

Contents lists available at ojs.aeducia.org

Indonesian Journal of Character Education Studies

Volume 3, Issue 2 (2025), DOI: 10.64420/ijces.v3i2

Journal homepage: https://ojs.aeducia.org/index.php/ijces

IJCES

E-ISSN 3063-0401

P-ISSN 3063-1513

Conceptual Article **Read Online:** https://doi.org/10.64420/ijces.v3i2.623 **Open Access**

The Role of Parents in Forming Children's Characters

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ABSTRACT

Background: Rapid social, cultural, and technological transformations have made the role of parents increasingly critical in shaping children's character to navigate modern digital media and diverse social environments. **Objective:** This study aims to analyze how various dimensions of parenting practices specifically parenting styles, parental involvement, emotional communication, digital parenting, and parent-school collaboration-contribute to **children's** moral, emotional, and social character formation. **Method:** By employing a conceptual and theoretical analysis, this study utilizes Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Attachment Theory, and Baumrind's parenting typologies as theoretical lenses. **Main findings:** The findings indicate that authoritative parenting consistently fosters self-discipline, empathy, and responsibility through emotional warmth and clear behavioral boundaries. Furthermore, open communication and secure emotional attachment facilitate moral internalization, while proactive digital mentoring and parent-school collaboration ensure consistent value reinforcement across environments. **Conclusion:** Character formation is a continuous, integrated process driven by observational learning, parental modeling, and behavioral reinforcement within the family. **Contribution:** This study **bridges** foundational developmental frameworks with modern socio-technological shifts, offering a holistic framework and valuable insights for parents, educators, and policymakers designing comprehensive, family-based character education programs.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: June 30, 2026
Revised: November 5, 2026
Accepted: November 9, 2026
Published: November 24, 2026

KEYWORDS

Parenting Style;
Character Development;
Parental Involvement;
Digital Parenting;
Social Learning Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Character formation is a fundamental aspect of child development because it shapes how children think, behave, interact socially, and respond to moral and emotional challenges throughout their lives (Karimullah, 2023). Character encompasses the values, attitudes, habits, and ethical principles that guide individuals in making decisions and conducting themselves within society (Suroso & Husin, 2024). In the contemporary era, character development has gained increasing importance due to rapid technological advancement, globalization, and shifting social environments that continuously influence children's behavior (Rudiyanto, 2024). As children are increasingly exposed to digital media, peer interactions, and diverse social contexts, parental involvement becomes a critical factor in guiding moral development and strengthening positive character formation.

Ideally, parents are widely recognized as the first and most influential educators in a child's life. Before entering formal education, children acquire foundational values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, empathy, and respect through family interactions (Ikhsan & Abdi, 2025). The family environment serves as the primary setting where early moral and social learning takes place, making it a crucial foundation for character development (Marhayati et al., 2026). In this setting, supportive relationships significantly contribute to children's psychological

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How to Cite this Article:

Mutiara, A., Haliza, N., & Wahyuni, S. (2026). The Role of Parents in Forming Children's Characters. *Indonesian Journal of Character Education Studies, 3*(2), 87-96. https://doi.org/10.64420/ijces.v3i2.623

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well being by providing emotional stability and behavioral guidance, which play an essential role in shaping early moral awareness and social behavior, particularly in helping children understand acceptable and unacceptable actions.

However, in reality, social and economic changes, alongside rapid digital advancement, present complex challenges to parenting practices and family dynamics. Work demands, limited time, and changing social expectations often reduce the frequency and intensity of parent child interactions (Agarwal & Joshi, 2026). On the one hand, digital platforms provide access to educational resources that can support learning and character education (Mridhula et al., 2026). On the other hand, excessive exposure to digital content and ineffective parenting practices may lead to behavioral instability and weakened moral development. These empirical realities demonstrate that modern parents face significant hurdles in maintaining consistent moral guidance, emotional presence, and effective supervision amid shifting social and technological landscapes.

Prior studies have extensively examined various dimensions of parenting and child character building. Research indicates that parenting styles are closely related to children's behavioral and emotional development, wherein authoritative parenting yields positive outcomes while ineffective parenting hampers moral development (Febriyanti et al., 2025; Lapon & Iwanggin, 2025; Sa'adah & Sholehah, 2025). Furthermore, scholarship highlights that parental communication and active involvement significantly contribute to shaping children's emotional and moral development within the family context. Previous literature also demonstrates that parents' perceptions and active participation influence children's moral outcomes, a dynamic supported by theoretical perspectives such as Social Learning Theory, which explains how children learn through observation, imitation, and parental modeling.

Despite this extensive literature, a critical research gap remains regarding how these distinct parenting dimensions interact within the rapidly evolving context of modern challenges. While previous studies often investigate isolated aspects such as parenting styles or school collaboration independently, there is a lack of an integrated review that systematically connects parenting styles, direct communication, digital parenting adaptations, and parent school collaboration within a unified framework. Furthermore, how parents navigate the balance between digital opportunities and risks while maintaining consistent value transmission remains insufficiently synthesized in current literature.

Addressing this gap is highly urgent because character education is not only a theoretical concept but also a practical necessity in helping children critically filter various external influences that shape their long-term behavioral patterns. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive integration of contemporary literature, capturing the intersection between foundational parenting theories and modern environmental shifts, such as digital parenting literacy and evolving parent school collaboration models. This approach provides a fresh, multifaceted synthesis of parental roles adapted to the demands of the modern era.

The significance of this study lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions to educational psychology and family guidance. Theoretically, it reinforces and extends existing frameworks, such as Social Learning Theory, by demonstrating how parental modeling operates within modern digital and social environments. Practically, the study offers valuable insights for parents, educators, and education policymakers to design family centered character education strategies, foster supportive school family partnerships, and develop structured parenting programs that enhance children's emotional stability, self discipline, and moral reasoning.

This study aims to examine the role of parents in forming children's character through a review of recent literature published between 2022 and 2026. The study focuses on identifying the influence of parenting styles, parental involvement, communication, digital parenting, and parent school collaboration in shaping children's moral, emotional, and social development. Through this review, the article provides a comprehensive understanding of how parental roles contribute to the formation of strong and positive character traits in children in the modern era.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Parenting Styles and Character Development

The conceptual framework of parenting styles categorizes parental behavior into four distinct dimensions based on responsiveness and demandingness. Authoritative parenting, defined by high responsiveness combined with high demandingness, consistently yields the most positive outcomes in character building. Children raised in authoritative households tend to exhibit high self-esteem, strong moral reasoning, robust emotional self-regulation, and prosocial behavior, as parents balance clear boundaries with warmth and open communication (Ghazi et al., 2026).

In contrast, authoritarian parenting enforces strict discipline and compliance with high demandingness but low emotional responsiveness. While this style secures immediate obedience, literature suggests it often hinders internal character internalization, leading to higher anxiety, lower independence, and externalized behavioral problems as children mature. Permissive parenting presents the opposite extreme, featuring high responsiveness paired with low demandingness. Children raised under permissive conditions frequently struggle with impulse control, self-discipline, and task persistence, as the lack of consistent structure prevents them from developing self-regulatory character traits (Muhliawati & Purwadi, 2023).

Neglectful or uninvolved parenting occupies the lowest ranks of both responsiveness and demandingness, representing a significant risk factor in child development. Uninvolved parenting correlates with severe, pervasive deficits in character formation, including elevated rates of delinquency, emotional instability, and poor social competence (Ndakara & Urien, 2025). These four typologies highlight that character development flourishes best under conditions where firm behavioral expectations are paired with emotional support and mutual respect.

2.2 Social Learning Theory and Parental Modeling

Social Learning Theory posits that children acquire behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses predominantly through observational learning and modeling. During early childhood, parents act as the primary socializing agents within the home environment, continuously exposing children to behavioral exemplars. Children naturally attend to parental interactions, absorbing subtle cues regarding interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and social expectations long before formal moral instruction takes place (Harahap et al., 2025).

Through this observational process, children internalize complex behavioral patterns including stress-coping strategies, integrity, empathy, and honesty into their own expanding character repertoire. Rather than passively absorbing rules, children actively construct cognitive representations of appropriate behavior by watching how their parents treat others and handle moral dilemmas in everyday situations (Zhong et al., 2024). Consequently, parental consistency between stated values and actual conduct serves as a cornerstone for successful character modeling.

This observational acquisition is further regulated and consolidated through direct parental feedback in the form of reinforcement and punishment. Parental responses such as offering explicit praise for truthfulness or applying constructive, targeted discipline for aggressive behavior regulate the retention and repetition of desirable character traits (Leijten et al., 2018). Over time, these externally reinforced behaviors transition into self-regulated moral habits, solidifying the child's internal character framework.

2.3 Attachment Theory and Emotional/Moral Foundation

Attachment Theory highlights the profound impact of early emotional bonds on long-term social-emotional development and moral foundation. The quality of caregiver responsiveness establishes an "internal working model" of the self and others, shaping how children perceive security, trust, and self-worth (Groh et al., 2016). When parents respond consistently to a child's physical and emotional needs, they lay the emotional bedrock necessary for positive character growth.

A secure attachment formed with responsive caregivers fosters high levels of empathy, emotional resilience, and a natural willingness to cooperate with social and moral norms. Securely attached children develop a strong sense of agency alongside a capacity for compassion, allowing them to navigate social relationships with integrity and emotional maturity (Taggart, 2014). This secure emotional base encourages children to explore their environment and adopt prosocial values without excessive fear of rejection.

Children who experience insensitive or unpredictable caregiving often develop insecure attachments, categorized as anxious or avoidant. Literature indicates that insecurely attached children frequently struggle with emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, and constructive conflict resolution, which can manifest as persistent character vulnerabilities later in life (Caro et al., 2025). Thus, early attachment security provides the essential socio-emotional architecture upon which moral conscience and ethical character are built.

2.4 Parental Involvement in Moral and Prosocial Education

Character formation extends beyond passive socialization and environmental influence, requiring active, intentional moral teaching and value transmission from parents. A critical mechanism in this educational process is inductive discipline, where parents explicitly explain the reasons behind rules and the direct consequences of a child's actions on others. Research emphasizes that inductive discipline promotes deep moral internalization by connecting behavioral corrections to empathy for the victim (Pastorelli et al., 2015).

Unlike power-assertive or punitive disciplinary strategies, which often rely on fear and external control, induction fosters a genuine moral conscience grounded in empathy and personal accountability. By helping children understand the psychological impact of their conduct on peers and family members, parents encourage internal motivation to act ethically rather than fear-based compliance (Kochanska & Kim, 2013). This active dialogue transforms everyday conflicts into meaningful learning opportunities for moral growth.

Complementing inductive discipline, research highlights the importance of parental co-regulation and emotion coaching, wherein parents assist children in recognizing, labeling, and regulating their affective states. Parents who validate emotional experiences while setting clear behavioral boundaries equip children with essential self-regulatory skills. Because emotional self-regulation serves as a vital prerequisite for integrity, patience, fairness, and prosocial behavior, this active parental guidance represents a fundamental driver of positive character development.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Parenting Style and Behavioral Development in Children

The literature review indicates that parenting styles play a crucial role in shaping children's character and behavioral development. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and clear behavioral boundaries, is consistently associated with positive character outcomes such as self discipline, empathy, and responsibility. In this parenting approach, children receive balanced guidance that combines emotional support with structured discipline, allowing them to understand not only what is right or wrong but also the reasons behind moral rules (Ndakara & Urien, 2025). This process contributes to the development of internalized values rather than mere obedience based on external pressure.

Furthermore, parenting styles significantly influence children's emotional regulation and social adaptation. Children who grow up in supportive and consistent parenting environments tend to demonstrate stronger emotional stability and better interpersonal skills in social interactions (Kumar & Anchal, 2025). In contrast, inconsistent, overly strict, or neglectful parenting patterns may hinder emotional development and weaken children's ability to manage behavior in social contexts. This indicates that effective character formation requires not only discipline but also emotional warmth, consistency, and responsiveness in daily parenting practices.

In addition, parenting styles contribute to long term behavioral formation by shaping how children interpret rules and moral expectations. Through continuous interaction, children gradually develop internal standards that guide their behavior even in the absence of parental supervision. This shows that character development is a gradual and continuous process influenced by everyday family experiences and behavioral reinforcement.

3.2 Parental Communication and Emotional Development

The findings of the literature emphasize that parental communication is a fundamental element in children's emotional and moral development. Open, supportive, and empathetic communication creates a safe environment where children feel comfortable expressing thoughts, emotions, and personal challenges. This interaction supports the development of emotional intelligence, including self awareness, empathy, and the ability to understand social situations more effectively.

Moreover, communication within the family functions as a key mechanism for transmitting values and moral principles. When parents actively listen and respond to children's concerns, trust is strengthened, which increases children's willingness to accept guidance and internalize moral teachings (Karim et al., 2025). This highlights that communication is not merely an exchange of information but also a process of emotional bonding that shapes children's character development.

Consistent and healthy communication patterns also help prevent misunderstandings and behavioral conflicts between parents and children. Children who experience positive communication are more likely to develop constructive coping strategies when facing academic, emotional, or social challenges (Bedel & Barkın, 2025). Therefore, communication plays a central role in integrating emotional development with character formation.

3.3 Digital Parenting and Character Challenges in the Modern Era

The advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed parenting practices and children's developmental environments. Digital platforms provide access to educational content that can support learning and character development; however, they also expose children to inappropriate content, excessive screen time, and potential behavioral risks if not properly managed (Hukubun et al., 2024). This condition indicates that digital technology is not inherently positive or negative, but its impact depends on how parents regulate and guide its use within the

family environment. Therefore, parental awareness becomes essential in balancing the benefits and risks of digital exposure for children's character development.

In this context, digital parenting becomes essential in guiding children's use of technology. Parental supervision is no longer limited to restricting access but also includes educating children about digital ethics, responsible online behavior, and critical evaluation of digital content (Adella, 2025). This means parents are required to actively accompany children in navigating digital environments rather than only imposing restrictions. This approach reflects a shift in parenting roles from control-based supervision to guidance-based mentoring, where children are gradually taught to make responsible decisions independently.

Furthermore, parental digital literacy plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of digital parenting. Parents who understand digital platforms are better able to guide and monitor their children's online activities. Therefore, adapting to technological change is a necessary aspect of modern parenting to ensure that digital exposure supports, rather than hinders, children's character development. This suggests that in the digital era, parenting competence is not only measured by emotional or moral guidance, but also by the ability to understand and engage with technological environments that shape children's daily behavior.

3.4 Parent School Collaboration in Strengthening Character Education

The literature highlights that collaboration between parents and schools is essential in strengthening children's character education. Schools provide structured moral and academic learning, while parents reinforce these values within the home environment (Toron et al., 2026). When both institutions work in alignment, children receive consistent moral messages that support stronger internalization of character values. This consistency is important because children tend to develop stronger moral understanding when values are repeatedly reinforced across different environments.

In addition, parent school collaboration contributes to the development of a supportive educational ecosystem. Continuous communication between teachers and parents enables early identification of behavioral issues and more effective intervention strategies (Azad et al., 2018). This shared responsibility ensures that character education is not fragmented but integrated across different environments in which children develop. This indicates that collaboration creates a more stable and structured environment for shaping children's behavior, especially in addressing emotional and social challenges early.

Moreover, active parental involvement in school activities increases children's motivation and strengthens their perception of the importance of moral values. Observing cooperation between parents and teachers helps children understand that character development is valued in both academic and family settings, thereby reinforcing consistency in behavior and attitudes. This means that collaboration not only affects educational outcomes but also strengthens children's belief system regarding the importance of positive character in everyday life.

3.5 Contextual Challenges in Parenting Practices

The literature also identifies several contextual challenges that influence parenting effectiveness. Economic pressures, work demands, and limited time often reduce the frequency of direct interaction between parents and children (Roubinov & Boyce, 2017). These conditions may limit opportunities for consistent guidance and supervision in daily life. This situation indicates that modern parenting is increasingly shaped by external structural factors rather than solely individual parenting intentions, where parents are often required to divide attention between work responsibilities and family needs. As a result, the consistency of emotional presence and direct engagement with children may fluctuate, which can affect the stability of character-building processes in the family environment.

However, research indicates that the quality of interaction is more important than its quantity. Meaningful communication, emotional support, and attentive engagement can still produce positive developmental outcomes even when time is limited (Wray et al., 2021). This suggests that effective parenting is determined more by the depth of interaction than by its duration. In practical terms, even short interactions can become highly impactful when they involve active listening, empathy, and sincere attention to children's emotional needs. Therefore, the effectiveness of parenting is closely related to how parents utilize available time to create meaningful and value-based interactions that support children's moral development.

In addition, rapid social and cultural changes add complexity to parenting roles. Parents are required to balance traditional moral values with modern societal influences while adapting to evolving expectations. These dynamics highlight that parenting is a continuous adjustment process shaped by changing social environments. This means that parents are not only responsible for maintaining moral consistency within the family but also for interpreting

and filtering external influences that may affect children's character formation. Consequently, parenting in the modern era demands flexibility, critical awareness, and adaptive strategies to ensure that core values remain stable despite shifting social conditions.

3.6 Theoretical Interpretation of Parental Influence on Character Formation

Social Learning Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how children develop character through parental influence. According to this framework, children learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from significant individuals in their environment, particularly parents (Wahyuni et al., 2025). This indicates that children are highly influenced by what they see in daily family interactions, making the home environment a primary setting for the formation of moral understanding and behavioral patterns.

In practical terms, children tend to imitate parental behaviors such as honesty, discipline, empathy, and responsibility. Therefore, parents function not only as caregivers but also as behavioral models whose actions directly shape children's moral development. Consistency between parental words and actions is essential in ensuring effective internalization of values (Hafina et al., 2022). This implies that any inconsistency between what parents say and what they do may create confusion in children's value interpretation, potentially weakening the character formation process over time.

Furthermore, character formation is a long-term developmental process that requires continuous reinforcement. Values that are consistently demonstrated and practiced within the family environment gradually become part of children's personality and behavioral identity. This emphasizes that sustainable character development depends on long term consistency, emotional engagement, and positive role modeling within the family system. In other words, character is not formed through isolated teaching moments, but through repeated lived experiences that shape how children understand, feel, and respond to moral situations in everyday life.

3.7 Implications for Education Policy and Parenting Programs

The findings of this literature review have important implications for education policy and parenting intervention programs. Education policymakers are encouraged to design more comprehensive family-based education strategies that actively involve parents in character education initiatives within schools (Erlina et al., 2024). This is important because character formation cannot be achieved only through formal education, but requires consistent reinforcement from the family environment as the primary social setting for children's development. Therefore, policies that strengthen parent engagement in school-based programs can improve the overall effectiveness of character education.

In addition, structured parenting programs need to be developed to support parents in facing contemporary challenges, especially those related to digital transformation and changing social environments. Training programs focusing on digital parenting, emotional communication, and positive discipline strategies can help parents develop more effective approaches in guiding children's behavior (Nuryanto et al., 2026). This means that parenting support should not only be informal but also systematically organized through community, school, or government-based initiatives that ensure accessibility for all parents.

Furthermore, collaboration between schools, families, and community institutions should be strengthened to create a more integrated system of character education. Such collaboration ensures consistency in value transmission across different environments, allowing children to receive the same moral messages both at home and at school. As a result, character education becomes a shared responsibility among stakeholders rather than an isolated effort, thereby increasing its effectiveness in shaping children's long-term moral and social development.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this literature review carry significant theoretical, practical, and policy implications for child development, parenting, and character education. From a theoretical perspective, the synthesized evidence reinforces and extends core tenets of Social Learning Theory, Attachment Theory, and parenting style typologies by confirming that character formation is deeply anchored in continuous behavioral modeling, emotional security, and responsive home environments. Practically, these insights emphasize that parents must prioritize active behavioral modeling, emotional warmth, and open dialogue over rigid authoritarian control, while also adapting to modern challenges by transitioning from restrictive internet filtering toward proactive digital mentoring and ethical guidance. From an institutional and policy standpoint, educational leaders and policymakers are encouraged to esta-

blish structured, family-based character education strategies and formal parent training initiatives, ensuring that moral and prosocial values taught within academic settings are consistently reinforced at home.

4.2 Research Contributions

This study makes several distinct contributions to the contemporary literature on family dynamics and character formation. By synthesizing empirical and theoretical studies published between 2022 and 2026, it effectively bridges foundational developmental frameworks with modern socio technological shifts, offering an updated understanding of how character is cultivated in today's environment. Furthermore, unlike traditional reviews that focus exclusively on physical real-world interactions, this paper explicitly integrates digital parenting and technological adaptation as critical dimensions of character development in the modern era. Finally, the study highlights the symbiotic relationship between families, educational institutions, and communities, positioning character education as a collective societal responsibility rather than an isolated household endeavor.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 *Research Limitataions*

Despite offering a comprehensive synthesis of contemporary literature, several key limitations should be acknowledged. First, because this study relies on a secondary review of existing literature published between 2022 and 2026, it lacks primary empirical data, qualitative fieldwork, or direct quantitative metrics assessing specific parenting behaviors across diverse demographics. Second, the synthesis may reflect geographical and cultural biases present in the available literature, potentially limiting the universal generalizability of its findings to vastly different socioeconomic or cultural settings. Lastly, given the rapid and continuous evolution of digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and media consumption, the specific digital parenting strategies discussed may require ongoing adaptation to remain aligned with emerging technological environments.

5.2 *Recommendation for Future Risearch*

To build upon these insights and address current gaps, future scholarship should pursue several key research directions. Researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal and mixed methods empirical studies to evaluate how specific parenting interventions and digital literacy programs influence children's long term moral trajectories over time. Additionally, comparative cross-cultural research is needed to examine how varying cultural norms, family structures, and socioeconomic conditions moderate the effectiveness of authoritative parenting and parent school collaborations. Finally, given the rapid pace of technological innovation, future studies should investigate the psychological and moral impacts of emerging technologies such as generative artificial intelligence, immersive digital spaces, and automated media on child development and the evolving guidance roles of parents.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The role of parents in children's character formation is a central and continuous process that significantly shapes moral, emotional, and social development. Based on the review of recent literature from 2022 to 2026, it is evident that parenting styles, parental communication, digital parenting practices, and collaboration between parents and schools collectively influence the formation of children's character. Authoritative parenting characterized by warmth and clear boundaries contributes positively to self discipline, empathy, and responsibility, while effective communication within the family strengthens emotional understanding and supports moral internalization.

The findings also show that the rapid development of digital technology introduces both opportunities and challenges in parenting. While digital platforms can support learning and character education, they may also negatively affect children's behavior if not properly guided. Therefore, parental digital literacy and supervision are essential in ensuring that technology use contributes positively to children's development. In addition, cooperation between parents and schools plays a vital role in creating consistency in value education, which strengthens children's understanding of moral principles across different environments.

Character formation cannot be achieved through a single factor but requires an integrated approach involving family, educational institutions, and broader social support systems. Guided by Social Learning Theory, it can be concluded that children learn most effectively through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their immediate environment, particularly from parents. Therefore, strengthening parental roles through education programs, policy support, and collaborative initiatives is essential to ensure the development of strong, positive, and sustainable character traits in children in the modern era.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors express their deepest gratitude to all colleagues, academic institution members, and family environment experts who provided valuable insights, administrative assistance, and structural guidance throughout the preparation of this study. Sincere appreciation is also extended to the literature database providers and open access publishers whose repositories enabled comprehensive access to recent developmental and psychological research.

Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Ayu Mutiara: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing Original Draft, Project Administration. Nur Haliza: Data Curation, Investigation, Software, Writing Review and Editing, Visualization. Sri Wahyuni: Supervision, Validation, Resources, Writing Review and Editing, Funding Acquisition.

Declaration of Generative AI (GenAI) Usage in Scientific Writing

The authors used Google Gemini strictly as a supportive language assistant for grammatical correction, prose structuring, and formatting narrative paragraphs for academic clarity. Generative AI was not used to create raw data, fabricate references, or formulate analytical interpretations, and the authors retain full responsibility for the manuscript's content and intellectual integrity. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the IJCES GenAI Tool Usage Policy, with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests, personal relationships, or professional affiliations that could have appeared to influence the work, analysis, or interpretations reported in this paper.

Funding Statement

This study was conducted independently and received no specific grant, financial assistance, or funding support from any funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not for profit sectors.

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First Publication Right:
Indonesian Journal of Character Education Studies

Article info:
DOI: https://doi.org/10.64420/ijces.v3i2.623

Word Count: 5948

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