




Character Education: A Hybrid Systematic Literature Review And Bibliometric Analysis

Mahmuda Aulia ^{1*}, Try Fanny Anshory ², Saifuddin ³

¹²³Universitas Malikussaleh, Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study conducts a hybrid Systematic Literature Review and bibliometric analysis to map the global development of Character Education research. Using the Scopus database, 21,259 publications (1922–2025) were identified, and after screening and eligibility filtering, 1,217 articles were analyzed (screening completed on 22 September 2025). Bibliometric visualization was generated using VOSviewer. The results show that Character Education has gained significant scholarly attention globally, with Indonesia, the United States, and the United Kingdom emerging as the most active contributors. Dominant research themes include morality, empathy, spirituality, and values-based educational practices. The study also proposes an integrated conceptual framework of Character Education that encompasses moral, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. This research contributes by providing a comprehensive mapping of global trends and conceptual directions in Character Education. Future investigations are encouraged to extend database sources (e.g., Web of Science) and explore regions with lower publication intensity to strengthen the global perspective. The implications highlight the need to institutionalize Character Education to foster sustainable learning environments and holistic student development.

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Character Education, Literature review, VOSviewer, Bibliometric analysis

1. Introduction

Character education has gained increasing attention in recent years due to its potential to strengthen students' moral development, cultural identity, and academic achievement in the face of global challenges such as individualism, value shifts, and unequal access to education (Arismunandar & Tolla, 2024; Bier et al., 2023). As an essential component of the educational process, character education is expected to provide not only ethical foundations for students but also practical contributions to creating responsible and adaptive citizens in a rapidly changing world. Grounded in values such as responsibility, empathy, tolerance, and respect, character education plays a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors (Liao, 2020). Various approaches, including cognitive-based and

CONTACT Mahmuda Aulia  mahmudaaulia4@gmail.com  Universitas Malikussaleh, Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia

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experiential learning, have been shown to effectively cultivate positive traits such as collaboration, responsibility, and integrity. Moreover, the integration of cultural and local wisdom has been recognized as a significant factor in enhancing the relevance and sustainability of character education in different contexts (Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Sitanggang et al., 2025).

Unlike conventional education models that may focus primarily on cognitive and academic outcomes, character education emphasizes the holistic development of students, combining intellectual, moral, and social dimensions. Its adaptability allows it to align with both local cultural traditions and global perspectives, ensuring that it remains relevant in diverse educational and societal settings (Bulkani et al., 2025; Sakti et al., 2024). The use of digital tools and technology has further expanded its scope, offering inclusive and innovative strategies to overcome contemporary challenges (Suciati et al., 2023).

Despite the growing interest in this field, there is still a lack of systematic and comprehensive studies that consolidate findings across contexts, evaluate methodological rigor, and provide a clearer map of existing research. Previous works often address fragmented aspects of character education, leaving gaps in understanding its evolution, effectiveness, and implications for future practice (Hanim, 2019; Khadijah et al., 2021).

This gap highlights the importance of conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) on character education to integrate dispersed evidence, identify research gaps, and propose directions for further development. This study aims to review the evolution of character education research, examine its theoretical and practical relevance, and contribute to strengthening both leadership theories in education and evidence-based practices in diverse cultural and organizational contexts.

Previous reviews on character education tend to be either solely conceptual or methodologically limited to qualitative narrative reviews, leading to fragmented insights and limited generalizability (Donthu et al., 2021). Consequently, the theoretical void persists in understanding how character education evolves across time, contexts, cultural traditions, and policy frameworks. A hybrid approach that combines SLR and bibliometric analysis is needed to generate stronger meta-insight: SLR identifies conceptual trends and research gaps, while bibliometric analysis objectively maps patterns of publication growth, thematic clusters, and influential research networks. Thus, this hybrid method is not merely methodological preference—but necessary for offering a more integrative and evidence-based assessment of where character education research currently stands, how it has evolved, and where future scholarship should be directed.

RQ1: *What are the publication trends and intellectual structure of Character Education research?*

RQ2: *Which theoretical and contextual domains dominate the field of Character Education?*

RQ3: *What are the future directions for developing a holistic Character Education framework?*

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and Bibliometric Analysis to address the three research questions. The SLR method is suitable for synthesizing existing studies, identifying research gaps, and outlining future directions, while also offering evidence-based insights that can guide policy, practice, and future investigations. This approach ensures that findings are derived from a broad and representative selection of studies, highlighting priority areas for further exploration (Agazu et al., 2022; Said & Sharif, 2023). Complementing this, the bibliometric analysis will assess the distribution and impact of publications on Character Education. By utilizing VOSviewer and the Scopus database, the study will examine research outputs on Character Education from diverse journals, focusing on works published up to September 22, 2025. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive mapping of the field's development and a deeper understanding of its growth and future research trajectories.

2. Literature Review

Character education has been conceptualized in multiple ways, yet scholars generally agree that it plays a crucial role in shaping students' moral, social, emotional, and intellectual development. Early perspectives emphasized the cultivation of virtues through habituation, role-modelling, dialogue, and "character friendships," where students

learn morality by observing and imitating virtuous behavior (Kristjánsson, 2025; Sanderse, 2025). This virtue ethics approach positions character education as a distinct curricular goal aimed at strengthening moral formation through repetition and deliberation. This shows that virtue ethics considers character development as a gradual moral construction, making it highly relevant as a theoretical foundation for a hybrid analysis because it links moral education to measurable developmental processes.

Over time, this understanding expanded into broader frameworks of personal growth, particularly in relation to emotional regulation, decision-making, and the development of traits such as responsibility, honesty, and discipline that support holistic human development (Hambali et al., 2025; Irwan et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025). In Indonesia, character education has been integrated into curriculum design and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasizes values such as critical reasoning, independence, and collaboration (Limiansi et al., 2025). Cultural education and national character building are also implemented as strategies to cultivate morality and discipline through structured educational practices (Karyono et al., 2025). This indicates that character education in the Indonesian context operates as both a moral and curricular construct, requiring hybrid analysis to connect national policy frameworks with practices at the school level.

Character education is also framed within spiritual and religious traditions. Within Islamic pedagogy, it refers to the formation of moral, intellectual, and spiritual character through values such as honesty, patience, compassion, and responsibility (Amal, 2025; Hasibuan et al., 2025). The integration of spirituality is considered essential for forming *insan kamil*—virtuous, resilient, and pious human beings who balance worldly and spiritual success (Rijal et al., 2025). Concepts such as *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) also serve as a moral foundation for forming noble character. This spiritual dimension expands character education into a transcendent domain, suggesting that hybrid analysis must connect individual moral development with religious-normative orientations in Muslim-majority contexts.

Other studies highlight the incorporation of local wisdom and cultural tradition as essential in strengthening identity and social responsibility. This includes encouraging participation in health promotion and clean living practices (Umar et al., 2025; Yani et al., 2025). Additionally, character education is increasingly positioned as a collaborative process involving schools, families, and communities to harmonize emotional, cognitive, and physical growth and guide individuals to make sound moral judgments (Ginting et al., 2025). This suggests that character formation is socially mediated; therefore, hybrid analysis must consider the socio-cultural settings that shape how values are internalized.

From a global point of view, character education is widely viewed as a subset of moral education that fosters virtues to support human flourishing. It has become part of effective school practice and is increasingly included in international education policy studies (Kristjánsson, 2025; Lopes et al., 2013). By fostering ethical knowledge, empathy, resilience, and responsibility, character education prepares individuals to face real-world challenges with wisdom and moral courage. Thus, the global perspective affirms the universality of character education while also highlighting the need for context-sensitive interpretation, which aligns directly with the integrative orientation of the present hybrid analysis.

Overall, the literature indicates that character education is a multidimensional construct shaped by virtue ethics, curricular policy, cultural values, and spiritual frameworks. Therefore, the hybrid analysis applied in this study aims to integrate these diverse theoretical models into a coherent analytical lens that can more systematically examine the multi-layered nature of character education.

Table 1. Key Conceptual Foundations of Character Education

Theme/ Conceptual Category	Core Defining Elements of Character Education	Representative Sources
Virtue Ethical Formation	Character education is framed as a moral formation process rooted in virtue ethics, where students cultivate moral excellences through habituation, role modelling, dialogue, and deliberation to internalize virtuous conduct and moral judgement.	(Kristjánsson, 2025; Sanderse, 2025)
Holistic Human Development	Character education aims to promote comprehensive human development by integrating emotional regulation, decision-making, empathy, resilience, social awareness, mental health, and positive behavior to prepare students to face real-world challenges with moral courage.	(Ginting et al., 2025; Hambali et al., 2025; Irwan et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025)
Curriculum & National Education Frameworks	Character education is embedded within national educational systems and curriculum objectives (e.g., Pancasila Student Profile), emphasizing critical reasoning, independence, collaboration, and civic responsibility as mandated learning outcomes.	(Karyono et al., 2025; Limiansi et al., 2025)
Local Wisdom Integration	Character education is reinforced through the integration of cultural traditions and local wisdom to strengthen student identity, communal responsibility, and participation in health-based and socially beneficial practices grounded in cultural norms.	(Umar et al., 2025; Yani et al., 2025)
Spiritual-Religious Formation	Character education is understood as a spiritually grounded educational effort that shapes moral, intellectual, and religious character by internalizing values such as honesty, patience, compassion, and piety, aiming to form resilient and virtuous individuals (<i>insan kamil</i>).	(Amal, 2025; Hasibuan et al., 2025; Rijal et al., 2025)
Global Citizenship & Moral Education	Character education is increasingly recognized internationally as a central dimension of moral education that fosters ethical knowledge, virtues, and competencies needed for human flourishing within a global educational discourse.	(Lopes et al., 2013)

3. Method and Analysis

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) combined with a bibliometric analysis to map and synthesize global research trends in Character Education. The SLR followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor (Marzi et al., 2025; Santosa et al., 2025). The initial search was conducted in the Scopus database, identifying 21,259 documents published between 1922 and 2025. After applying screening and eligibility criteria, 1,217 articles were retained for final analysis, with the screening completed on 22 September 2025. As illustrated in Figure 1, the PRISMA flow diagram presents the detailed selection process, showing the transition from the initial identification of records to the final inclusion of studies.

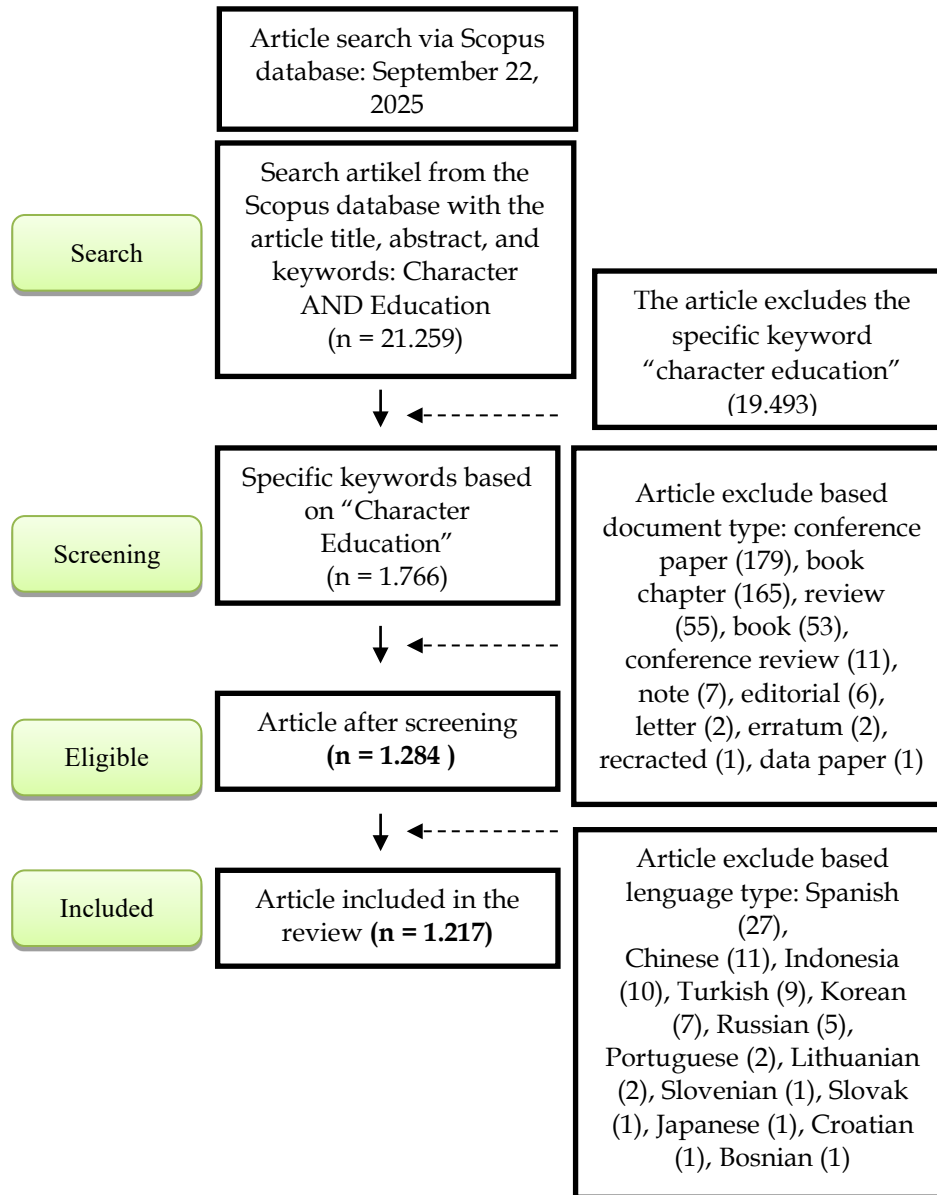
The inclusion process was guided by predefined criteria to ensure the quality and relevance of the data. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English and explicitly addressing Character Education in their title, abstract, or keywords were included. Publications such as conference papers, book chapters, editorials, and non-peer-reviewed documents were excluded, along with duplicate records and studies unrelated to moral, ethical, or values-based education. To ensure reliability, the screening and data extraction process was independently validated by two researchers, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer (version X.X) to visualize bibliographic coupling, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks. A minimum threshold of five keyword occurrences was applied to generate robust and meaningful clusters. This approach enabled the identification of intellectual structures, emerging research themes, and collaboration patterns across countries, institutions, and authors (Donthu et al., 2021; Khizar et al., 2024). Integration of bibliometric mapping with systematic review methods provided a comprehensive synthesis of theoretical, empirical, and contextual developments in the field.

A macro-to-micro keyword strategy was employed, beginning with broad search trajectories and gradually refining them to focus specifically on "Character Education." The keyword was applied across title, abstract, and keyword fields to maximize coverage and relevance. The Scopus database was selected due to its extensive indexing of high-quality journals and broad disciplinary coverage; however, this reliance also presents a limitation, as it excludes potentially relevant publications indexed in other repositories such as the Web of Science. Future studies are therefore encouraged to perform cross-database validation to enhance comprehensiveness and mitigate database bias.

Figure 1

Systematic Literature Review information flow using PRISMA



According to the search outcomes retrieved on September 22, 2025, from the Scopus database utilizing the article title, abstract, and keywords: "Character AND Education" across diverse academic disciplines, spanning from the earliest publication in 1922 to the most recent in 2025, the total number of articles about Character Education is 21,259 documents (refer to Figure 1). Following these findings, a screening process filters documents according to their classification. Articles are eliminated based on the document type: conference paper (179), book chapter (165), review (55), book (53), conference review (11), note (7), editorial (6), letter (2), erratum (2), retracted (1), data paper (1). The screening results, categorized by document types, yielded 1,217 articles. This document is then further analyzed in this study to answer **RQ1: What are the publication trends and intellectual structure of Character**

Education research? **RQ2:** Which theoretical and contextual domains dominate the field of Character Education? **RQ3:** What are the future directions for developing a holistic Character Education framework?

4. Results and Discussion

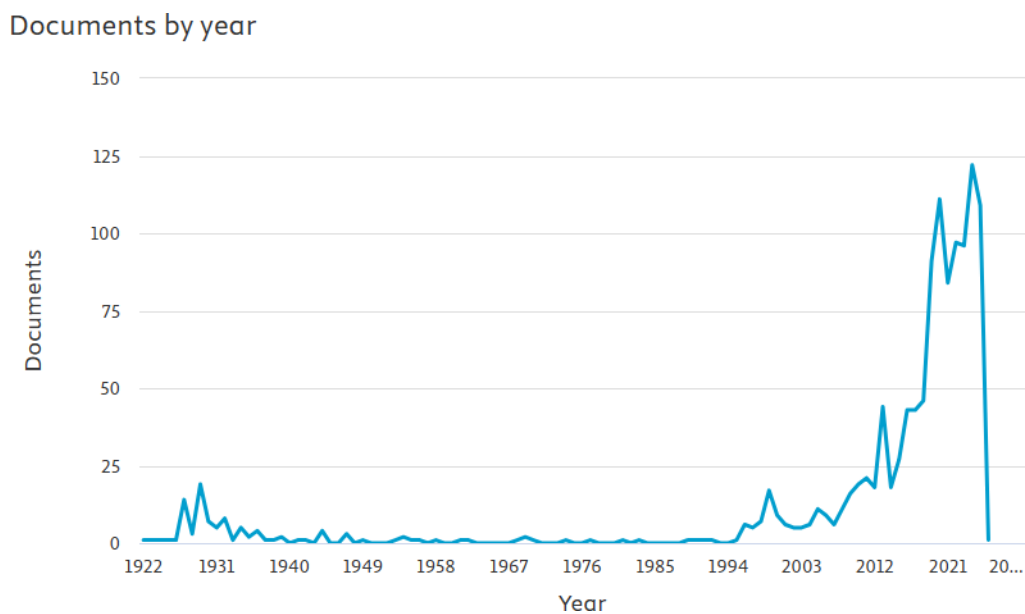
The results of this study focus on findings from 1,217 articles in the Scopus database on Character Education. This data is sourced from identifying the number of articles published, publications throughout the years, and journal sources. This study will also highlight the most influential elements in Character Education, including the authors, affiliations, and the countries involved.

RQ1: What are the publication trends and intellectual structure of Character Education research?

According to Scopus data (Figure 1), publications on Character Education first appeared in 1922, although the volume remained very limited and fluctuating until the early 2000s. A sustained increase began around 2010, followed by a very sharp upward trend in the last decade, with the peak occurring in 2024 (122 documents). This trajectory suggests that Character Education has shifted from a niche topic to a mainstream academic discourse. One plausible explanation for this surge is the global educational agenda emphasizing value formation, such as SDG 4 (Quality Education), which explicitly includes “promotion of global citizenship and sustainable development values.” In addition, the growing attention to moral crises, cyber ethics, digital culture, and political polarization may also have driven researchers to revisit Character Education as a foundation for addressing ethical problems in the digital era.

Figure 2

Number of Character Education publications



Source: Scopus database

In terms of intellectual structure, the literature has expanded beyond classical virtue ethics and now intersects with contemporary domains such as digital literacy, local wisdom, education strategies, and comparative studies (Dewi & Alam, 2020; Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Korim & Hanesová, 2010; Zurqoni et al., 2018). Character Education is also frequently linked to academic achievement, psychosocial development, and identity formation (Jeynes, 2019). This indicates that Character Education is not only theoretically rooted in moral philosophy, but also increasingly

positioned as an interdisciplinary field that connects curriculum reform, national policy agendas, socio-cultural contexts, and future competencies required in 21st-century learning.

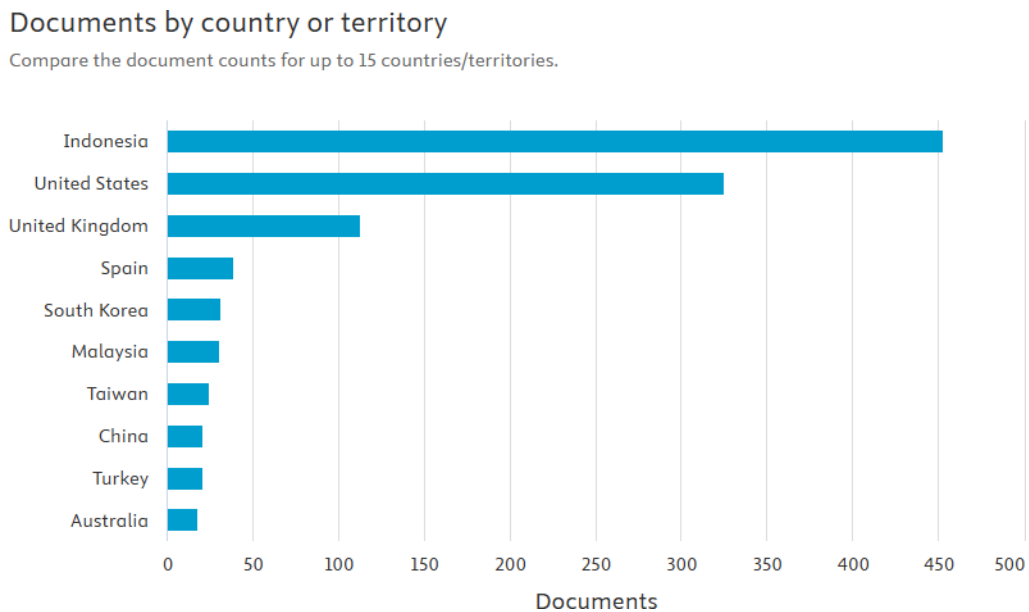
RQ2: Which theoretical and contextual domains dominate the field of Character Education?

The analysis of RQ2 mapped the distribution of Character Education research across the 1,217 articles by grouping them according to nation, region, institutional affiliation, publication source, and author—restricted to the top 10 in each category to maintain analytical clarity. Understanding how scholarship is geographically and institutionally concentrated is important not only for identifying who drives the global knowledge production in Character Education, but also for informing future research directions—especially concerning how the Character Education paradigm can be sustained and strategically advanced.

First, the distribution of Character Education publications by nation indicates a strong dominance from Indonesia (452 articles), followed by the United States (324 articles) and the United Kingdom (112 articles). Meanwhile, other countries such as Spain (38), South Korea (31), Malaysia (30), Taiwan (24), China (20), Turkey (20), and Australia (17) contribute in smaller proportions (see Figure 2). This pattern suggests that Character Education research is not equally distributed globally, but is primarily concentrated in Indonesia and Anglo-American contexts—likely driven by differing policy pressures, curricular agendas, and socio-cultural imperatives related to character formation. (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

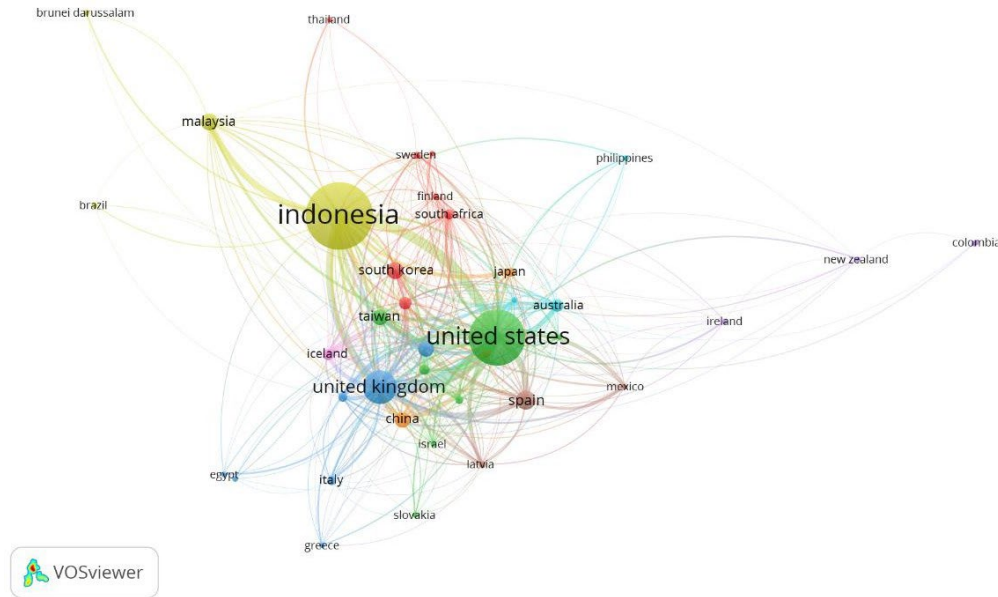
Number of articles by country or territory (top 10 country)



Source: Scopus database

Figure 3

Network country visualization

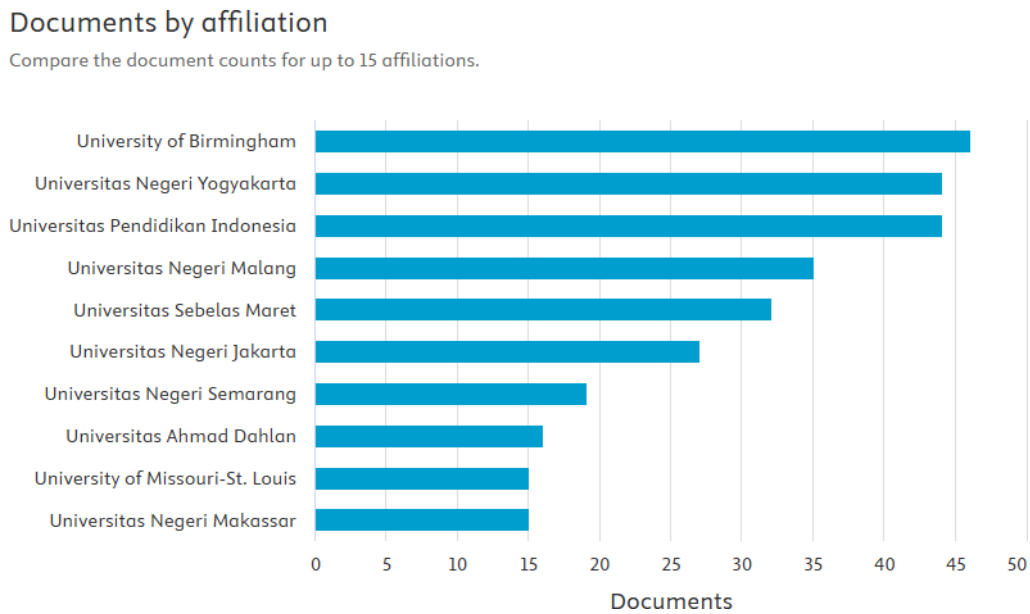


These findings reaffirm that Character Education is not only concentrated in countries with dominant contributions such as Indonesia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, but is also gaining attention from countries with smaller publication outputs, including Spain, South Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, China, Turkey, and Australia. This pattern demonstrates that Character Education has global relevance across varied social, cultural, and educational contexts. In many cases, this expansion aligns with national policy reforms, moral debates in public discourse, and the global education agenda (e.g., SDG 4) that emphasizes holistic competencies beyond academic skills. Thus, Character Education has become a cross-national concern—not merely a localized curriculum trend—reflecting shared efforts to formulate more sustainable, values-based educational models.

Second, the distribution of scholarship based on institutional affiliation is led by the University of Birmingham (United Kingdom), followed by major Indonesian universities such as Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Universitas Negeri Malang, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, and Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, with a smaller contribution from the University of Missouri–St. Louis in the United States (see Figure 4). This pattern reveals two important points: (1) Character Education has strong institutional roots in the United Kingdom through long-standing leadership in moral education scholarship, and (2) Indonesia has become a major global hub for Character Education research, driven by national policy mandates and the integration of Pancasila-based values in the curriculum. (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Number of articles by affiliation



Source: Scopus Database

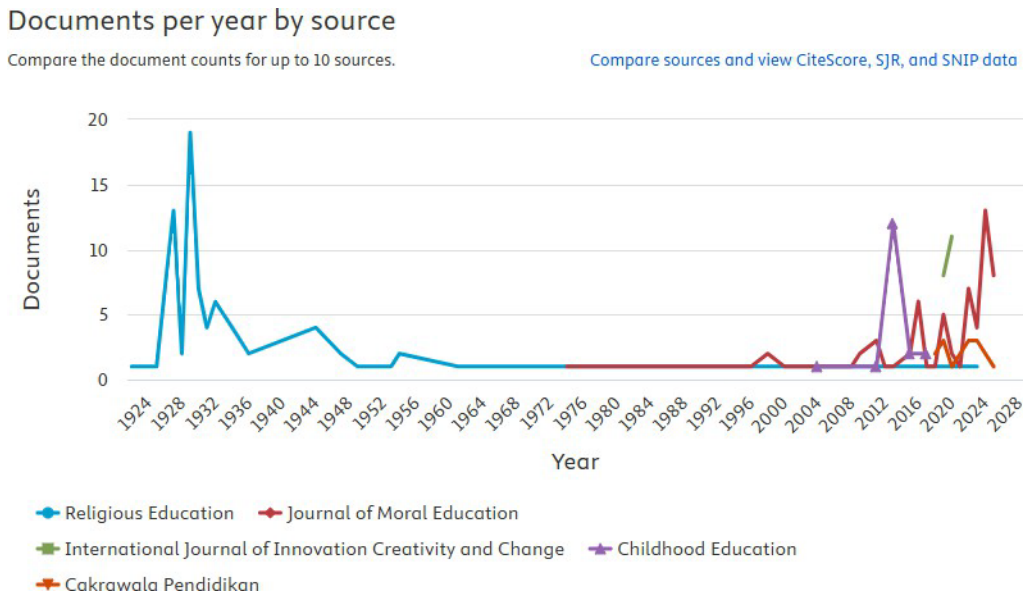
These findings confirm that Character Education is not merely concentrated in Indonesian institutions, but is also supported by leading international universities such as the University of Birmingham (United Kingdom) and the University of Missouri–St. Louis (United States). The presence of sustained contributions from diverse institutional contexts reinforces the global status of Character Education as a research field that transcends national boundaries and is continually developed across different educational systems, policy frameworks, and cultural settings.

Third, the distribution of articles on Character Education by source shows that Religious Education dominates with 74 articles, followed by the Journal of Moral Education with 68 articles. Furthermore, the International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change contributed 19 articles, Childhood Education 18 articles, Cakrawala Pendidikan 17 articles, International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research 15 articles, and Revista Española de Pedagogía 15 articles. In addition, the International Journal of Instruction provided 14 articles, NASSP Bulletin 13 articles, and Ethics and Education 12 article (see Figure 5).

Third, the distribution of publications by journal source indicates that Religious Education and the Journal of Moral Education constitute the two most dominant publication outlets in this field. In addition to these core sources, a diverse range of educational and interdisciplinary journals—such as the International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change, Childhood Education, Cakrawala Pendidikan, and the International Journal of Instruction—also contribute significantly to the dissemination of Character Education research (see Figure 5). This distribution shows that discourse on Character Education is not limited to moral and religious domains, but is increasingly published in broader educational platforms.

Figure 5

Number of articles by sources (top 10 sources)

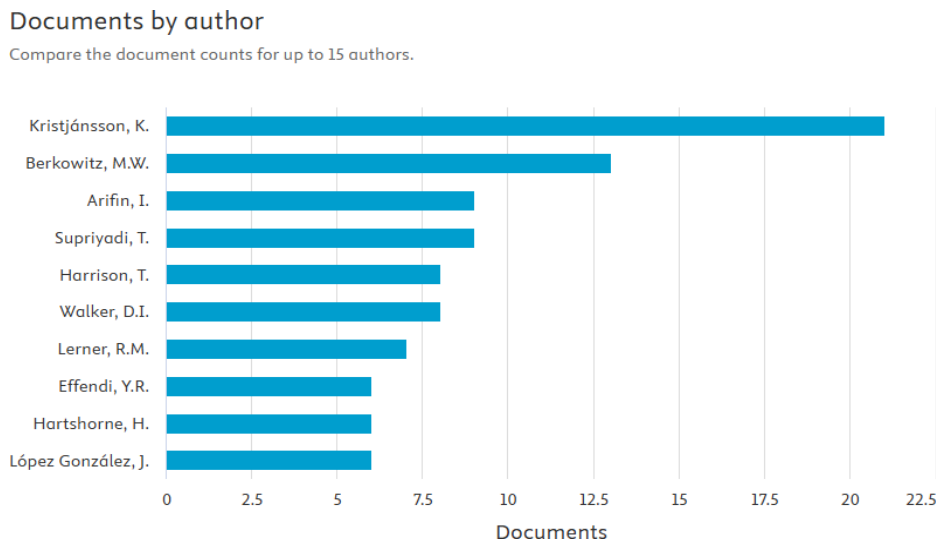


Source: Scopus database

Fourth, the distribution of research based on authors reveals that the field is strongly dominated by a limited number of leading scholars. Kristjánsson, K. emerges as the most prominent contributor, followed by Berkowitz, M.W., with several other authors such as Arifin, Supriyadi, Harrison, Walker, Lerner, Effendi, Hartshorne, and López González also making notable contributions (see Figure 6). This pattern reflects that Character Education scholarship is influenced by a concentrated group of experts who have consistently shaped theoretical development and research progress in this domain.

Figure 6

Count of publications by author (top 10 authors)



Source: Scopus database

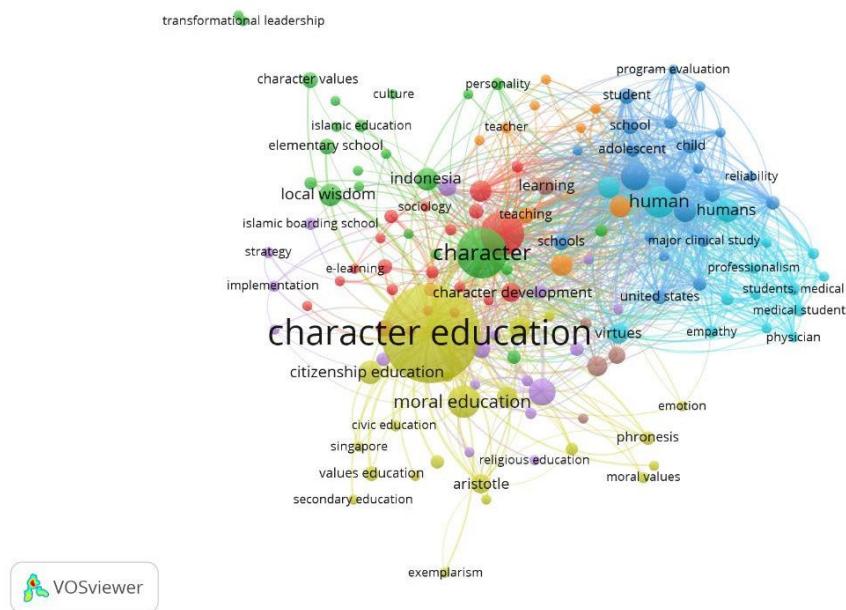
RQ3: What are the future directions for developing a holistic Character Education framework?

The examination was undertaken on 1,217 manuscripts amassed from the Scopus repository. Using VOSviewer, the study identified trends, research clusters, and conceptual linkages that hold both theoretical and practical implications for future inquiries into Character Education. The bibliometric mapping reveals not only the growth and diversification of this field but also its evolving theoretical orientation—particularly toward virtue ethics, emotional intelligence, and moral education. These insights enable researchers and practitioners to better understand how Character Education has been conceptualized across different contexts, thereby providing a theoretical foundation for developing more holistic and value-based educational frameworks.

From Figure 7, the most frequent keywords related to Character Education include character education (471), character (124), morality (23), ethics (17), moral education (52), empathy (8), and emotional intelligence (5). These recurring terms demonstrate the strong association between Character Education and moral, emotional, and ethical domains, implying that recent research has shifted from purely instructional models toward frameworks that emphasize moral virtue, emotional awareness, and holistic student development. This convergence of key terms underscores the theoretical continuity between Character Education and virtue ethics as well as the affective dimensions found in emotional intelligence theory.

Figure 7

Co-occurrence framework Anda representation of key terms



Source: Output VOSviewer software

	Keyword	Total Link Strenght
1	Character Education	1131
2	Human	756
3	Education	542
4	Morality	317
5	Controlled Study	252

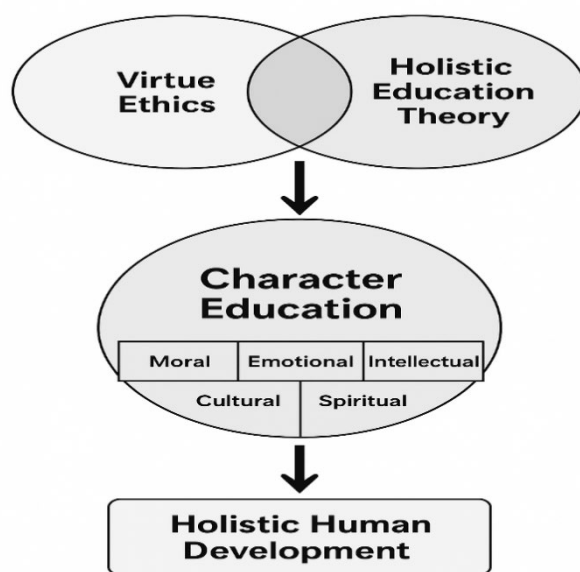
6	Students	226
7	School	224
8	Curriculum	163
9	Moral Development	153
10	Moral Education	151

Based on the mapping outcomes and an examination of previous investigations, it is evident that research on Character Education is primarily concentrated in countries such as Indonesia, the United States, and the United Kingdom (see Figure 2 and Figure 4). Future research should also consider countries with smaller publication outputs—such as Spain, South Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, China, Turkey, and Australia—to enrich global perspectives on Character Education. Studies from these regions reveal culturally specific approaches: for example, South Korea emphasizes moral and ethical growth (Park, 2017), the United States and Turkey apply Character Education principles in diverse educational contexts (Baloğlu Uğurlu, 2014), while Indonesia integrates local wisdom and community-based practices (Purwaningsih & Ridha, 2024). These findings demonstrate that Character Education can serve as a unifying framework for moral and emotional formation across various cultural settings, resonating with the holistic education theory that promotes the integration of moral, social, and spiritual dimensions.

The findings from studies on Character Education conducted by previous scholars indicate that its success depends on five fundamental attributes: moral, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development. These dimensions emphasize the cultivation of virtues through habituation, the development of empathy and tolerance, the integration of critical reasoning and integrity, and the preservation of cultural traditions and faith-based values. When viewed through the lens of virtue ethics, these attributes represent the internalization of moral virtues that shape one’s moral character and practical wisdom (phronesis). Simultaneously, from the perspective of emotional intelligence theory, the emotional and social dimensions of Character Education highlight self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy as key competencies for moral action. Collectively, these perspectives support moral education theory, where moral behavior is cultivated through consistent practice, emotional sensitivity, and rational reflection—forming the ethical core of holistic human development.

Figure 8

Character Education Attribute



Source: Adapted from previous research (Amal, 2025; Bier et al., 2023; Hambali et al., 2025; Hasibuan et al., 2025; Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Irwan et al., 2025; Jeynes, 2019; Karyono et al., 2025; Kristjánsson, 2025; Liao, 2020; Limiansi et al., 2025; Rijal et al., 2025; Sanderse, 2025)

Character Education, therefore, can be conceptualized as a holistic educational framework that integrates virtue ethics and holistic education theory. The moral attribute represents the ethical foundation that aligns with Aristotle's concept of virtue as a habit of moral excellence. The emotional attribute connects to emotional intelligence, emphasizing empathy and self-regulation in interpersonal relations. The intellectual attribute relates to rational virtue, critical thinking, and integrity, resonating with moral reasoning theories. The cultural attribute sustains the identity and continuity of communal values, while the spiritual attribute integrates transcendental awareness and moral consciousness—dimensions central to holistic education theory. Together, these five attributes constitute an integrated model that unites cognition, emotion, and morality in nurturing complete human beings.

Based on these linkages, this study proposes a conceptual integration model of Character Education (see Figure 8), which situates the five attributes within the overlapping domains of virtue ethics and holistic education. In this model, virtue ethics provides the moral-philosophical foundation (focusing on moral and intellectual virtues), while holistic education theory offers a multidimensional framework that incorporates emotional, cultural, and spiritual growth. This integration demonstrates that Character Education not only promotes individual virtue but also nurtures emotional balance, social harmony, and cultural continuity—aligning educational practices with global ethical and moral imperatives.

5. Discussion

The present bibliometric investigation extends previous reviews on Character Education by offering a more integrative theoretical lens that connects virtue ethics, emotional intelligence, and holistic education theory. Whereas prior studies (Arthur, 2005; Lickona, 1999; Nucci et al., 2014) have largely emphasized moral and civic virtues, the current review advances this understanding by conceptualizing Character Education as a synthesis of five interrelated attributes—moral, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual. This multidimensional integration highlights the comprehensive nature of character formation and addresses a key limitation in earlier bibliometric reviews that tended to treat these domains in isolation.

Compared with earlier analyses (Berkowitz, 2011; Kristjánsson, 2025), this study contributes a new conceptual insight: Character Education should be viewed as a dynamic ecosystem of virtues rather than a static collection of moral traits. The moral and emotional attributes align with virtue ethics and emotional intelligence theory, representing the internalization of ethical and affective competencies. Meanwhile, the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual attributes draw from holistic education theory, where cognitive, social, and transcendental dimensions interact to promote whole-person development. This theoretical synthesis provides a more coherent framework for understanding how character evolves across moral, emotional, and spiritual domains.

The analysis also reveals a geographical and cultural imbalance in Character Education scholarship, dominated by contributions from Indonesia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This finding indicates that while moral and emotional aspects are extensively studied, the integration of cultural and spiritual dimensions remains underexplored globally. Hence, this study broadens the scope of Character Education by incorporating local wisdom, community engagement, and faith-based traditions—elements often overlooked in Western paradigms. These culturally grounded perspectives reinforce the holistic education approach, which values the interdependence of ethics, culture, and spirituality in nurturing human flourishing.

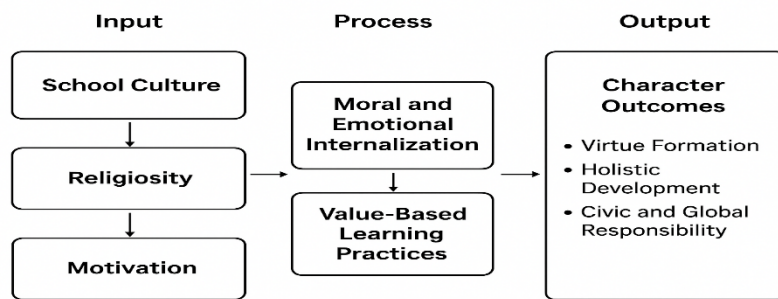
From a policy and pedagogical standpoint, integrating the five attributes offers several implications. First, education policies should adopt virtue-based frameworks that align moral and emotional learning with cognitive and spiritual growth. Second, schools should encourage interdisciplinary approaches that connect humanities, sciences, and local culture to develop intellectual and moral virtues simultaneously. Third, teacher preparation programs must equip

educators not only as transmitters of knowledge but as moral and emotional role models who embody the virtues they teach. Finally, reflective and community-based pedagogies can help translate abstract virtues into lived experiences, promoting empathy, social justice, and global citizenship among learners.

Overall, this study’s main contribution lies in its conceptual synthesis that bridges virtue ethics and holistic education through five educational attributes. It extends prior bibliometric reviews by presenting an integrative model that unites ethical reasoning, emotional intelligence, intellectual virtue, cultural awareness, and spiritual growth. This framework positions Character Education as a transformative process, not merely a curricular component, cultivating individuals who are morally grounded, emotionally resilient, intellectually curious, and culturally rooted—qualities essential for global citizenship in the modern era.

Figure 9

Conceptual model of Character Education



Source: Author’s elaboration based on Character Education literature

6. Conclusion

This study provides an integrative synthesis of global Character Education research through a hybrid Systematic Literature Review and bibliometric analysis of 1,217 Scopus-indexed publications from 1922 to 2025. The analysis confirms a growing international interest in Character Education, particularly from Indonesia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, with emerging attention from other regions. Conceptually, the study advances the field by framing Character Education as a multidimensional construct encompassing moral, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual dimensions—integrated within a comprehensive model linking school culture, religiosity, and motivation to character outcomes through moral and emotional internalization.

Theoretically, this investigation bridges virtue ethics, emotional intelligence, and holistic education theories into a unified framework that captures both internal (moral-emotional) and external (cultural-religious) determinants of character formation. Methodologically, it demonstrates how bibliometric techniques can illuminate the intellectual structure and research frontiers of Character Education, supporting future meta-analytic and qualitative integration. Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of embedding Character Education into institutional culture, promoting empathy, responsibility, and civic engagement as essential outcomes of holistic learning.

Looking ahead, future studies should (1) conduct cross-database validation using Web of Science and other repositories, (2) employ mixed-method triangulation to capture contextual and narrative insights, and (3) undertake regional comparative analyses to examine cultural variations in the implementation of Character Education. Altogether, this research contributes a forward-looking conceptual foundation that repositions Character Education as a dynamic ecosystem of virtues—essential for nurturing ethical integrity, emotional resilience, and global citizenship in the 21st century.

Acknowledgments

None.

Ethical Statement

This bibliometric study did not involve direct human participation or experimental intervention. Therefore, ethical approval was not required. All data were obtained from the database, which contains publicly available bibliographic metadata. The analysis strictly adhered to ethical research standards, ensuring transparency, proper citation, and acknowledgment of all sources included in the dataset.

Competing Interests

None.

Author's Contribution

Author¹: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft

Author²: Methodology

Author³: Resources, Software, Writing – review and editing

Data availability

None.

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