultivation of identity values and a sense of normalcy (Marwan et al., 2025; Arif et al., 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, moral education emphasizes the integration of moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions as core dimensions of character development. Character education is not just a learning of values (Cholifah, 2024) but also a form of a whole personal formation process (Simbolon, 2024), so that individuals can live their lives with the principles of morality and responsibility (Ramadhani et al., 2024), (Brunsdon & Layne, 2025). This is in line with the need for education in the 21st Century that focuses not only on academic competence (Muldagaliyeva et al., 2023) but also on integrity (Vásquez-Pailaqueo et al., 2025), empathy and social skills for life in a global society (Maisyaroh et al., 2023; Megawati & Prahmana, 2024). Character education not only focuses on learning values (Davidson et al., 2023) but also on the process of forming a whole person (Isroani & Huda, 2022). Character education has a strong contribution to the formation of identity (Grządziel, 2024), so it is hoped that with quality character education, it can form individuals with integrity and responsibility (Iksal et al., 2024).

Based on the database, there are research results related to moral and character education, but the results vary: one group showed high effectiveness, while others did not. The other group showed limited results. This is influenced by differences in context, methods, curricula, and research populations. For example, in Indonesia, character education focuses on policy through programs, one of which is a program to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students

However, despite the growing body of research on moral and character education, existing empirical findings remain inconsistent and fragmented. Some studies report high levels of effectiveness, while others indicate limited or context-dependent outcomes. These inconsistencies are influenced by variations in educational context, research design, curriculum models, intervention duration, and population characteristics. For



instance, in Indonesia, character education is largely implemented through policy-driven programs such as the strengthening of the Pancasila student profile (Ratnawati et al., 2024; Sakban & Sundawa, 2023; Zakso et al., 2022) Internationally, diverse approaches to moral and character education have been applied in both formal and non-formal settings (Nuryahman et al., 2024; Bahiyah, 2025) Nevertheless, previous studies are often limited to specific regions, educational levels, or methodological approaches, making it difficult to draw generalizable conclusions about overall effectiveness.

Based on these conditions, a clear research gap emerges: the lack of a comprehensive synthesis that systematically integrates and compares findings across contexts and settings. Therefore, the central research question of this study is: To what extent are moral and character education interventions effective in improving students' moral and character development across diverse educational contexts? Therefore, to answer the research question, the meta-analysis approach is the right choice in revealing the effectiveness of moral and character education (Johnson et al., 2022; Schuetz & Koglin, 2023). By using the meta-analysis approach, researchers can provide a more objective picture of the effectiveness of the implementation of moral and character education (Khadijah et al., 2021; Aulya et al., 2024), identify general patterns, measure the magnitude of influencers and factors that can affect variations in research results.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive meta-analytic examination of the effectiveness of moral and character education, using quantitative indicators such as mean scores, standard deviations, and sample sizes from rigorously screened studies. Unlike previous reviews, this study integrates evidence from both Indonesian and international contexts, encompassing school-based and non-school-based settings. Thus, this research contributes robust, evidence-based insights to the literature on moral and character education, particularly in supporting the development of competent individuals aligned with the global expectations of the Society 5.0 era.

## METHOD

This study uses a systematic literature review and meta-analysis to synthesize findings from global research on the effectiveness of implementing moral and character education. This approach was selected to provide a comprehensive and quantitative synthesis of empirical evidence across diverse educational contexts. The research process was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Brüggemann & Rajguru, 2022; Page et al., 2021) to ensure transparency, rigor, and reproducibility throughout the review.

The literature search was conducted comprehensively using several international and national databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Taylor and Francis, Garuda, and Google Scholar. The search covered articles published between 2018 and 2025. A structured Boolean search strategy was applied using combinations of keywords such as (“moral education” OR “character education” OR “values education” OR “ethics education”) AND (“intervention” OR “program”) AND (“effectiveness” OR “impact”). Only peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings were considered to ensure the quality and credibility of the included studies.

The inclusion criteria used in this study it contains, among others, the following:

1. The type of research is experimental or quasi-experiment with the existence of an experimental group and a control group
2. The existence of sufficient statistical data reports to calculate effect sizes, such as: sample count, mean and standard deviation.

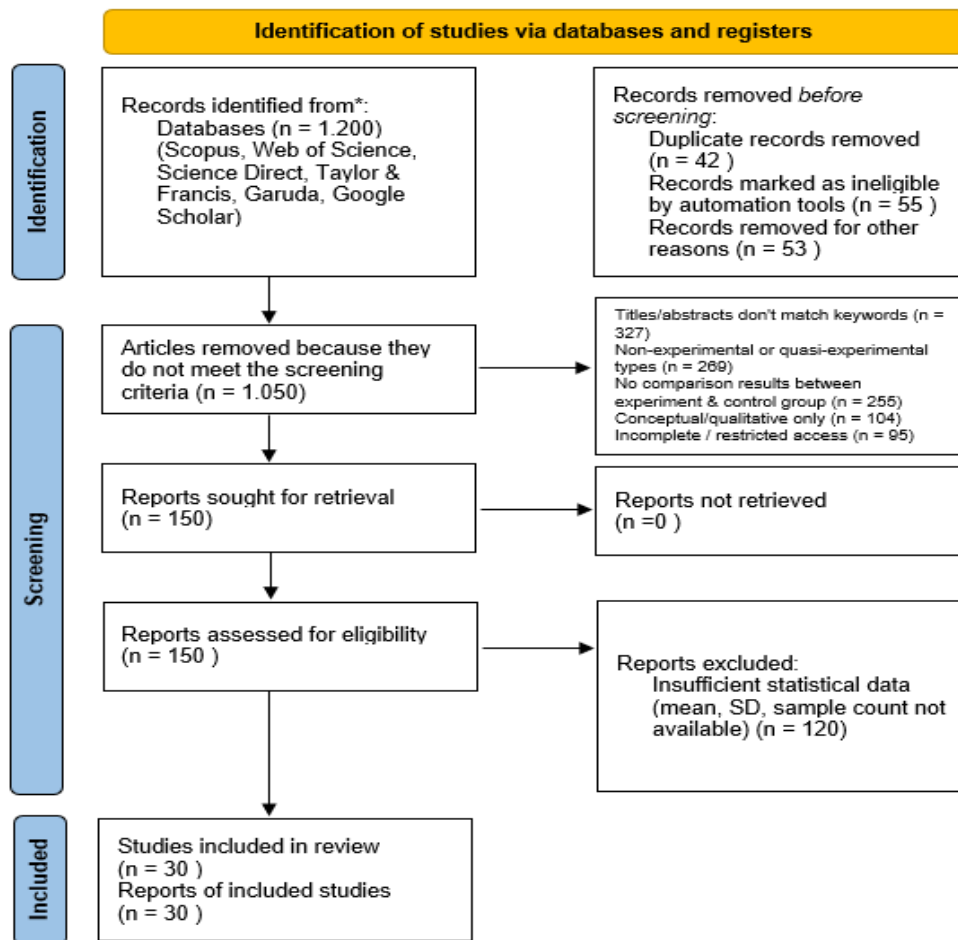


3. Focus on moral and character education interventions, both in and outside school.
4. The article is published and indexed in both international and national databases.

The exclusion criteria are as follows.

1. Articles are conceptual, theoretical, or research of a purely qualitative nature
2. The article is incomplete and access is restricted.
3. The study results do not provide complete statistical data for the meta-analysis.

The initial search related to this study, produced around 1,200 articles from various databases, after filtering and deletion based on titles and abstracts, 150 were obtained that were completely reviewed, based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, then 30 articles were obtained that were eligible and analyzed further, so that the selection process of these articles can be known on the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 1, as follows.)



**Figure 1.** PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

In this study, the data taken in each article document was in the form of: 1) author name, year of publication, country and source database, 2) level of education in the research (school, college and community organization), 3) number of samples, average values and standard deviation for each experimental and control group, 4) context information, namely continent, sample size and intervention setting. Data extraction is carried out independently by two research members until differences in the extraction results are discussed, and the data are verified to be valid (Schlunegger et al., 2024).



This study uses meta-analysis, with the presence of random effects, this is so that the research results can be accommodated through heterogeneity between studies (Page et al., 2021; Stogiannis et al., 2024). Hedges's  $g$  is also used to determine effect size. Heterogeneity between studies using Cochran's  $Q$ -test and  $I^2$  statistic, Publication bias potential was also evaluated through funnel plots and further tested with Egger's regression test (Newson, 2020; Beermann et al., 2024), all research procedures were conducted using Comprehensive Meta-Analysis (CMA) software (Biostat Inc), Version 3.3.070

Despite its strengths, this study has several methodological limitations. First, the analysis was restricted to articles published in English and Indonesian, which may introduce language bias. Second, including studies published between 2018 and 2025 may limit the generalizability of the findings to earlier periods. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the meta-analysis results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The reliability that occurs between article raters is tested using Cohen's Kappa (Dettori et al., 2022),(Tan et al., 2024) so that the results between raters have very high consistency. The Kappa value is in the range of 0.826-0.950, with a  $p$ -value of  $<0.05$ . In the experimental group, the average value was 0.950 ( $p=0.009$ ), and the standard deviation was 0.917 ( $p=0.009$ ), indicating that these two values were in the category of almost perfect agreement. Meanwhile, in the control group, it can be seen that the kappa value has an average of 0.882 ( $p=0.011$ ), for the standard deviation value of 0.826 ( $p=0.017$ ) these two values are included in the category of strong agreement. Other contextual variables, namely at the education level, are 0.845 ( $p = 0.017$ ), while class capacity is 0.886 ( $p = 0.011$ ), and continental variables are 0.869 ( $p = 0.012$ ). This reveals that the power extraction process applied to these 30 inclusion articles is not only reliable but also free of systematic bias among researchers, providing a strong data foundation for this meta-analysis. So that this can be known in Table 1, as follows

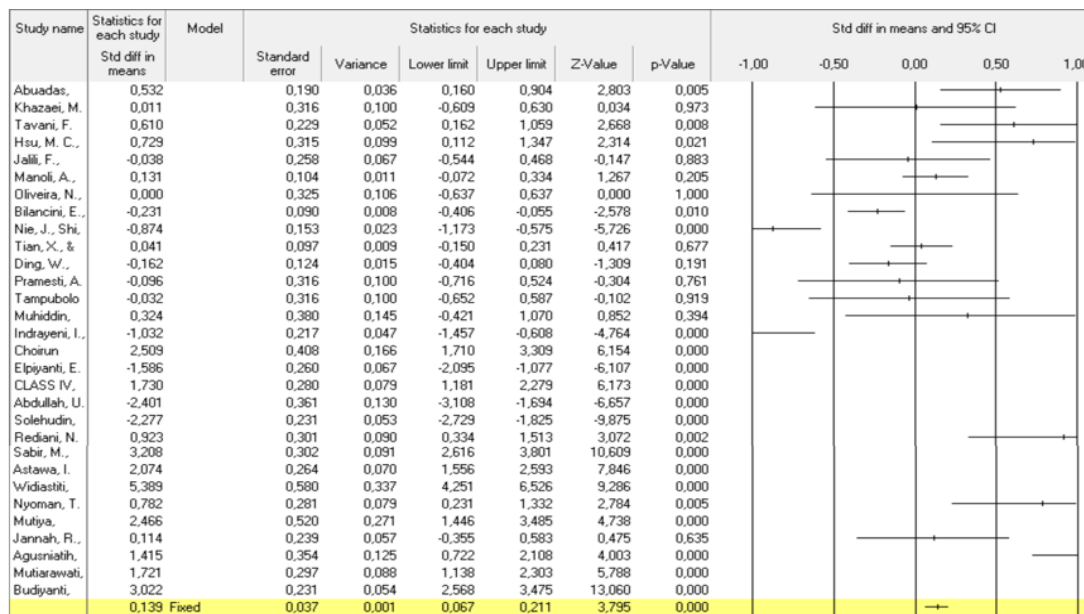
**Table 1.**  
 Data Extraction Reliability Using Cohen's Kappa

Coding Item	Kappa Value	Agreement Level	Sig. Value
Mean of Experiment Group	0.950	Almost Perfect	0.009
SD of Experiment Group	0.917	Almost Perfect	0.009
Sample Size of Experiment	0.850	Strong	0.017
Mean of Control Group	0.882	Strong	0.011
SD of Control Group	0.826	Strong	0.017
Sample Size of Control	0.850	Strong	0.017
Educational Level	0.845	Strong	0.017
Class Capacity	0.886	Strong	0.011
Continet	0.869	Strong	0.012

Based on the results of the meta-analysis using the fixed effects model (Borenstein, 2022), it can be seen that moral and character education has proven to be effective globally, this is known based on a combined effect of 0.139 with a confidence interval (CI) of 95%, which is between 0.067 – 0.211, this proves that the test results are significant at the level of  $p < 0.001$ . Although these results are in a small sample, they



suggest that moral and character education interventions have a significant impact. The results of the meta-analysis are shown in Figure 2. As follows

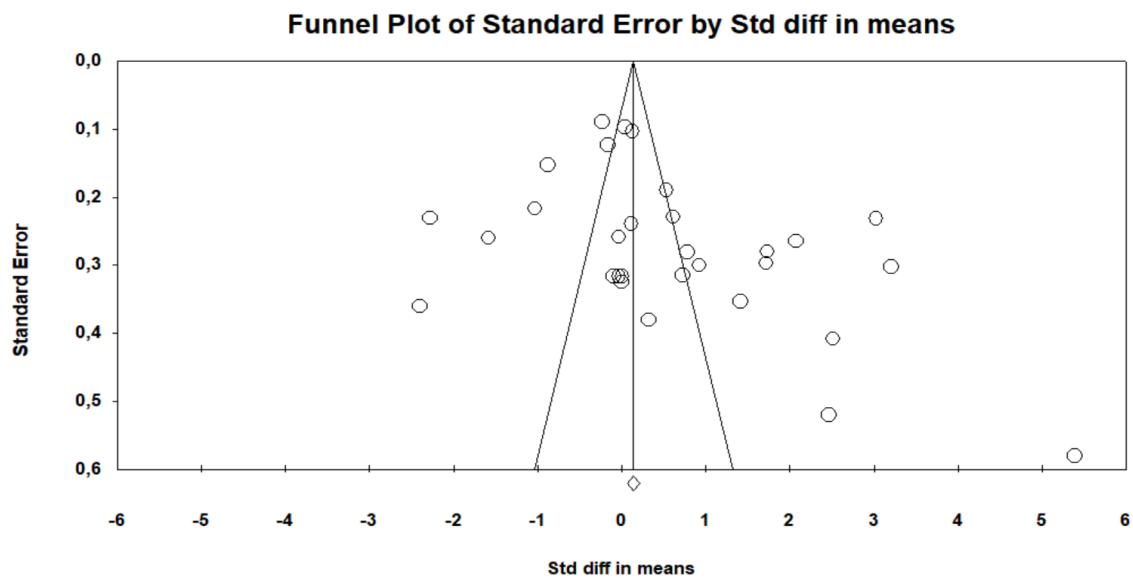


**Figure 2.** Forest Plot of the Overall Effect Size of Moral and Character Education Studies

In this analysis, the heterogeneity test shows a Q value of 135.673 with 29 degrees of freedom and a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ . This reveals the differences between the studies analyzed. Furthermore, the  $I^2$  value is 62.8%, placing it in the medium-to-high category. Therefore, it can be concluded that some of the measurement results are not due to random error alone but are also influenced by contextual factors that distinguish each study. It is important to recognize that the effectiveness of moral and character education varies with differences in the interventions implemented, such as education levels, class sizes, and countries of origin. So that the use of the random effects model becomes more appropriate and can accommodate a diversity of results that are representative of the conditions of moral and character education globally (Choi & Kang, 2025; Langan, 2021).

The results of the meta-analysis may be influenced by publication bias; therefore, in this study, a publication bias test was conducted to ensure that the results of the non-existent data synthesis are not distorted by the tendency to publish research findings (Almalik, 2024). It is shown in Figure 3 below.





**Figure 3.** Funnel Plot of Standard Error by Standardized Mean Difference

The results of the publication bias analysis, based on the plot funnel above, show that the distribution of research points is relatively symmetrical around the average effect line. This distribution pattern indicates no significant publication bias. This is because the studies included in the analysis are spread evenly on the left and right sides (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022).

Points with low error standards (at the top of the plot) tend to be more consistent, while some points with high error standards are at the bottom of the plot, according to the general funnel shape of the plot. Therefore, it can be concluded that this meta-analysis is considered representative of the available literature, and conclusions about the effectiveness of moral and character education can be trusted without distortion due to publication bias

## Discussion

The findings of this meta-analysis reveal that moral and character education interventions are significantly effective in improving moral understanding and character development worldwide. Effective character education must integrate moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral action holistically (Lickona, 2022). Strong character is a necessary foundation for a meaningful teaching-learning process (Davidson et al, 2023). Structured character education interventions have a measurable positive impact on learner development, reinforcing the validity of the study's key findings (Johnson et al., 2022).

Despite an overall positive effect, heterogeneity analysis revealed significant variation in intervention effectiveness across studies. Heterogeneity in meta-analysis is not a weakness, but rather a reflection of the diversity of contexts and moderation factors that can be explored (Choi & Kang, 2025). This variation is often due to differences in intervention design, duration, and population characteristics (Langan, 2021). The relationship between self-regulation and morality in children is strongly influenced by cultural context and educational methods, which explains why research findings across regions can vary (Schuetz & Koglin, 2023).

The context of the Society 5.0 era and digital transformation presents both challenges and unique opportunities for character education. Technological advances in



this era must be balanced with the strengthening of humanist and ethical values to create a sustainable society (Tavares et al, 2022). Developing "digital empathy" in online education is crucial to character in cyberspace (Duarte et al., 2023). Moral education in higher education needs to design sustainable solutions that are responsive to socio-technological dynamics to be relevant to the younger generation (Le Khanh & Thanh, 2025).

The practical implications of this study confirm the need to integrate moral values into the curriculum and learning practices. Character development must be embedded in the curriculum through explicit teaching and assessment of comprehension and practice of virtue (Pike et al, 2021). The occupational socialization of physical education teachers strongly influences how they implement character education, underscoring the importance of teacher training (Brunsdon & Layne, 2025). Pancasila value-based character education planning can be strengthened even in international-class programs (Maisyaroh et al., 2023).

This research also highlights the critical role of moral identity as a mediator and the outcome of character education. Character education aims to develop moral identity through narrative and reflection, which shape the way individuals view themselves as moral beings (Grządziel, 2024). Empathy influences prosocial behavior through moral identity, thereby affirming the psychological pathway from intervention to outcome (Peng et al., 2024). Moral identity as a factor influencing cyberbullying behavior in adolescents shows its relevance in the digital realm (Gaya et al, 2022).

The findings on the importance of a contextual approach are supported by several experts. Their cultural development suggests that moral values are undergoing both globalization and localization, so interventions must be sensitive to local context (McKenzie & Jensen, 2024). The integration of holistic approaches in Islamic education, both formal and non-formal, can be an effective model (Nuryahman et al, 2024). A character education strategy grounded in religious values needs to be specifically designed to address the challenges of the globalized education era (Bahiyah, 2025).

In conclusion, this synthesis of meta-analytic evidence provides a strong empirical foundation for the development of moral and character education in the 21st century. Meta-analysis in this area contributes to the understanding of "what works". The next recommendation is that empirical research on character education should conduct an in-depth comparative content analysis to understand the nuances of various approaches. Strengthening character education is a necessary response to the challenges of the times, with the aim of forming individuals with integrity and responsibility, essential competencies for facing the complexities of contemporary society.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the meta-analysis carried out, it can be known that moral and character education is effective globally, this is based on the synthesis of 30 experimental and quasi-experimental research articles at various levels of education and cultural contexts. This is known based on the heterogeneity between studies that proves the need for the integration of moral and character education. These findings also reveal the importance of the role of schools and educational institutions in the implementation of character education programs that are in line with the needs of the Society 5.0 Era, where character education can be through moral actions such as the values of integrity, empathy and responsibility in academic achievement. Therefore, it is necessary to design policies and interventions for character education that are directed and sustainable. For further research, it is



recommended to analyze the effectiveness of character education through broad morality values both in formal and non-formal, community-based contexts, to obtain a more comprehensive picture of character education through the formation of morality values in the generation with integrity

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