HUMANITIES JOURNAL

RESEARCH ARTICLE
Published Online: December 4, 2025
https://doi.org/10.31893/humanitj.2026015

Situated moral formation and adolescent character ontogenesis in Indian school ecologies: A multi-sited interpretivist inquiry

Ashraf Alam[a]

[a]Alliance University, Bengaluru, India.

Abstract This qualitative study explores how adolescents develop moral character within Indian secondary schools. Using a constructivist-interpretivist approach, data were collected from 134 participants across six schools in Pune, Bengaluru, and Ranchi through interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis, informed by virtue ethics, capability theory, and sociological theory, identified four themes: belonging and relationships as foundations of moral growth; experiences with discipline and authority shaping integrity and agency; negotiation of cultural and digital influences; and growth through moral challenges and reflection. Findings highlight that "*becoming through belonging*" and student voice are central to character formation. Both traditional values (e.g., duty, respect) and modern ideals (e.g., equality, digital citizenship) influence adolescents' moral development. The study recommends whole-school strategies like caring school climates and reflective, culturally responsive pedagogies to support character education in diverse, digital-age societies.

Keywords: moral development, character education, adolescents, school climate, constructivist research, student agency

1. Introduction

Character development during adolescence has emerged as a focal site of inquiry within global educational discourses, as schools are increasingly positioned as arenas for cultivating ethical dispositions, socio-emotional competencies, and civic-mindedness alongside academic competencies (Alimron, 2023; Birhan, 2021; Dewi & Alam, 2020; Hidayati et al., 2020; Peterson, 2020; Suprianto & Nurdyansyah, 2020; Syarnubi et al., 2021; Tyas et al., 2020). Dominant paradigms in moral education are undergoing epistemic shifts, from didactic, decontextualized instruction to embodied, relational, and culturally embedded paradigms of virtue formation. The literature increasingly recognizes that character ontogenesis is not reducible to individualistic cognitive-behavioral models but is emergent through dynamic person-context interactions (Guberina, 2023; Harefa et al., 2024; Hermino & Arifin, 2020; Mujahid, 2021; Mustoip et al., 2023; Pradana et al., 2020; Pring, 2021; Zulela et al., 2022). However, the extant corpus remains disproportionately anchored in Western epistemologies, with limited engagement in postcolonial contexts where cultural hybridity, neoliberal schooling logics, and plural moral ecologies intersect. In India, the absence of a standardized moral education curriculum, coupled with intensified academic performativity and socio-economic stratification, provides a critical site to interrogate how adolescents form moral sensibilities within and beyond formal pedagogic structures.

This study addresses a significant lacuna: *the paucity of empirically grounded, culturally attuned research on how Indian adolescents negotiate character development within their socio-institutional milieus*. In particular, we focus on how character is co-constructed through the *hidden curriculum*, the implicit value-laden scripts embedded in teacher-student interactions, disciplinary regimes, peer cultures, and participatory opportunities in civic or prosocial activities. Additionally, we interrogate how youth reconcile dissonant normative frameworks, e.g., familial/religious orthodoxy vis-à-vis digital liberalism or peer cosmopolitanism, constituting moral agency as a reflexive, contested process. Our dual research questions thus explore: (1) the intra-school processes of moral cultivation, and (2) the intersubjective navigation of moral pluralism in shaping adolescent virtue trajectories.

Employing a multi-sited, interpretivist qualitative design, this study draws from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in six schools across Pune, Bengaluru, and Ranchi, each city offering distinct socio-cultural and economic milieus. The sample includes both public and private institutional ecologies to capture divergences in moral pedagogies and structural affordances. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and school climate assessments, engaging students, educators, administrators, counselors, and parents to construct a polyvocal narrative. This triangulated approach facilitated granular insights into each school's moral architecture and the situated moral negotiations adolescents undertake.

 Received: July 30, 2025 | Accepted: November 21, 2025

The study is anchored in two theoretical propositions. *First*, character is conceptualized not as a stable internal attribute or universal competency but as a situated, relational praxis emergent from socio-material entanglements, a view consonant with virtue ethics, cultural psychology, and relational developmental systems theory. We hypothesize that belonging to a moral community, constituted by trust, recognition, and dialogic engagement, is foundational to ethical becoming. *Second*, we reject models that frame youth as passive recipients of adult-imposed values. Instead, we frame adolescents as active moral agents who appropriate, resist, or reinterpret normative expectations, especially within the moral polyphony engendered by digital media and socio-cultural fluidity. Contemporary adolescent moral formation thus entails a reflexive ethical discernment responsive to structural inequities and emergent social imaginaries. By foregrounding culturally saturated, experience-near narratives of Indian adolescents, this inquiry offers a critical intervention into *character education* literature. It theorizes moral development not as curriculum delivery but as a socio-relational enactment of "*becoming through belonging*" in ethically heterogeneous school ecologies.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The epistemological scaffolding of this inquiry rests on a transdisciplinary synthesis of philosophical, psychological, sociological, and pedagogical literatures, yielding a conceptual lens attuned to the socio-cultural situatedness of adolescent character formation. Our framework is grounded in five intersecting paradigms: (1) virtue ethics and phronetic discernment, (2) the capabilities approach to human development, (3) socialization theory via Bourdieu's habitus, (4) moral psychological developmentalism, and (5) civic and digital moral ecologies. Rejecting monolithic or decontextualized constructions of character, we approach it as a praxis, an emergent, dynamic, relational construct embedded in cultural-historical matrices and mediated through institutional affordances, structural inequalities, and the affective-intellectual life of the adolescent.

2.1. Virtue Ethics and Situated Phronesis

Aristotelian virtue ethics posits character as the cultivation of habituated excellence through iterative engagement in morally salient practices, guided by phronesis, i.e., practical wisdom involving contextual judgment, moral perception, and affective attunement (Dimmock & Fisher, 2020). In contrast to deontological rule-following or consequentialist utilitarianism, this framework privileges embodied ethical reasoning and context-contingent discernment (Asif et al., 2020; Hanafiah et al., 2022; Hardiansyah & Mas'odi, 2022; Khashimova et al., 2021; Murti, 2020; Osío, 2023; Taufik, 2020; Tohri et al., 2022). Educational theorists have increasingly advocated for a *phronetic turn* in moral education, critiquing the technocratic emphasis on compliance and standardization. We operationalize this by examining schools as crucibles for moral practice, i.e., sites where activities such as cooperative projects, peer mediation, or service learning function as moral rehearsal spaces, and where teacher-mentors act as carriers of phronetic exemplarity.

Crucially, our analysis is culturally reflexive. South Asian normative traditions foreground a lexicon of virtues such as *dharma* (duty), *seva* (service), *satya* (truth), and *ahimsa* (non-violence), which inflect the Indian moral imaginary. These are not merely archaic ideals but are often reinscribed in school rituals, visual iconography, and public discourse (e.g., Gandhian aphorisms in school mottos). Our ethnographic attention to virtue-talk in context allowed us to trace local conceptions of moral excellence, resisting epistemic coloniality while acknowledging cross-cultural resonances (e.g., honesty, compassion, courage). Thus, virtue formation is framed as a dialogic, culture-situated enterprise rather than a universalist import.

2.2. Capabilities Approach and Moral Agency

Augmenting the disposition-centric lens of virtue ethics, we invoked the Capabilities Approach to foreground agency, justice, and structural enablement (Keleher, 2014). This paradigm reframes moral development as a function of what individuals are substantively free to do and become. Rather than evaluating character as static traits, we asked: *does the school expand students' moral capabilities*, e.g., for empathy, practical reason, affiliation, and ethical autonomy? A democratic school culture that legitimizes student voice, advances deliberation, and encourages civic action cultivates these freedoms; conversely, authoritarian pedagogies may engender conformity without conviction (Adebayo, 2020; Khaidir & Suud, 2020; Komariah & Nihayah, 2023; Muis et al., 2022; Simanjuntak, 2020; Sulistiyo et al., 2020). The capabilities lens renders visible how caste, class, and gender hierarchies mediate moral opportunity structures. For example, a girl from a *Dalit* background may experience restrictions on moral expression or agency that are absent for her privileged counterparts. Our inquiry attends to these differential affordances, recognizing character as both an individual good and a social justice imperative. NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic education implicitly affirms this view, yet empirical instantiations remain uneven (Ministry of Education, 2020).

2.3. Habitus, Socialization, and Moral Ecologies

From a sociological standpoint, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, i.e., a system of durable, transposable dispositions, illuminates how schools function as fields of moral socialization (Bourdieu, 2020). Character is not merely taught but sedimented through embodied participation in normative regimes. Institutional rituals, disciplinary protocols, peer hierarchies,

and symbolic rewards configure a school's moral ecology, shaping students' predispositions and behavioral repertoires (Callista & Simanjuntak, 2022; Ekaterina, 2023; Gamage et al., 2021; Jumriani et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2021; Saripudin et al., 2021; Suartama & Salehudin, 2020; Syarnubi et al., 2023). We approached schools as moral microcosms wherein relational climates, marked by trust, surveillance, or indifference, mediate ethical learning. The valorization of certain traits (e.g., obedience, initiative) and the silencing of others (e.g., dissent, vulnerability) constitute implicit curricula. Our lens remained critical of character discourses that reify neoliberal meritocracy (e.g., *grit*, *leadership*) while masking structural exclusions. Intersectionality theory guided our interpretation of divergent moral habitus, i.e., how, for instance, dominant-caste male students were encouraged toward assertive virtues, while lower-caste or female students were steered toward compliance. Such asymmetries problematize unitary narratives of virtue and call for an ethics of recognition and redistribution.

2.4. Moral Psychology and Developmentalism

From developmental psychology, we integrate stage-based and social-intuitionist perspectives. Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental theory posits a progression from pre-conventional to post-conventional moral reasoning, with adolescence as a critical phase of normative consolidation and moral abstraction (Kohlberg, 1987). While critiqued for Western, justice-centric bias, this framework remains heuristically useful in analyzing students' justificatory schemas (e.g., rule adherence vs. principled reasoning). We expected heterogeneity in moral cognition, ranging from instrumentalist logic to value-internalized stances. Haidt's social-intuitionist model adds that moral judgments often arise from intuitive-emotive responses, with *post hoc* rationalization (Haidt, 2001). This highlights the role of moral emotions, i.e., empathy, guilt, and moral outrage in ethical development. School practices that cultivate emotional literacy (e.g., storytelling, reflective journaling, restorative circles) may enhance students' moral responsiveness (Algifahmy, 2022; Bakar, 2021; Elbes & Oktaviani, 2022; Fatimah & Aly, 2020; Hastasari et al., 2022; Lavy, 2020; Lilja & Osbeck, 2020; Tambak et al., 2021). Indian schools often embed such affective pedagogies in spiritual or contemplative practices (e.g., morning yoga, moral prayers), which we treated not as ritualistic vestiges but as potential sites of socio-emotional habituation. Positive psychology's taxonomy of strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) also informed our sensitivity to virtues like perseverance, humility, or gratitude, the traits empirically linked to adolescent well-being and prosocial conduct.

2.5. Civic Character and Digital Morality

Finally, we situated character within broader civic and digital lifeworlds. Democratic theorists (Dewey, 2014; Gutmann, 1993) view schools as incubators of civic virtue, i.e., tolerance, justice orientation, public reasoning. In India's plural, contested polity, such civic moral formation acquires particular urgency. We examined how schools operationalize democratic values via student councils, community engagement, dialogic pedagogy, or observance of constitutional ethos. Concurrently, adolescents inhabit hybrid moral terrains shaped by digital media. Online spaces pose novel ethical challenges, for instance, cyberbullying, misinformation, performative virtue, and moral disengagement through anonymity (Carr, 2021; Fernández Espinosa & López González, 2024; Husna & Thohir, 2020; Jelani, 2021; Marsakha et al., 2021; Muthohar, 2021; Putri & Simanjuntak, 2022; Sumartias et al., 2020). We incorporated digital ethics as integral to contemporary character, such as, integrity and empathy must traverse physical-digital boundaries. Schools that scaffold digital literacy and ethical reasoning equip students for moral agency in algorithmic ecologies. Conversely, a pedagogical vacuum in digital domains risks ethical fragmentation, i.e., students may perform virtue offline while enacting moral disengagement online. We explored whether digital dilemmas catalyze moral reflection or reproduce offline hierarchies under different guises.

This integrative framework conceptualizes adolescent character development as a multi-dimensional, culturally situated, capability-sensitive, and reflexively mediated process. It transcends reductive trait-based or behaviorist models, foregrounding the interaction between normative traditions and emergent moral horizons. Our analysis recognizes adolescents as active moral agents embedded in complex moral ecologies, i.e., agents whose ethical becoming is scaffolded by institutional ethos, relational dynamics, cultural scripts, and civic-digital imaginaries. This framework guided our methodological choices and interpretive strategies, enabling a thick description of character ontogenesis in the Indian schoolscape.

3. Methodology

Our research employed a qualitative, interpretivist methodology to deeply explore how character development is experienced and understood by adolescents in context. Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring predefined traits, we sought to construct a rich, grounded account of *how* and *why* moral formation occurs in real school settings. The study design was *multi-sited and multi-perspectival*, treating each school as a case of the broader phenomenon of interest (character ontogenesis) and engaging diverse stakeholders for holistic understanding. Table 1 summarizes the key features of our methods and sample.

To ensure research credibility, we took several measures. We triangulated across data sources (e.g. checking if students' and teachers' accounts converged) and methods (interview vs. observation). Member-checking was done informally by sharing a summary of emerging findings with a few participants (who affirmed that it resonated). Peer debriefing within our research

team and with an external qualitative research expert helped challenge and validate our interpretations. Rich, thick descriptions of context are provided in findings to allow transferability judgments. Overall, we prioritized transparency and reflexivity in the analytic process to produce trustworthy insights. Ethical protocols (informed consent, confidentiality) and researcher positionality considerations are discussed later in the *Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality* section. All participants gave informed consent, anonymity was rigorously protected through pseudonyms and data security, and the diverse composition of our research team was put to use to enhance cultural interpretation while remaining reflexive about biases.

Table 1 Overview of Study Context, Participants, and Methods.

Aspect	Description
Sites and Context	6 secondary schools in three Indian cities (Pune, Bengaluru, Ranchi), each city with one public (government) and one private school. Cities were selected for regional, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity (Western India, South India, and Eastern India contexts). Schools ranged from well-resourced urban institutions to under-resourced schools serving low-income communities, allowing comparison of different school cultures. Each site was treated as a case study to capture context-specific practices.
Participant Sample	Total n = 134 participants, obtained via purposive sampling to ensure diverse perspectives on character development. This included ~80 students (ages ~13–18, Classes 8–12, balanced by gender), ~25 teachers (various subjects and experience levels), 6 school administrators (principals or vice-principals), 9 counselors or value-education coordinators (where available), and 10 parents from different backgrounds. Each school contributed 10–15 students (often via focus groups), ~4–5 teachers, 1 administrator, and 1–2 parents. The sample spans multiple roles to create a *360-degree* view of each school's moral climate. We continued sampling until reaching *thematic saturation*, where new interviews yielded no fundamentally new themes.
Data Collection	Conducted from August 2024 to April 2025 using multiple qualitative methods for *triangulation*. Main methods were *semi-structured interviews* with teachers, administrators, counselors, and some students (typically 30–60 minutes each); *focus group discussions (FGDs)* with students (usually 4–6 students per group, to encourage peer dialogue); *observational field notes* on school environment and events (e.g. assembly, classroom interactions, student council meetings); and review of relevant *school documents* (e.g. student handbooks, bulletin board content, value education materials). In total, we conducted 12 student focus groups (2 per school on average) and ~40 one-on-one interviews (5–8 per school across adult stakeholders and a few individual students). All interviews/FGDs followed a narrative-elicitation approach, using open-ended prompts to invite stories of moral experiences (e.g. "Describe a situation at school that taught you an important value"). Observations and documents provided contextual background and helped cross-verify claims (for instance, whether a school claiming to emphasize service actually had visible service projects or slogans). Using multiple sources helped create a fuller picture and allowed *cross-checking of themes* across students, teachers, and institutional artifacts.
Data Analysis	We employed *thematic analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with an inductive-deductive strategy. Analysis proceeded in iterative phases. *Phase 1: Familiarization:* team members transcribed and read through data, noting initial impressions and recurrent ideas. *Phase 2: Coding:* we developed a codebook and systematically coded all transcripts and field notes, using both *a priori* codes (informed by our conceptual framework and research questions, e.g. *Peer Influence*, *Moral Dilemma*) and emergent codes grounded in participants' language (in vivo codes). Both the researchers independently coded each transcript, then reconciled differences through discussion to enhance reliability. This yielded ~60 codes encompassing influences, values, behaviors, and processes. *Phase 3: Theme development:* we clustered related codes into candidate themes and subthemes, constructing thematic maps to explore relationships. Early theme ideas (e.g. *belonging and peer support*, *discipline and fairness*, *learning through challenges*, *digital morals*) were refined by checking against the data for coherence and distinctiveness. Some themes merged or became subthemes upon review (for example, *teacher role modeling* was folded into broader themes of belonging or discipline rather than standing alone). *Phase 4: Review and finalization:* we finalized four major themes, each with 2–3 subthemes, that answered our research questions and recurred across sites. The final themes were: (1) Belonging as Bedrock of Character, (2) Discipline, Authority, and Agency, (3) Values in Transition: Cultural Traditions and Digital Influences, and (4) Growth Through Challenges and Reflection. *Phase 5: Interpretation:* we analyzed each theme in light of theoretical frameworks and sought nuanced understanding (e.g. not just that *belonging matters*, but how and why it translates to moral growth). We also paid attention to *divergent cases* or counterpoints to avoid overgeneralization. Throughout analysis, we engaged in reflexive team discussions to ensure our interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives and that we accounted for our own biases (see *Ethics and Positionality*). We maintained an *audit trail* of coding decisions and theme development to strengthen credibility.

4. Findings

The qualitative findings reveal a complex, situated picture of how character development unfolds in the everyday life of Indian secondary schools. We identified *four overarching themes* that organize the results: (1) *Belonging as the Bedrock of Character*; (2) *Discipline, Authority, and Agency*; (3) *Values in Transition: Negotiating Cultural Traditions and Digital Influences*; and (4) *Growth Through Challenges and Reflection*. Each theme encompasses several interrelated subthemes and illustrates different dimensions of adolescents *becoming through belonging* in their school contexts. Notably, the themes are deeply

interconnected: for example, a student's sense of belonging (Theme 1) influences how they respond to authority and rules (Theme 2) and how open they are to internalizing or questioning values amid social change (Theme 3), while many transformative character-building moments (Theme 4) occur through relationships or conflicts that tie back to belonging and value negotiations. Below, in Table 2, we elaborate each theme with data and participant quotes (using pseudonyms and role descriptions). We distinguish the *raw experiential findings*, what participants described and did, from interpretive commentary, which will be expanded in the Discussion. *(To protect confidentiality, identifying details in quotes have been altered or omitted.)*

Table 2 Key Themes of Character Formation with Illustrative Examples.

Themes	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Quote by Participant(s)
1. Belonging as Bedrock of Character	Supportive peer community & empathy Teacher care and trust School identity and *family* ethos	*"Our class is like a second family… we support each other. When a boy lost his father, we all helped. I realized caring for others isn't just a lesson in a book; it's something you feel when someone in your tribe is hurting."* *- (Student, Public School, Pune)*
2. Discipline, Authority, and Agency	Fair vs. arbitrary discipline (internalization vs. rebellion) Student voice in rule-making & responsibility Perceived justice and moral autonomy	*"In junior classes we obeyed out of fear, the teacher would yell or hit the desk. By high school it changed. Our principal involves us in making rules. For example, instead of outright banning phones, he discussed it with the student council and we agreed on allowed times. That made us feel responsible. Now if someone breaks it, we ourselves tell them off because we all agreed to it."* *- (Student, Private School, Bengaluru)*
3. Values in Transition: Traditions vs. Digital	Alignment or clash between home values and school ideals Critical thinking about cultural norms (e.g. gender roles) Influence of digital media on values and exposure to global ideas	*"At school they say girls can do anything, but back home my brother is allowed out late and I'm not. It's a mixed message. I choose to believe what school teaches, but it's hard."* *- (Student, Private Girls' School, Pune)* *"Honestly, I learned more about justice from Instagram and YouTube than from textbooks, seeing posts on #BlackLivesMatter and farmers' protests made me think about fairness and rights. In school they mention these issues only briefly, but online I could explore and form my own opinion."* *- (Student, Co-Ed School, Pune)*
4. Growth Through Challenges and Reflection	Learning from moral failure via guidance (restorative experiences) Moral courage and standing up for what's right Personal adversity building empathy/resilience Structured reflection (journals, dialogues) promoting moral insight	*"I cheated on a test in 9th grade. The teacher found out. Instead of just punishing me, she said, 'I'm not angry, I'm sad because I know you're better than this.' That hit me harder than any scolding. I realized I'd broken her trust. Since that day I promised myself never to cheat again. I even help juniors now so they don't feel that pressure."* *- (Student, Private School, Bengaluru)* *"I used to be arrogant about coming first in class. Then I fell very ill and missed a term. My friends helped me catch up, even a rival lent notes. It humbled me. I learned gratitude, that kindness matters more than marks. Now I try to be there for others too."* *- (Student, Public School, Pune)*

4.1. Theme 1: Belonging as the Bedrock of Character

Across all sites and participant groups, a resounding message was that a *strong sense of belonging and positive relationships in the school community form the foundation of character development*. Students consistently described how feeling cared for, included, and valued by peers and teachers inspired them to behave better and uphold moral values. In turn, teachers and parents observed that when students *identify with the school and its ethos*, "*when they feel the school is like our second home, like a family*," as one teacher put it, they become more receptive to moral guidance and more likely to exhibit virtues such as respect, empathy, and responsibility. Essentially, being part of a supportive community nurtures an intrinsic commitment to that community's norms.

One student's story from a public school in Pune illustrates this well. He recounted how his class rallied around a classmate in crisis: *"Our class is like a second family. We have our fights and drama, but at the end of the day we support each other. Last year, a boy in our class lost his father. All of us, even those who weren't close to him, came together to help. We visited his home, pooled money for anything he might need. That experience changed me. I realized caring for others isn't just*

a lesson in a book; it's something you feel when someone in your 'tribe' is hurting. We became closer and also more responsible with each other after that." (Student, Public School, Pune). In this narrative, the *peer group's solidarity* in a moment of adversity provided a concrete opportunity to practice compassion and communal responsibility. The student explicitly notes that the value of caring *came alive* through this lived experience in a way that abstract teachings could not. Many students across different schools shared similar anecdotes where *peer support during challenges* (a bullying incident, a family hardship, a personal failure) became a defining moral learning moment. In focus groups, students often contrasted such experiences with formal moral lectures. *"We've heard lectures on kindness, but I really understood it when my friends helped me through a tough time,"* said a girl from a Bengaluru school. This highlights that *belonging catalyzes virtue internalization*, empathy, loyalty, and generosity are learned by *being there for each other*, not by being told to be kind.

Teachers corroborated that a *caring, inclusive classroom climate* is crucial for character outcomes. Many teachers described deliberately advancing a *classroom community* of trust. For instance, a language teacher in Ranchi implemented weekly circle-time sessions where students could share their feelings and discuss issues. She noted that initially students were reticent, but over months they grew more open and supportive of one another: *"I saw my students becoming more patient listeners and more considerate. When a new girl joined mid-year, the class welcomed her so warmly, that wasn't the case before we did circle time,"* she said. This suggests that intentional practices to *cultivate belonging and empathy* (like structured sharing circles) can directly nurture virtues in students (inclusivity, kindness) by strengthening relational bonds (Birhan et al., 2021; FHKPS, 2021; Huo et al., 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2021; Suciati et al., 2023; Susilo et al., 2022). It aligns with the ethics of care perspective that relational trust and attentiveness allow moral emotions like compassion to flourish in a group setting.

Belonging also had a notable effect on students' *moral identity and internalization of values*. Many students mentioned not wanting to *let down the school* or certain teachers who believed in them. They felt accountable to the community's values. For example, a Head Boy at a private Bengaluru school shared how being entrusted with a leadership role became a moral motivator. *"When I became Head Boy, sir (the Principal) told me, 'I know your integrity, that's why you were elected.' Those words stuck with me. Whenever I'm tempted to slack or do something wrong, I recall that he trusts my integrity. It's like I carry the school's name and what it stands for on my shoulders. That feeling of belonging here, of being an example, pushes me to actually live up to those values of honesty, fairness, service."* (Student, Private School, Bengaluru). Here, belonging manifests as a *proud identification with the school's ethos*. The student internalized virtues as part of his self-concept because the community (through the Principal's affirmation) staked its trust in him. Several students similarly spoke of their school's identity and motto as guiding their choices (e.g., *at our school we don't cheat*). This illustrates how a *collective identity* can socialize individual moral behavior. Being part of a group with strong ethical norms (a "*we don't do that*" culture) provides both motivation and a script for personal conduct.

It is important to note that *not all belonging is positive*. A few teachers and students cautioned that cliques or exclusive groups could reinforce negative norms (for instance, a tight-knit group could normalize minor misbehaviors or bullying of outsiders). However, in our data, such cases were limited and often eventually challenged by others. Largely, *inclusive belonging*, a sense of community that *bridges* differences rather than forming in-groups against out-groups, was associated with positive character outcomes. Students in schools that celebrated diversity and teamwork reported broader empathy. *"In our class, it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor or what religion, we all sit together and help each other. I think that made me more open-minded,"* said one student. In contrast, a student from another school noted that when a class had fragmented cliques, *"people only cared about their own friends and would tease those not in their group,"* which led to some learning negative behaviors like prejudice. Thus, *the quality of belonging matters*. When schools cultivate an inclusive, "*unity in diversity*" ethos, belonging becomes a force for good, expanding students' moral circle; but if belonging is based on exclusion or toxic group loyalty, it could inculcate biases. By and large, participants emphasized the former, *schools as caring communities*, and that feeling "*at home*" and accepted at school set the stage for them to adopt the school's positive values as their own.

Finally, strong teacher-student relationships often underpinned this theme of belonging. Students frequently named certain teachers as *"second parents"* or mentors who deeply influenced them morally *through their caring actions*. For example, a 16-year-old girl from Ranchi described how a normally strict math teacher showed her unexpected kindness when she scored poorly. *"I was terrified she'd scold me. Instead she called me after class, gave me tea from her flask, and talked with me to find out what went wrong. She listened, really listened, and helped me make a plan. That made me respect her so much. I realized through her actions what empathy and patience look like. Now when I tutor a weaker student, I try to be like Mrs. Dutta, firm but understanding. She changed not just how I study, but how I treat others who struggle."* (Student, Public School, Ranchi). Such stories exemplify *learning by example in a relationship of care*. The teacher's compassionate response turned a potentially shameful experience into a moral lesson in empathy for the student, who then emulated that behavior with peers. Students often explicitly drew these connections. A kindness or trust shown by a teacher instilled in them a desire to *live up to that trust* or "*pass it on*" to others. Thus, Theme 1 highlights that *moral formation is inherently relational*, a product of feeling valued, trusted, and responsible within a community. Adolescents "*become good by belonging well*," as evidenced by their accounts of camaraderie, teacher devotion, and pride in their school.

4.2. Theme 2: Discipline, Authority, and Agency

The second major theme centers on how students *navigate rules, disciplinary practices, and authority figures* at school, and how these interactions shape their moral development. In many Indian schools, the traditional model of discipline has been relatively hierarchical, i.e., the teachers and the administrators hold clear authority, and compliance is expected, often enforced through strict rules and punishment. Our findings, however, reveal a *nuanced evolution* in students' responses to authority. As adolescents mature, they increasingly seek to understand the *rationale* behind rules and desire a voice in shaping them. Whether students internalize discipline as a positive moral framework or merely comply superficially (or rebel) depends largely on whether the disciplinary environment is perceived as *fair and respectful* or as arbitrary and coercive. Furthermore, the way authority figures exercise power, through fear or through dialogue, significantly affects adolescents' sense of justice, integrity, and autonomy.

Many teachers and administrators in our study equated building character with *instilling discipline*. They noted that virtues like punctuality, diligence, and respect for others often manifest outwardly through adherence to rules and routines. Indeed, we observed that schools with clear, consistently enforced norms tended to have more orderly environments, and students in those schools often acknowledged the *value* of having rules. For example, at one private school the principal proudly showed us their "*Honor Code*" poster, which all students sign annually. Students from that school mentioned that the honor code influenced them *"it makes you think twice about cheating or bullying because you've given your word,"* said one 10th grader. This example suggests that *structured ethical guidelines, if imbued with student buy-in, can guide behavior* by appealing to personal honor and collective responsibility. In that case, students weren't simply obeying to avoid punishment; they felt a sense of ownership over the rules since they had formally committed to them.

However, more often when students talked about discipline, they framed it in terms of their *relationship with authority, whether they felt respected or merely controlled* by teachers and school leaders. A recurring observation was a shift from *external control to internalized self-discipline* as students progressed through school, *if* they were treated increasingly as responsible agents. One student from a private co-ed school in Bengaluru described this developmental change. *"In junior classes we behaved mostly out of fear, like if we made noise, the teacher would yell or hit the desk with a stick. But by high school, it changed. Our principal treats us more like young adults; he even involves us in making some rules. For instance, instead of banning phones outright, he discussed with our student council and we agreed on allowed times and penalties. That made us feel responsible. Now if someone breaks it, we ourselves tell them off because we all agreed to it. I learned that rules are more effective when we understand and accept them, not just fear punishment."* (Student, Private School, Bengaluru). This quote vividly illustrates that when authority shifted from a fear-based approach to a *participatory, reasoned approach,* students transitioned from superficial compliance to true buy-in. Early on, this student's obedience was driven by fear of immediate punishment (a classic *pre-conventional* moral motive). Later, under a principal who practiced *inclusive rule-making*, his orientation became one of *ownership and fairness,* he internalized the rule (e.g., phone use policy) as a *shared norm* he helped create, thus enforcing it even peer-to-peer. Importantly, he explicitly articulated the lesson: *rules work better when they're understood and agreed upon, not just imposed by fear*. This aligns with educational theories of *democratic discipline* and Kohlberg's notion of moving toward a social-contract reasoning stage (Kohlberg, 1987). It also resonates with the concept of procedural justice where people (including students) are more likely to obey rules they perceive as arrived at fairly.

Not all schools in our study embraced this enlightened approach. In several government (public) schools, especially those with large classes and scarce resources, students described disciplinary regimes that felt *authoritarian and sometimes unjust*. They reported instances of severe or humiliating punishments for relatively minor infractions, being made to stand outside in the sun for talking in class, public scoldings or name-calling for uniform violations, etc. Some students reacted to such strictness with outward obedience but covert defiance. *"Many kids pretend to obey in front of teachers, but behind their backs we do what we want,"* a 10th grade boy in Ranchi admitted. *"If I can't be late or I'll get punished, I just get a fake doctor's note. It's easier than arguing."* (Student, Public School, Ranchi). These comments indicate that when discipline is experienced as *unreasonably rigid or disrespectful*, students often do not internalize the underlying value at all, they learn only to *avoid getting caught*. A few even described how overly harsh discipline taught them to become *cunning or dishonest*, which is the opposite of character education's aims (e.g. forging a doctor's note to evade an inflexible rule, rather than learning punctuality). Thus, a *backfire effect* can occur, an overly punitive climate instills an instrumental mindset ("*just don't get caught*") rather than moral understanding. In our data, *surface compliance* was common in such environments, students followed rules strictly under surveillance but reverted to ignoring them when unsupervised, implying a lack of true moral buy-in.

However, even within generally strict schools, individual teachers could soften or offset the impact of punitive systems. Students distinguished between teachers who enforced rules with explanation and care versus those who did so with intimidation or humiliation. The former were often respected; the latter were resented. For example, in one focus group students contrasted two teachers' approaches: *"Miss N always tells us why it's important to be on time, she says it's about respecting others' time, not just obeying her. That makes sense to me,"* said one student. In contrast: *"When Sir shouts and calls someone 'useless', honestly we lose respect for him and stop listening. It's like noise,"* said another. These accounts emphasise that *authority exercised with respect and reasoning helps students see discipline as morally meaningful* (e.g.

punctuality as respect), whereas authority wielded through fear or insults breeds cynicism and disengagement. The student's phrase "*it's like noise*" for the yelling teacher indicates how counterproductive that approach was, it eroded the teacher's moral authority completely. Many students echoed this, they were willing to follow rules set by teachers who *treated them with dignity and gave reasons*, but they tuned out or found ways around rules from teachers who were perceived as unfair or demeaning.

A strong subtheme here was students' acute *sensitivity to fairness*. Adolescents were quick to label rules or enforcement as *fair* or *unfair*, and this often became a turning point for moral reflection or even resistance. For instance, at a public school in Pune, there was a controversial rule that students speaking in Marathi (the local language) instead of English on campus could be fined. Many students felt this rule was unjust, "*discriminatory against those less fluent in English*," as one put it, since it punished them for using their mother tongue in informal conversation. One student recounted how he *challenged a teacher* about this rule's fairness and was reprimanded, which only reinforced his sense of grievance. In a focus group at that school, multiple students agreed the rule was "*just wrong*" and described how they collectively *resisted it quietly*. They continued speaking Marathi amongst themselves out of earshot of teachers and formed an implicit pact not to report each other. *"It's like we all know this rule is silly, so we ignore it together. It taught me sometimes authority can be wrong,"* one student concluded. Here we see a double-edged aspect of moral development through discipline. On one hand, the students' solidarity in opposing an *unjust rule* shows principled moral agency (a positive outcome, they recognized a fairness principle and acted on it); on the other hand, their method (covert defiance) involved normalizing rule-breaking, which can undermine respect for legitimate rules. Ideally, the school would have provided a channel for dialogue or appeal on such issues. In schools that did have mechanisms like student councils or suggestion boxes for feedback on rules, students expressed much higher sense of legitimacy in the discipline system. *"They listen to us, so even if I don't like a rule, I follow it because I know I can suggest a change properly,"* said a student from a school with an active student council. This contrast suggests that *perceived injustice* in rules often becomes a flashpoint for moral reasoning, students start thinking critically about right and wrong beyond blind obedience, which is a healthy development of moral autonomy, but if not guided, it can manifest as adversarial compliance or cynicism. The Pune example effectively taught those students about moral *civil disobedience* in miniature, they upheld their principle (linguistic fairness) against authority, reflecting a justice orientation, but it also put them at odds with school authority.

Interestingly, we observed a generational shift in the *definition of respect* underlying the teacher-student relationship. Several older teachers equated respect with simple obedience to authority. *"Students nowadays question too much; they need to learn to respect elders and just do what is told,"* one teacher lamented. In contrast, many students (and some younger teachers) saw respect as a *reciprocal* concept. *"I respect teachers who respect me. If they just shout, I tune out,"* was a common student sentiment. This indicates that whereas traditional Indian culture emphasized hierarchical respect (obeying a teacher because of their position), today's youth are gravitating toward an *earned-respect model*. One experienced teacher we interviewed (in a pilot phase, from another city) insightfully noted *"We're transitioning from an authority culture to an influence culture. I can't just command respect; I have to inspire it now."* Our data strongly echoed this. Students gave many examples where a little kindness or listening from a teacher led them to respect and follow that teacher greatly, versus instances where authoritarian behavior led them to mentally disengage or secretly rebel. For character education, this is crucial, a*uthoritative* (firm but caring) approaches appear far more effective than *authoritarian* (strict and punitive) ones in cultivating genuine moral conscience. Students were learning not just from what rules existed, but from *how* those in power enforced them, drawing lessons about justice, power, and respect that they will carry into adulthood.

Theme 2 reveals that adolescents' moral development vis-à-vis rules is a *negotiation between authority and autonomy*. When discipline is done *with* students, through fair rules, reasoning, and shared decision-making, it can instill self-discipline, honesty, and a sense of justice. Students begin to internalize school rules as expressions of core values (like fairness or safety) rather than arbitrary dictates. Conversely, when discipline is imposed *on* students without respect or fairness, it risks teaching the wrong lessons, compliance only under surveillance, rule-evasion strategies, or even an oppositional stance toward authority. Many participants' experiences highlight the importance of *voice and fairness* in discipline, adolescents crave a sense of agency and justice, and if the school environment meets that, it transforms rule-following into a moral commitment; if not, students often develop a *dual morality* (one for when authority is watching, another for when it isn't) or challenge the system in ways that can be both a sign of moral agency and a potential problem if completely underground. These findings illustrate how schools serve as a microcosm where youths negotiate power and learn (for better or worse) about justice, duty, and personal agency, that are essential components of their emerging character.

4.3. Theme 3: Values in Transition - Negotiating Cultural Traditions and Digital Influences

The third theme captures the dynamic terrain where *traditional values meet contemporary influences* in adolescents' character formation. Indian teenagers today are inheritors of rich cultural-ethical traditions (family values, religious teachings, community norms) while simultaneously engaging with a rapidly globalizing, digitally connected youth culture. Participants often described being *"in between" value systems*, for example, what parents or faith taught them vs. what peer culture and the internet expose them to; or the community's expectations vs. their personal sense of individual rights and aspirations. This

theme explains how students make sense of moral education as a process of *negotiating continuity and change*, blending elements of longstanding cultural frameworks with new ideas and contexts.

Regarding, *family and cultural continuity*, nearly all students acknowledged the foundational role of their family upbringing in shaping their morals. Many felt their school's messages about character largely *reinforced* what they learned at home. Common virtues like honesty, respect for elders, helping those in need were cited as values stressed both by parents and by teachers. This congruence created a seamless path for those students. They experienced school and home as partners in virtue education. For instance, a student in Ranchi noted: *"In our morning assembly, we recite a Sanskrit prayer about treating the world as one family, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. My grandfather tells me the same thing at home. So it feels natural to behave that way."* Here, the alignment of a school ritual (praying for universal kinship) with a family-taught ideal (the ancient concept that "*the world is one family*") made it easy for the student to accept and embody that value. Teachers also observed that students coming from families with strong ethical discipline or service-oriented values were often "*already on track*", the groundwork laid at home made it easier for the school to build character. In such cases, the school's role was more about providing additional arenas (like group activities or community service programs) to practice those values.

On the other hand, many students reported encountering *value conflicts between home and school (or society)*, which forced them to critically evaluate what they had been taught. A notable example is around *gender norms*. Progressive urban schools often proclaim gender equality, *"girls can do anything",* encouraging girls to take leadership and challenging traditional stereotypes. However, at home some students still face conservative norms (e.g. girls having different expectations than boys). A girl from Pune highlighted this mixed message, *"...at school, they say girls can do anything, but back home my brother is allowed to stay out late and I'm not. It's a mixed message. I choose to believe what school teaches, but it's hard..."* (Student, Private School, Pune). This student is consciously siding with the more egalitarian school value, but feeling the strain of a family practice that contradicts it. Such experiences often put adolescents in a position of *quietly questioning or resisting certain family or societal practices*. In our interviews, roughly a quarter of students gave examples of what we might call *"reverse socialization",* instances where the student tried to educate their parents or elders based on what they learned in school. For example, one student convinced his parent not to pay a small bribe for a service because at school he'd learned about integrity and civic responsibility. Another student gently challenged her family's dismissive attitude toward their domestic helper, urging more respect, reflecting her school's emphasis on dignity of labor. These cases show students taking moral ideas from school back into their home sphere, sometimes clashing with entrenched norms. A few students noted they had to do this *diplomatically* to avoid sounding disrespectful. They would frame it as sharing something they learned rather than accusing the elder of being wrong. Nonetheless, it's significant that these youths felt empowered enough to attempt influencing their family's ethics. This is the evidence of school exposing them to values like honesty, equality, or environmental responsibility that they "*reasoned forward*" into their personal lives. It also points out how character education can have a ripple effect outward, though it may occasionally create intergenerational tension.

Conversely, a few participants (notably some parents and conservative teachers) expressed concern that *modern education might be eroding traditional values*. One parent in Bengaluru said, *"I like that the school is modern, but I fear kids are losing touch with our Indian values, like touching elders' feet or speaking politely. They answer back these days."* Such concerns reflect a common narrative that "*Westernized*" schooling encourages too much individualism or questioning of authority, potentially undermining filial piety or cultural customs. We indeed saw hints of this tension, for example, a teacher in Ranchi recounted a values class debate on "Should children always obey their parents?" where many students argued *no*, giving scenarios (career choice, marriage) where they felt personal autonomy should trump parental dictates. She noted, *"That's a big change from earlier times. They're weighing autonomy versus duty."* This illustrates that students are more willing now to *critique traditional norms (like absolute filial obedience)*, invoking ideas of individual rights or personal happiness. Teachers mediating such discussions often tried to strike a balance, acknowledging youths' points about personal choice while gently reminding respect for parents. What is evident is that schools have become a forum where *cultural values are openly negotiated,* not just transmitted. Adolescents are exposed to new ideas (e.g. gender equality, personal freedom) that may conflict with certain traditional expectations, and in the best cases, schools facilitate dialogue about these conflicts, helping students formulate their own reasoned stances without wholly rejecting their culture. As one teacher put it, *"Challenging certain traditions isn't about rejecting our culture; it's about living up to our culture's highest ideals like justice and compassion."* By framing progressive change as actually aligned with deeper cultural values (citing, for instance, reformist Indian figures or principles in scripture that support equality), educators found they could sometimes ease the perceived clash between "Western" ideas and "Indian" values.

A very strong influence that emerged, especially in the more urban and higher-income schools, was *digital media*. Today's teens consume vast content online from YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and global streaming media, which introduces them to *diverse values, social issues, and lifestyles* beyond their immediate community. Students in focus groups brought up topics like climate change activism, LGBTQ+ rights, Black Lives Matter, mental health awareness, noting that they learned about these largely through the internet or social media trends, as these topics were often only lightly touched upon in their formal curriculum. For example, a 10th grade student in Pune candidly said, *"Honestly, I learned more about justice from Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts than from school textbooks. Seeing posts on #BlackLivesMatter and videos on the farmers'*

protests made me think about fairness and rights. In school, they touch these topics lightly, but online I could explore and form my own opinion." (Student, Co-Ed School, Pune). Many peers agreed that online media provided information and perspectives that sometimes *outpaced or went deeper than school*. On the positive side, this can be empowering and enlightening. Several students credited online inspiration for spurring them to action, like starting an eco-club after seeing global climate movements. On the negative side, it means schools no longer monopolize moral narratives; students might receive conflicting messages (for instance, school says "don't cheat," but online forums may trivialize cheating, or school promotes communal harmony while some online content spreads hate). We found that when schools *engaged with digital life proactively* (e.g. the counselor-led digital citizenship module in one Pune school that discussed cyberbullying and misinformation), students responded very positively and made concrete behavior changes (becoming more mindful of their online comments, etc.). This suggests that incorporating *critical media literacy and digital ethics* into character education is crucial. Students themselves often don't naturally transfer their offline values to the online realm unless guided. They see them as separate worlds. But once a teacher or workshop bridges that gap (for example, by showing the real impact of online cruelty or teaching how algorithms create echo chambers), many students "wake up" to the moral dimensions of their digital actions. One boy reflected after a workshop, *"I realized there are real people with feelings behind the screen. I felt ashamed of times I laughed at trolls. Now I'm more careful before I comment or forward something."* This kind of reflective shift was reported by several students exposed to *digital citizenship education*. Conversely, in schools that had no discussion of online behavior, some students admitted to ethically dubious online habits (plagiarism, sharing exam answers in WhatsApp groups, participating in toxic trolling) without much guilt, because it felt normalized among peers and unaddressed by adults. Thus, the digital sphere is a double-edged influence, it broadens youths' moral horizon and provides new platforms for moral action (e.g. online activism), but it also introduces new temptations and normalization of vices (cheating, hate speech, etc.). Our participants' experiences indicate that *schools which ignore digital life leave a large portion of students' moral arena unguided*, whereas those that integrate discussions on digital ethics help students apply virtues like empathy and honesty consistently across contexts.

Exposure to global discourse via media also seemed to enhance students' *critical consciousness* regarding social issues at home. Many students, especially girls and those from minority communities, mentioned that content creators and activists they followed online inspired them to question local injustices. For example, a girl from Ranchi said she follows a YouTuber who talks about women's rights, which made her notice subtle gender biases at school (like girls always being asked to do cleanliness tasks while boys handle technical tasks) and she actively challenged that in a school assembly. Teachers observed that students are *more outspoken about equality and rights* now, often echoing global human rights language. One teacher shared that a student confronted a family elder's casteist remark after a school lesson on discrimination, which even led to the parent complaining that the school was "*putting radical ideas*" in the child's head. The teacher defended the importance of encouraging critical thinking on injustice. These incidents highlight the delicate line schools tread, empowering youth to question injustice can lead to friction with conservative elements of their community, yet it is arguably a sign of moral progress (students striving to align daily life with principles of justice taught in civics or by global norms). Our data suggest that *students are synthesizing influences*, they often combined what they saw as the best of traditional values (e.g. caring for others, community loyalty) with universal ethical principles (human rights, equality) when making moral judgments. In focus group scenario discussions, we saw students use both frames, for instance, in a scenario about accepting an LGBTQ+ friend (a topic rarely openly addressed in many communities), students invoked empathy and friendship (values nurtured at home or through culture about accepting loved ones) alongside ideas of individual rights and "*everyone has their own path*" (a more globally inflected, autonomy-respecting view). Typically, they arrived at compassionate conclusions ("*we should support our friend*"), justifying them by blending arguments from *both* the local and global value sets. This creative synthesis implies that students are not simply Westernized nor simply traditional, they are forging their own moral frameworks that draw on multiple sources.

An important aspect of "*negotiating values*" is how religious or spiritual teachings are integrated or reinterpreted by modern youth. India's religious diversity was reflected in our sample (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, etc.), and many students cited *religious values as moral anchors*, e.g. principles of *karma* and *ahimsa* from Hindu/Buddhist thought, or Biblical teachings of love and charity in Christian families, or Islamic emphasis on honesty and service (Zakat). These provided continuity with tradition and often aligned with school-taught virtues (e.g. compassion, non-violence). Yet, students were also aware of and sometimes challenged certain traditional religious norms that felt outdated or in conflict with modern egalitarian ideals. For instance, at a Catholic school in Ranchi, Christian students (encouraged by a liberal teacher) openly discussed why certain Biblical prescriptions on gender roles might not hold in today's context, concluding that core values of their faith (love, justice, mercy) are timeless but some historical rules can be reinterpreted. Similarly, a Muslim student in Pune said learning about the Indian Constitution's values in school made her reflect on interpretations of her faith regarding equality, leading her to believe that "*true Islam also values equality, so any discriminatory practice isn't true faith.*" This shows that when given a safe space, youths are capable of *critical yet respectful engagement* with their religious traditions, aiming to extract the universal ethical core and set aside aspects they see as incompatible with contemporary morality. Rather than abandoning religion, many were *reimagining it in a socially conscious way*, a process some teachers facilitated by highlighting progressive interpretations and reformist figures within those traditions (e.g. invoking Swami Vivekananda or B.R. Ambedkar, who advocated social reform, to show that questioning injustice has indigenous legitimacy).

Theme 3 depicts adolescents as *moral bricoleurs*, picking and choosing from various inputs to construct their own value framework. They deeply value their heritage of community and spirituality but are unafraid to question practices they find unjust, often influenced by global ideals of human rights and equality, and the broadening effect of digital connectivity. This negotiation is not without stress, students sometimes feel "*caught between worlds*," and it can cause friction with elders or internal conflict, but it also represents a rich developmental process. Through reconciling differences (home vs. school, tradition vs. modernity, online vs. offline norms), students are developing a more *reflective, pluralistic morality*. The school that recognizes and guides this process (by encouraging dialogue, critical thinking, and culturally sensitive framing) can help students integrate their values in a healthy way. Conversely, if schools ignore these tensions, students either compartmentalize (behave one way at home, another at school) or become cynical about one sphere or the other. Our findings suggest that Indian adolescents, when supported, are actively synthesizing the *communitarian values of their culture (duty, empathy, harmony)* with *individualistic or universal values (rights, justice, authenticity)* gleaned from global discourse, potentially leading to a well-rounded moral outlook that honors both local and universal principles.

4.4. Theme 4: Growth Through Challenges and Reflection

The final theme digs into the *crucible moments and reflective processes* through which students reported significant character growth. Time and again, participants' stories showed that *adolescent moral development often occurs in spurts* triggered by challenges, ethical dilemmas, personal failures, conflicts, or adversities that test their values, followed by a period of *reflection* where they process what happened and derive lessons. In other words, character was often *forged* in moments of strain or choice, especially when accompanied by guidance or self-reflection that helped turn an incident into a learning experience. This theme highlights both the importance of providing a safe space for students to reflect on difficult experiences (mentor support, restorative practices) and the value of an ethos where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth rather than just punished.

Many students could point to specific incidents that shifted their moral outlook or behavior, essentially *moral turning points*. These ranged widely. Some were cases of *personal wrongdoing*, e.g., cheating on an exam, lying to a teacher, or succumbing to negative peer pressure, followed by feelings of guilt or consequences that taught them a lesson. Others were instances of *witnessing or being victim to wrongdoing*, seeing someone bullied, experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment, observing a respected person violate a value, events that provoked new moral insight. These incidents functioned as "*wake-up calls*." Crucially, in the most impactful stories, the raw experience was followed by a *meaningful response* (often by an adult or peer mentor) that allowed the student to reflect and change.

One powerful example comes from a student in Bengaluru who recounted a *cheating incident* that became a moral watershed for him. *"In 9th grade, I cheated on a physics test. I was so anxious about grades. The teacher found out. I'll never forget how disappointed she looked. Instead of punishing me severely, she spoke to me after class. She said, 'I'm not angry, I'm sad because I know you're better than this.' That hit me harder than any scolding. I realized I'd not only broken the rules, I'd broken her trust. Since that day I promised myself never to cheat again. It's not worth losing self-respect and others' respect. Now I help juniors with studies so they don't feel the pressure I did."* (Student, Private School, Bengaluru). This narrative encapsulates several key elements, the *moral challenge* (temptation and act of cheating under pressure), the *empathetic confrontation* by a teacher appealing to the student's better self (expressing sadness and faith in him rather than just anger), the *emotional impact* (the student feeling shame and the realization of broken trust), and the *resolution and growth* (commitment to honesty thereafter, and even positive action of helping others avoid the same mistake). In this case, a *serious transgression turned into a profound lesson* on integrity and responsibility, largely because of the teacher's response. Instead of a punitive, shaming reaction, she took a *restorative approach*, conveying disappointment and confidence in the student's character, which enabled him to feel genuine remorse and a desire to *redeem himself* rather than just fear punishment. The student internalized the moral "why" (trust and self-respect matter) and changed his behavior long-term, indicating real character growth. Many similar stories emerged where a student *did something wrong but an adult's compassionate mentorship transformed it into a learning moment*. For instance, a boy who vandalized school property in anger was initially facing suspension, but the principal instead had him spend a week helping the janitor and carpenter repair the damage, through this act of restitution, the boy learned humility and respect for the work behind maintaining the school, and he said it made him feel "useful, not criminal," and he never vandalized again. Students frequently noted that *how authority figures handled their mistakes* determined whether they learned from them. Approaches that involved making amends, discussing the consequences, or expressing personal disappointment often led students to deeply reflect and strive to do better, whereas mere punishment might have just caused resentment or avoidance. This illustrates the principle of *restorative justice* in moral education, focusing on repairing harm and understanding rather than only retribution can catalyze positive moral development (confirming research that restorative practices build empathy and reduce repeat misbehavior).

On the flip side, some formative experiences students described were not about doing wrong, but about moments they *did the right thing under pressure or fear*, which significantly strengthened their moral identity. These *"moral victories"* were as influential as moral failures. For example, a usually timid girl in Ranchi told how she found the courage to intervene when older boys were harassing a new classmate, *"I don't know what came over me, but I just put myself in front of the girl and told*

them to stop. I was trembling inside, but they backed off. I had always seen myself as timid, but that day I felt brave. It changed how I see my responsibility like if I see wrong happening, I can't stay silent." (Student, Public School, Ranchi). Her peers confirmed this incident had an effect on the class, witnessing her bravery inspired others to be more confident to uphold what's right. This anecdote highlights a well-known phenomenon of '*moral action builds moral identity*'. Doing something courageous or just, even once, can reshape a student's self-perception (from "*I'm timid*" to "*I can be brave when it counts*"), which in turn makes future moral action more likely because it becomes part of who they are. One might say *we become what we practice*. Moreover, such acts can shift peer norms. One person's stand can set an example that empowers others (in her class, it set a precedent of not tolerating bullying). Students who had these experiences of standing up for a principle often described them with pride and as a defining moment of "*knowing what I'm capable of morally*." It highlights that character is also strengthened by *positive challenges*, moments requiring courage or integrity, not just resisting temptation but proactively doing good, especially when it's hard.

Some character development came through personal adversities not overtly "moral" in nature but which cultivated virtues like resilience, empathy, or humility. Students who went through hardships, a serious illness, bereavement, parental divorce, moving to a new environment, failure in something important, often emerged with changed perspectives and values. For instance, one boy from Pune admitted he used to be arrogant and cared only about being top of the class. Then he fell very ill and missed school for months. *"Falling sick and lagging behind was humbling. My friends helped me catch up; even a rival lent me notes. I learned gratitude and that kindness matters more than being number one. Now I try to be there for others too."* (Student, Private School, Pune). This experience instilled humility and empathy in him that no lecture could have, it took a personal setback and the kindness of others to reorient his values. Educators in our study recognized this pattern, often the students who showed the most empathy or leadership had overcome some difficulties themselves. A principal noted, *"Our most compassionate student leader had been an outsider and bullied in middle school, because they know how it feels, they value helping others."* This aligns with the psychological idea that *suffering can build character* (the "*what doesn't kill you makes you stronger*" notion in terms of virtues). Some schools tried to harness this by intentionally providing challenging experiences. Several schools had programs like outward-bound camps, rural service projects, or difficult team expeditions, which students uniformly described as "eye-opening" and transformative, especially encountering poverty first-hand which ignited compassion and civic commitment in some. While not everyone needs trauma to grow, these accounts show that *navigating adversity with support* often accelerated students' moral development, they learned resilience, gratitude, and a sense of social responsibility through coming out the other side of hardship.

A critical part of turning challenges into character growth was *reflection*. Many adolescents might experience failures or dilemmas but not necessarily glean a moral lesson unless they are prompted to reflect on it. Our data suggests that *structured reflection opportunities* in schools significantly enhance learning from experience. Several schools had institutionalized forms of reflection, for example, a private school in Bengaluru had weekly "Pastoral Care" or life class sessions where small groups met with a teacher to discuss recent events or personal issues. Students credited these sessions with helping them *process* experiences. *"When we talk about what happened, like a nasty fight in class, Sir helps us see everyone's side and what we could do better next time. It's not a lecture, it's a discussion, so we actually open up. I've realized a lot about myself through those talks."* Similarly, some schools had students keep *reflection journals*, especially after major events or service activities. We were shown (anonymized) examples where students wrote about how volunteering at an orphanage made them grateful and empathic, etc., writing it down likely reinforced the insights. This echoes John Dewey's famous idea that "*we do not learn from experience… we learn from reflecting on experience*." Our findings strongly support that. Experiences became morally educative when there was time and facilitation for students to *think and talk about them*. Without reflection, a student might just feel upset about an incident and move on; with reflection (guided by a teacher or peers), they could articulate "what I learned" and carry that forward. Even *informal peer conversations* often served this role. Students mentioned they'd often discuss moral quandaries or personal problems with close friends (on the bus, over lunch, on WhatsApp at night). In those dialogues, friends sometimes acted as moral counsellors. *"My best friend stopped me from lying about a mistake; she said 'just be honest, you'll feel better,' and she was right."* Here a peer helped turn a potential misdeed into an honest admission, effectively facilitating reflection and better choice. Some schools recognized the power of peer influence and set up *peer mentoring* or buddy systems, where older students informally guide younger ones. Students responded well to this, perhaps because advice from a slightly older peer can feel more relatable than from an adult. In any case, an environment that encourages *talking through* issues, whether in a formal circle time or a friendly chat, helps students derive meaning and principles from the raw events of their lives.

One common insight from these reflections was developing a *growth mindset about character*. Several students realized that character is not fixed, people can change. For instance, a student recounted how a notorious school bully changed after receiving counseling and more inclusion; this made her realize *"nobody is 100% bad; people can change if you help them. It taught me to be less judgmental and more forgiving."* (Student, Public School, Ranchi). Witnessing someone's moral improvement first-hand broke the simplistic "good people vs bad people" notion, encouraging a mindset that individuals (including oneself) can grow morally. This is precisely what research by Yeager et al. (2014) has shown, teaching teens that personalities and moral traits can develop makes them more likely to put effort into better behavior and to forgive others'

mistakes. In our context, students were learning that organically by seeing peers transform or by reflecting on how they themselves overcame a flaw, they began to believe in the malleability of character. This outlook is valuable as it promotes resilience (you're not doomed by one misstep) and compassion (others aren't irredeemable). It also reinforces that the school environment should allow opportunities for redemption and change, rather than labeling students early as "bad" or "good".

Teachers also described *facilitating moral reasoning discussions* as part of their practice. A few mentioned using dilemma discussions (à la Kohlberg's method) in class to stretch students' thinking (Kohlberg, 1987). For example, posing hypothetical scenarios like "If your friend stole to help his poor family, would you report him or support him?" and letting students debate. Such exercises, though not directly drawn from real incidents, *prepared* students to think through values and consider multiple perspectives. One teacher gave a powerful example, later in the year a student actually faced a real situation of a friend cheating, and he referenced the class debate in deciding to ultimately confront the friend, showing transfer of those reasoning skills to real life. This indicates that explicit moral reasoning practice can complement experiential learning by equipping students with a cognitive framework to approach tough choices.

Another noteworthy subtheme within challenges was the role of *forgiveness*, both seeking and granting it. Students who had done wrong and were forgiven by a teacher or friend often expressed that it deeply moved them and made them determined to justify that renewed trust ("*I want to be worthy of that forgiveness*"). Similarly, those who learned to forgive someone (like a friend who betrayed them) described it as maturing their empathy and emotional understanding. For example, a girl described a fallout with her best friend over a lie; after months of bitterness, a class discussion on forgiveness prompted her to reconcile. *"We both apologized. I realized I had been harsh too. Forgiving her was such a relief and it made our friendship even stronger. Now I truly get what 'to err is human, to forgive divine' means."* (Student, Private School, Mumbai). This shows how connecting a *personal experience with a taught moral* (the proverb about forgiveness) through reflection led to internalizing that virtue more deeply. The experience moved forgiveness from an abstract ideal to a lived value for her. We saw multiple instances where forgiveness, when handled sincerely, became a catalyst for moral renewal. A student forgiven by a teacher for misbehavior was motivated to prove themselves afterward, or friends who forgave each other became more considerate henceforth. Forgiveness, of course, requires reflection to yield growth (otherwise one might superficially move on without learning). But in these cases, students clearly *reflected on the process of forgiving/being forgiven* and identified how it changed them (e.g. feeling relief, feeling motivated to do better). It's a reminder that moral education is not only about enforcing rules or encouraging positive acts, but also about *reconciliation and mercy*, handling transgressions in a way that allows learning and healing. Schools that adopt a forgiving atmosphere (within reason) seem to help students practice empathy, trust, and restoration, which are key moral capacities.

Theme 4 thus highlights that while routine school life and planned curriculum lay the groundwork for character, it is often the *unplanned, challenging moments* that serve as true tests and catalysts for moral growth. How the school community responds to these moments, with punitive blame or with empathy and guidance, can determine whether they become mere incidents or transformative lessons. Our data strongly suggest that an environment which encourages viewing mistakes as opportunities to learn (rather than occasions for permanent shame), which provides support and dialogue when students face moral conflicts or personal trials, and which actively engages students in *reflective sense-making* of their experiences, greatly enhances character development. This finding aligns with educational approaches that emphasize *resilience, restorative practices, and moral reflection* as central to character education. In the Discussion, we will further analyze how these concrete narratives of challenge and growth inform and enrich theoretical frameworks, and what practical implications they carry for educators aiming to nurture moral character in real-world school settings.

5. Discussion

This study offers an empirically grounded theorization of adolescent character development as a situated, relational, and dialogical process, emergent from a dynamic interaction between institutional climate, cultural scripts, evolving agency, and reflexive engagement with experience. Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, our discussion articulates four key insights that extend theorizations of moral formation beyond trait-based paradigms: (1) belonging as a generative moral ecology; (2) evolving relations to authority and the internalization of normative commitments; (3) cultural hybridity in moral reasoning amid tradition and digital modernity; and (4) moral apprenticeship through challenge and guided reflection. We conclude with implications for practice and acknowledge epistemological limits.

5.1. Belonging as Moral Infrastructure

Our data vividly illustrate that the felt sense of belonging, constituted through affective inclusion, intersubjective trust, and relational continuity that functions as the ontological substrate of moral internalization. Drawing from care ethics (Noddings, 2013) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2024), we affirm that relatedness is not merely ancillary but constitutive of character development. Participants routinely invoked school communities as *families*, and moral behaviors including empathy, honesty, reciprocity that emerged from affiliative investment, not external compliance. This aligns with Durkheimian sociological insight that moral norms are imprinted via emotional integration into the collective (Malik & Malik,

2022). However, we nuanced this premise by identifying that belonging *per se* is normatively ambivalent, i.e., it may scaffold either prosocial or exclusionary solidarities. While most schools in our study cultivated inclusive ecologies, we noted instances of clique formation and in-group bias, echoing Baumeister & Leary's warning (Allen et al., 2022) that the need to belong can produce moral myopia. Schools that operationalized civic pluralism (e.g., *unity in diversity*) and structured intergroup contact (Allport's Contact Hypothesis) mitigated these tendencies, expanding students' *moral circle* (Raj et al., 2024). Our findings advance relational models by showing how moral norms become internalized via identification and affective accountability. Students refrained from misconduct not merely to avoid sanction, but to uphold collective esteem and trust. This relational ethos mirrors Gilligan's moral reasoning schema, privileging *care* over *rule abstraction* (Gilligan, Kohlberg, Lerner, & Belenky, 1971). Thus, the school's moral atmosphere, marked by warmth, fairness, and mutual recognition, was a more potent vector of virtue than explicit moral instruction. Moral identification, we contend, is catalyzed by sustained relational affirmation.

5.2. Authority and the Arc of Moral Autonomy

A second axis of insight pertains to adolescent negotiations of disciplinary authority. Our findings reaffirm developmentalist claims (e.g., Kohlberg) that moral reasoning matures from heteronomous to autonomous modes, but with important cultural and contextual inflections (Kohlberg, 1987). Students initially adhered to rules for extrinsic reasons (fear of punishment) but progressively demanded procedural justice and voice in norm formation. When school authorities shifted from authoritarian to authoritative modes, combining firmness with fairness, students reciprocated with normative internalization and reflexive commitment. This substantiates procedural justice literature (Tyler & Blader, 2003), perceived legitimacy of rules via participatory processes, that advances alignment with institutional values. Schools that embedded student voice (e.g., rule co-construction) witnessed transitions from compliance to ownership. Conversely, in punitive environments, students resorted to strategic deception, reflecting *performative compliance* devoid of moral uptake. This echoes Alfie Kohn's (1997) critique of extrinsic control as antithetical to intrinsic moral development. Culturally, we observed a generational shift in how *respect* is constructed. While some teachers retained a vertical, obedience-based ethos inherited from *guru-shishya* traditions, students increasingly expected reciprocal respect grounded in fairness. This reflects global pedagogical shifts toward dialogical authority (Davis, 2024; Dewi & Alam, 2020; Hermino & Arifin, 2020; Imawan & Ismail, 2023; Martinez & Partin, 2023; Murcahyanto & Mohzana, 2023; Muzakkir et al., 2024; Shim, 2023). Teachers who embodied ethical consistency and humane discipline wielded greater moral influence, confirming Kristjánsson's (2014) assertion that educator exemplarity is a powerful, often underutilized, tool of moral formation.

5.3. Tradition, Digitality, and Syncretic Moral Reasoning

Our third insight foregrounds the cultural-hybrid moral landscape navigated by Indian adolescents, shaped by interpenetrating traditional and modern (particularly digital) value regimes. Rather than dichotomizing these domains, youth displayed remarkable reflexivity in integrating ancestral moralities (e.g., *dharma*, familial piety) with emergent global ethics (e.g., gender equity, digital rights). This supports Jensen's (2008) cultural-developmental theory, which posits that hybrid societies generate *syncretic moralities* where adolescents toggle between community and autonomy ethics. Value consonance between home and school (e.g., shared emphasis on duty, honesty) facilitated seamless moral uptake. However, dissonances, especially around gender and hierarchy, activated critical reflection. Students selectively assimilated egalitarian principles when justified via culturally resonant idioms (e.g., invoking Ambedkar or religious tenets on justice). This aligns with culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes translating global values into local narrative frames to enhance resonance (Brown et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2021; Dempster, 2020; Isroani & Huda, 2022; Johnson et al., 2022; Khadijah et al., 2021; Mulianti & Sulisworo, 2023; Watts & Kristjánsson, 2022). The digital sphere emerged as both a moral amplifier and a site of disinhibition. Students confronted novel ethical challenges like cyberbullying and online misinformation, that lacked moral scaffolding unless explicitly addressed. Schools that integrated digital ethics through dialogic curricula catalyzed moral extension into virtual spaces (Badawi et al., 2020; Eryong & Li, 2021; Firdaus et al., 2020; Komara et al., 2021; Papadopoulos, 2022; Sin & Cahyani, 2022; Susatya et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2021). This substantiates the *online-offline moral consistency* imperative (Suler, 2004). Moral dualism (good offline, reckless online) attenuated where reflection, emotional attunement, and peer-led digital literacy programs existed. Students' moral reasoning reflected a plural rationality by invoking both sacred and secular justifications, tradition and modernity, care and rights. They articulated a layered moral identity which is a synthesis rather than a supersession of heritage. This bicultural reasoning aligns with Nussbaum's notion of cosmopolitan rootedness and reinforces the need for dialogical moral education that legitimizes both cultural critique and continuity (Nussbaum, 2011).

5.4. Challenge, Reflection, and Moral Apprenticeship

The fourth axis elucidates how lived dilemmas and structured reflection operate as crucibles of moral formation (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Cholifah, 2024; Hart, 2022; Husen et al., 2022; Jhon et al., 2021; Koehler et al., 2020; Peterson, 2020). Students' ethical maturation unfolded not via abstract exhortation but through grappling with real-world conflicts like betrayals, peer injustice, and personal failure, that mediated by reflective processing. This reinforces Deweyan experientialism,

i.e., transformation arises not from experience alone, but from critical reflection embedded within affective support. Moral breaches including cheating and vandalism became formative when educators responded with restorative, rather than retributive, strategies. This inductive discipline promoted metacognitive insight and emotional accountability. Moral apprenticeship (Damon & Colby, 2015), i.e., character learning through guided challenge, was exemplified in narratives where mentors scaffolded meaning-making from transgression. Students did not merely avoid repeat infractions but reoriented their self-concept around emergent virtues (e.g., integrity, responsibility). Importantly, positive deviance (moral courage) also catalyzed character consolidation. Acts of peer defense or truth-telling were not only norm-enforcing but identity-shaping. Recognition by others (teachers, peers) amplified these moments into durable moral identities (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Furthermore, guided reflective practices including journals and circle time enabled abstraction of insights into generalizable ethical frameworks. This process mirrors Aristotelian phronesis, i.e., the cultivation of situational discernment through practical engagement and reflection (Self, 1979). Adversity like illness, loss, and failure was also transmuted into moral capital when buffered by empathetic scaffolding. Our findings resonate with resilience literature (Luthar et al., 2000), which says that character is not forged in adversity alone but in supported navigation of it. This reiterates Narvaez's (2016) call for integrative ethical education, i.e., blending emotional safety, ethical skill-building, and reflective dialogue. Thus, character development is best conceived as iterative praxis of challenge, reflection, and identity recalibration (Dabdoub et al., 2024; Fajarianto et al., 2023; Ichsan et al., 2023; Jamo, 2023; Suhifatullah et al., 2021; Suprianto & Nurdyansyah, 2020; Tabroni et al., 2021; Yusnan, 2022).

5.5. Implications for Practice

Theoretically, this study highlights the need to reframe character education as ecological, participatory, and reflexive. Pedagogically, it advocates for relational infrastructures (mentorship, inclusive ethos), procedural justice (student voice in rule-making), cultural bridging (locally grounded universalism), and reflective modalities (journaling, dialogic circles) (Agustini, 2021; Aprilia et al., 2021; Atqia et al., 2021; Datuk, 2020; Hasanah et al., 2021; Hayati & Susatya, 2020; Ningsih, 2020; Rinenggo & Kusdarini, 2021). The most morally generative schools did not preach virtue, rather they enacted it through ethos, exemplarity, and structural affordances. Curricular interventions should integrate digital morality, intercultural reasoning, and experiential ethics. Teacher development must foreground educators as ethical mentors, not merely enforcers (Arifin et al., 2022; Bamkin, 2020; Chairunnisa, 2022; Jerome & Kisby, 2022; Kristjánsson, 2021; Sanjani, 2024; Smith, 2021; Tyas et al., 2020). Character must be co-constructed, not transmitted. This resonates with global south pedagogies that view education as moral formation in community.

5.6. Limitations and Reflexive Cautions

While our study offers deep interpretive insight, it is bounded by its qualitative, urban-centric scope. Rural schools, elite institutions, or contexts with limited digital penetration may display variant dynamics. Moreover, as a snapshot reliant on self-reported narratives, our claims reflect perceived rather than observed moral behavior. Triangulation and insider-outsider analytic dialogue enhanced credibility, but future longitudinal and mixed-method studies are needed to capture developmental trajectories and assess causality. We acknowledge variability in individual moral receptivity. Some students remained unaffected or resistant to school influences, highlighting the role of personal agency, familial ethos, and societal conditions. Our aim for this research is not universalization but analytic transferability, offering a conceptual scaffold adaptable to comparable contexts. This inquiry foregrounds the complex moral ecologies of Indian secondary schools, wherein adolescents become moral agents not via didactic instruction but through embedded relationalities, negotiated authority, cultural reflexivity, and guided engagement with moral challenges. Character emerges not as a possession but a process that is dynamic, co-constructed, and embedded in the lifeworld of the school. By cultivating emotionally resonant, dialogically inclusive, and experientially rich educational ecologies, schools can actualize the moral potential of youth, not as vessels to be filled with values, but as interlocutors in a shared ethical project of becoming.

6. Implications for Policy, Pedagogy, and Practice in Character Education

The findings from this inquiry delineate a multidimensional paradigm of adolescent moral formation within Indian secondary schools, offering both empirical clarity and conceptual sophistication. These insights yield actionable imperatives across pedagogical praxis, institutional leadership, policy architecture, and community co-engagement. While situated in an Indian socio-cultural milieu, the implications possess heuristic transferability across Global South contexts undergoing educational modernization amidst socio-digital flux.

6.1. Reconstituting the School as a Moral Ecology

The relational substratum of character development foregrounded in our findings mandates a deliberate reconfiguration of school climate. Schools must be architected as moral ecologies, i.e., affective, inclusive, and dialogic communities, wherein virtues are co-constructed through relational resonance (Achadah et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2020;

Haryono et al., 2020; Kristjánsson et al., 2025; Maisyaroh et al., 2023; Metcalfe et al., 2024; Natalia et al., 2021; Panggabean, 2022). Policy and leadership must prioritize emotional safety and relational cohesion as structural pillars, not ancillary attributes. Operationally, this entails embedding systematic practices such as cross-age peer mentoring, circle-time forums for collaborative emotional expression, and institutional rituals celebrating moral exemplarity (e.g., integrity recognitions alongside academic accolades) (Altayeb, 2022; Chen et al., 2023; Hidayati et al., 2022; Jónsson et al., 2021; Mustoip et al., 2023; Rochadiana et al., 2022; Satria & Shahbana, 2020; Suchyadi et al., 2022). These practices align with SEL frameworks and communitarian educational theory. Moreover, culturally responsive inclusion, such as, recognizing linguistic plurality, religious difference, and socio-economic variance, is essential. Practices such as multilingual informality policies or cooperative heterogenous grouping dissolve hierarchical normativities and widen the adolescent moral circle (Berkowitz, 2022; Fathoni et al., 2024; Hart et al., 2020; Nucci & Ilten-Gee, 2021; Pratama et al., 2021; Retnasari et al., 2021; Victorynie et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). School belonging, then, is not epiphenomenal but constitutive of virtue acquisition.

6.2. Reframing Discipline as Ethical Apprenticeship

The disciplinary architecture of schools must transition from retributive behavior management to restorative, dialogic moral education. Our findings resonate with integrative disciplinary paradigms that center on moral internalization via inductive reasoning, empathetic accountability, and community restoration (Anwar et al., 2023; García-Moriyón et al., 2020; Mansur & Sholeh, 2024; McGrath et al., 2022; Rusmin et al., 2020; Suryanto et al., 2023; Tohri et al., 2022; Zuhroh, 2022). Practically, this calls for institutionalization of restorative justice modalities such as structured reflection dialogues, harm circles, and reparation-based consequences, that reframe transgression as pedagogical opportunity. Teachers and administrators should be capacitated through professional development in restorative facilitation, empathetic inquiry, and equity-driven enforcement (Azis et al., 2023; Hardiansyah & Mas'odi, 2022; Ivanova, 2021; Minas & Charles, 2020; Taufik & Nurhayati, 2023; Yuan, 2022). Participatory rule-making, such as, class compacts, honor codes, and student-led disciplinary review boards, further democratizes school normativity and promotes procedural legitimacy. These practices operationalize Kohlbergian *Just Community* principles and affirm students as moral agents, not rule-bound subjects (Kohlberg, 1987). Discipline becomes ethical apprenticeship, wherein wrongdoing is metabolized into practical wisdom and relational repair.

6.3. Institutionalizing Student Moral Agency

A recurring insight across sites was the transformative potential of student voice, autonomy, and civic responsibility (Berkowitz, 2021; Felini, 2021; Gao & Wang, 2021; Harrison, 2024; Marzuki & Samsuri, 2022; Metcalfe & Moulin-Stożek, 2021; Rahman, 2020; Ridha et al., 2020). Character education must rupture its monological posture and embrace co-agency where students are stakeholders in the school's ethical architecture. This involves embedding participatory governance structures including student ethics committees, issue forums, and values-based clubs, that enable youth-led dialogue on moral dilemmas and social issues. Moreover, integrating experiential civic engagement, such as, service-learning modules, community partnerships, and participatory action projects, mobilizes moral learning beyond classroom confines (Aditama et al., 2022; Akbar et al., 2022; Badrun et al., 2022; Chazan & Chazan, 2022; Mills, 2021; Sakban & Sundawa, 2023; Shiddiq et al., 2024; Shih, 2022). These initiatives activate students' prosocial imagination and align with NEP 2020's vision of producing civically rooted critical thinkers (Ministry of Education, 2020). Such experiential modalities, when coupled with structured reflection (journals, presentations, peer dialogue), engender moral metacognition and civic consciousness. Institutional trust, responsibility, and justice are not only taught but enacted.

6.4. Integrating Digital Morality and Media Reflexivity

Given the digitalization of adolescent sociality and moral cognition, schools must treat digital ethics and media literacy as integral to character formation. Moral education cannot remain analog in a digitized moral terrain. This entails introducing scaffolded digital citizenship curricula, such as, modules on cyber-empathy, responsible online conduct, misinformation discernment, and algorithmic influence. Existing frameworks (e.g., UNESCO's digital citizenship competencies, EU DigiComp) can be adapted into culturally situated syllabi (Vrabec & Furtáková, 2024). These should be delivered not only through IT classes but interwoven across subjects via interdisciplinary infusion. Peer-led digital ethics campaigns, e.g., assemblies, awareness clubs, and student podcasts, use adolescent credibility and participatory pedagogy (Fitriyani et al., 2023; Handsman, 2021; Hardiansyah, 2022; Huo & Xie, 2021; Minsih et al., 2023; Muhajir, 2022; Silvia, 2021; Supriyadi et al., 2024). Media literacy must likewise be cultivated through dialogic engagement with digital content, such as, critical deconstruction of viral trends, ethical inquiry into digital representations, and analysis of moral tropes in social narratives. When digital behavior is framed as morally continuous with offline ethics, integrity and empathy acquire coherence across domains. Thus, digital moral education must be formally institutionalized, not peripheralized.

6.5. Developing Teachers as Ethical Mentors and Reflective Practitioners

Teachers emerged in our study as potent vectors of moral socialization and not merely through didactic instruction but via everyday modeling, ethical consistency, and dialogic engagement (Abuzar et al., 2024; Ariani et al., 2022; Heryati et al., 2022; Mezi & Dewantara, 2020; Milal et al., 2020; Patra, 2022; Tang & Wang, 2021). Thus, teacher education must incorporate a robust ethical and relational dimension, reframing educators as facilitators of moral reasoning and co-constructors of school ethos. Professional development should include scenario-based training on restorative response, classroom deliberation techniques (e.g., Philosophy for Children, Structured Academic Controversy), and value-sensitive facilitation (Atika et al., 2021; Betawi, 2020; Fawait et al., 2020; Hidayat et al., 2022; Muhyiddin et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2022; Smith, 2022; Zaenab et al., 2020). Teachers should also engage in reflexive praxis, like, peer discussion groups, moral dilemma forums, and personal value audits, that deepen ethical intentionality. Institutionally, ethical role-modeling must be recognized and supported. Teacher self-assessment rubrics may include indicators like consistency, fairness, and compassion. Ethical exemplarity should be celebrated within staff development structures, adopting a culture wherein modeling virtues is not incidental but central. This humanizes moral pedagogy, where students absorb moral values most enduringly from relational proximity to adults who live them (Afriani et al., 2022; Carr, 2024; Haq et al., 2022; Rachmadtullah et al., 2024; Renita, 2023; Rihatno et al., 2020; Surawan et al., 2022; Yolandini et al., 2023).

6.6. Aligning Curriculum and Assessment with Moral Objectives

Structural misalignment between curricular intent and assessment regimes often marginalizes character education (Aghni et al., 2020; Amri et al., 2020; Cahyanto, 2023; Nur & Kanji, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2023; Rina et al., 2020; Surachmi & Rondli, 2024; Winarni et al., 2022). Our findings advocate for integration of ethical inquiry and civic responsibility across disciplinary domains and evaluative frameworks. Curricular design should infuse moral reasoning into subject pedagogy by including literature classes analyzing moral complexity, history classes drawing parallels with current injustices, science modules exploring ethical implications of innovation. Experiential ethics, like role-play, dilemma analysis, and community projects should supplement abstraction with praxis. Assessment must likewise transcend cognitive performance metrics to include descriptive indicators of ethical growth by incorporating reflective journals, peer evaluations, and service portfolios (Brooks et al., 2021). Holistic progress cards (as envisioned in NEP 2020) can record contributions to school climate, prosocial conduct, and civic engagement (Ministry of Education, 2020). Importantly, such evaluation should avoid performativity, emphasizing authentic self-assessment and communal feedback over tokenistic checklists. Institutionalizing moral learning in the formal apparatus of schooling elevates its legitimacy and sustainability.

6.7. Engaging Parents and Communities as Moral Co-Educators

Character formation is trans-contextual; thus, family and community partnerships must be substantively cultivated. Schools should facilitate moral continuity through family engagement by including parent education sessions on adolescent ethics, newsletters with value-extension activities, and inclusive discussions on generational moral shifts (e.g., discipline philosophies, gender norms). Dialogue-oriented PTA formats can harmonize school-home expectations and defuse resistance to progressive values. For instance, framing student voice initiatives not as threats to authority but as cultivating principled autonomy can reframe parental anxieties. Schools may also pull local moral capital such as community elders, alumni exemplars, and culturally respected figures, as mentors, guest speakers, or narrative sources. This localizes virtue narratives and decouples moral education from perceptions of Western imposition. Cultural consonance enhances credibility, while diverse role models pluralize the image of moral excellence. Collectively, these implications articulate a systemic reorientation where character education must be situated, dialogic, participatory, and contextually adaptive. It must engage students as agents, teachers as exemplars, and schools as ethical ecologies. Only when moral development is embedded across relationships, curricula, institutional structures, and civic life can it truly become integral to schooling. Amidst socio-technological flux and cultural transition, such a vision is not idealistic, it is imperative.

7. Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

This inquiry was undertaken with rigorous adherence to ethical protocols and sustained reflexivity regarding researcher positionality, particularly given the moral sensitivities and developmental vulnerabilities intrinsic to adolescent participants. Research design was calibrated to the ethical mandates of respect, beneficence, justice, and cultural sensitivity.

7.1. Informed Consent, Autonomy, and Confidentiality

Voluntariness and informed consent were foundational. Adult participants signed written consent forms, while student minors participated under dual-layer consent, i.e., parental approval and age-appropriate student assent. Information sheets, contextualized in accessible language, outlined the research purpose, procedures, voluntariness, and confidentiality protocols. Assurances were made that participation (or withdrawal) would incur no academic consequence. Researchers explicitly communicated to students that there were no *correct* responses, emphasizing our interest in their authentic moral voices. To eliminate potential coercion, all student interactions occurred in neutral, teacher-free environments, with interview scheduling

and participant identities withheld from school authorities. Confidentiality was protected through pseudonymization and data sanitization. Any identifying markers in transcripts were obfuscated through contextual camouflage (e.g., generalizing subject names, altering dates without distorting meaning). Audio recordings and transcripts were encrypted and stored on secure, access-restricted platforms. When approached by school staff for individual feedback, only anonymized thematic summaries were shared, thus maintaining non-disclosure integrity. This methodological opacity was essential for cultivating the psychological safety needed for disclosure of moral tensions, dilemmas, and institutional critiques.

7.2. Minimizing Harm and Maximizing Participant Well-being

Given that moral development research intersects with emotionally charged terrains like bullying, injustice, and social exclusion, we embedded trauma-informed practices into our methodological architecture. Interviewers, including a certified counselor, were trained in empathetic engagement, active listening, and distress de-escalation. Participants were repeatedly reminded of their right to pause, skip questions, or withdraw without repercussion. When disclosures triggered emotional responses (as in one student's recollection of sustained bullying), facilitators allowed narrative pacing to be participant-driven, offered emotional support, and reiterated autonomy. In that instance, the participant ultimately reported therapeutic catharsis, highlighting the potential of well-facilitated interviews to be affirming, not extractive. A resource protocol was developed in advance, listing school counselors, helplines, and referral pathways, to be activated should distress manifest. While no participant requested direct referral, the availability of a psychosocial safety net reinforced ethical preparedness. In focus group settings, social risks were mitigated through collective norms including confidentiality pacts ("*what's shared here stays here*"), protocols for turn-taking, and ground rules proscribing judgment or ridicule. Facilitators actively moderated group dynamics to prevent discursive domination or micro-aggression. The dialogical ethos mirrored the respectful environments that students cited as morally generative within their school communities.

7.3. Reciprocity and Community Value

We operationalized a reciprocity ethic by returning value to research participants and host institutions. During data collection, rapport was enhanced through non-material gestures (refreshments, informal tone) that humanized the research encounter. Post-fieldwork, we synthesized findings into accessible, jargon-free briefs and disseminated them to each school. In response to institutional interest, we conducted teacher development seminars, offering actionable strategies for moral climate cultivation, informed by student data. These engagements enacted a knowledge co-production model, rather than extractive data mining, we envisioned schools as co-constructors of insights. Several schools reported concrete pedagogical adaptations, e.g., piloting student suggestion platforms and adopting reflective circle-time structures, based on our presentations. This praxis feedback loop enhanced the translational legitimacy of our inquiry and honored participants' epistemic contributions.

7.4. Researcher Positionality and Reflexive Integrity

Positionality was a continuous analytic and procedural consideration. Our research team was composed of culturally diverse scholars. One Odisha born and other Jharkhand born researcher embedded in the educational ecology, and two research assistants (from Gujarat and Kerala) with expertise in cross-cultural moral psychology. This insider-outsider configuration produced epistemic complementarity. The Odisha-born researcher's cultural fluency enabled attunement to linguistic nuance (e.g., interpreting terms like *sanskar*, *izzat*, or *shraddha*), social codes, and non-verbal cues. She navigated rapport-building with students and educators through culturally congruent protocols (e.g., honorific use, deference scripts), decoding subtext inaccessible to cultural outsiders. Conversely, Jharkhand-born researcher and the two researcher assistants disrupted taken-for-granted assumptions, identifying themes (e.g., the pervasiveness of "values talk") that may have been domestically normalized. Their interrogative stance pushed the team to probe discursive formulations more deeply, e.g., whether *good character* was an empty signifier or embedded with actionable meaning. Such cross-cultural dialogue yielded methodological vigilance, analytical richness, and multi-perspectival validity.

Power asymmetries were actively addressed. As adult academics engaging with youth and authority figures, we were sensitive to hierarchical dynamics. With students, we adopted a non-threatening posture, i.e., casual dress, relatable self-disclosure, and affirmations of their expertise, to flatten status differentials. Facilitators framed sessions as mutual learning rather than evaluative extraction. With teachers, we posed open-ended, strength-based questions to avoid condescension or implied critique. This positional modesty encouraged candor and trust. Throughout data collection and coding, the team convened reflexivity debriefs to surface and interrogate how identity (e.g., age, gender, cultural background) might be shaping field interactions and interpretive frames. For example, students often disclosed more vulnerable content with the younger or female interviewer, leading us to optimize rapport-based matching. Team members cross-coded transcripts to identify latent biases or cultural misreadings. Discrepant interpretations were deliberated collectively, and the Jharkhand-born researcher contextualized idiomatic expressions or culturally embedded logics for non-local collaborators.

This recursive reflexivity also extended to our theoretical scaffolding. While global frameworks (e.g., Kohlberg, Noddings) guided our conceptual entry points, local moral vocabularies and indigenous categories were foregrounded in our analysis (Kohlberg, 1987; Noddings, 2013). For instance, when students referenced familial respect or *dharma*, we resisted subsuming these under Western constructs (e.g., deontology) and instead interrogated their situated moral ontologies. The analytic hybridity that resulted was both intellectually generative and ethically necessary. Thus, the ethical conduct of this research was not treated as procedural compliance but as an epistemic commitment, anchored in care, humility, and contextual responsiveness. From consent protocols to reflexive praxis, we upheld an ethos of relational accountability, aiming to honor participants' dignity and safeguard the moral integrity of the research encounter. By doing so, we hoped not only to study moral formation but to model it in our scholarly practice.

8. Conclusions

This inquiry sought to interrogate adolescent character ontogenesis within Indian secondary schools, animated by the conceptual metaphor of *becoming through belonging*. Through an interpretivist, multi-site qualitative design engaging 134 stakeholders, including students, teachers, caregivers, and institutional actors, we reconceptualized character not as an essentialist trait, but as a dialogic, contextually situated, and relationally emergent construct. Findings elucidate that moral formation is catalyzed by affective integration into school ecologies imbued with trust, care, and reciprocal recognition. When students perceive themselves as valued members of a moral community, they exhibit pro-social comportments, such as, honesty, empathy, and responsibility, and not via instrumental compliance but as acts of ethical allegiance. Belonging functions as moral infrastructure; relational warmth operationalizes the hidden curriculum of virtue. Ordinary gestures such as a teacher's affirming presence or peer solidarity in adversity become loci of moral apprenticeship.

Simultaneously, students navigate polyvocal moral terrains, such as, familial orthodoxies, institutional norms, generational subcultures, and the algorithmic stimuli of digital lifeworlds. Their moral agency is neither passive nor dichotomous; rather, they synthesize inherited and emergent norms with critical discernment. Contesting patriarchal hierarchies or reconciling spiritual idioms with civic egalitarianism, students engage in normative bricolage, thus affirming justice, care, and dignity through both ancestral and contemporary lenses. Their character reasoning reflects a hybrid moral grammar, shaped by continuity and critique. Crucially, adversity and missteps emerged as crucibles of phronesis. Ethical growth often occurred through reflexive engagement with failure, such as, cheating episodes reframed as honesty epiphanies, exclusionary behavior reconstituted as empathy, or role model disillusionment advancing moral autonomy. Such narratives affirm that character is not the absence of transgression but the insight derived from its thoughtful resolution. Moral maturation thus arises through iterative cycles of challenge, reflection, and recommitment.

Our interdisciplinary analytic frame substantiated these insights. Aristotelian notions of habituated virtue and practical wisdom found real-world articulation in students' testimonial learning. Sen and Nussbaum's capabilities approach was evident in expanding students' moral agency, i.e., the freedom to reason ethically and act in accordance with values they *have reason to value* (Keleher, 2014). Bourdieu's concept of habitus illuminated the internalization (and at times contestation) of moral norms embedded in school culture (Bourdieu, 2020). This research contributes a richly contextualized, Global South-grounded re-theorization of character education. While affirming cross-cultural constants, peer influence, moral voice, the importance of reflection, it reveals culturally specific tensions, such as, collectivist allegiances versus liberal autonomy, reverence versus resistance, ancestral duty versus digital disruption. It evidences that character education is most potent when diffused across the moral architecture of the school, i.e., suffused into ethos, relationships, routines, and discourse, and not sequestered into isolated lessons. Limitations of this research include site-specificity and reliance on self-reported data. Future research may longitudinally trace moral trajectories across diverse socio-cultural ecologies, integrating curricular analyses with lived school experience. Ultimately, our findings demand a pedagogical reorientation, from moral instruction to moral cultivation. Schools must function not merely as conveyors of ethical content but as crucibles of moral becoming. When adolescents are embedded in communities that trust, hear, and challenge them, they grow not just in knowledge but in character. As one student aptly summarized, "*We make each other better.*" That, indeed, is the quiet pedagogy of belonging.

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

References

Abuzar, M., Riazul, S. M., Rahman, O., & E-sor, A. (2024). Strategies for Forming Student Discipline in Islamic Elementary Schools Malaysia: A Holistic Approach in Character Education. *Solo Universal Journal of Islamic Education and Multiculturalism*, *2*(03), 207-218.

Achadah, A., Wahidmurni, W., & Yasin, A. F. (2022). Internalization of character education values in shaping elementary school students' religious behavior. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *14*(4), 4723-4734.

Adebayo, A. (2020). Emphasizing Morals, Values, Ethics, and Character Education in Today's Digital Age. *SMCC Higher Education Research Journal (Business Administration Journal)*, *2*(1), 1-1.

Aditama, M. G., Amelia, R., & Pravitasari, H. (2022). Implementation of character education in English language learning for junior high school. *Jurnal education and development*, *10*(3), 367-370.

Afriani, Y., Agustiningsih, N., & Karmela, S. H. (2022). Character education in learning history of the Diponegoro war material. *Journal of Research in Instructional*, *2*(1), 19-32.

Aghni, L. A., Vianty, M., & Petrus, I. (2020). Character education in English subject: Teachers' perceptions and strategies. *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)*, *5*(2), 127-134.

Agustini, N. L. P. R. E. (2021). Character education for children in Indonesia. *Journal of Educational Study*, *1*(2), 89-94.

Akbar, M., Suhrah, S., Wahid, A., & Afnir, N. (2022). Islamic boarding school as a role model for character education. *KnE Social Sciences*, 623-632.

Algifahmy, A. F. (2022). Holistic Education in the Implementation of Islamic Value Morality in Inclusion Schools in The Covid 19 Pandemic Period. *TA'DIBUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, *5*(1), 63-77.

Alimron, A., Syarnubi, S., & Maryamah, M. (2023). Character Education Model in Islamic Higher Education. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *15*(3), 3334-3345.

Allen, K. A., Gray, D. L., Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (2022). The need to belong: A deep dive into the origins, implications, and future of a foundational construct. *Educational psychology review*, *34*(2), 1133-1156.

Altayeb, L. (2022). From Entertainment to Ideology: Examining Popular Culture's Role in Shaping Collective Consciousness Reinforcement of Stereotypes or Promotion of Equality. *Social Science Chronicle*, *2*, 1-14.

Amri, F., Djatmika, E. T., Wahyono, H., & Widjaja, S. U. M. (2020). The Effect of Using Simulation on Developing Students' Character Education in Learning Economics. *International Journal of Instruction*, *13*(4), 375-392.

Anwar, C., Saregar, A., Fitri, M. R., Anugrah, A., & Yama, A. (2023). Folklore with value clarification technique: its impact on character education of 8-9-year-old students. *Journal of Innovation in Educational and Cultural Research*, *4*(1), 44-55.

Aprilia, B., Sari, Y. Y., & Ghani, A. R. A. (2021, May). The Implementation of Cultivating Good Values Through Character Education in Prince's Primary School Tangerang. In *1st Annual International Conference on Natural and Social Science Education (ICNSSE 2020)* (pp. 80-89). Atlantis Press.

Aquino, K., & Reed II, A. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *83*(6), 1423.

Ariani, F., Ulfatin, N., Supriyanto, A., & Arifin, I. (2022). Implementing Online Integrated Character Education and Parental Engagement in Local Cultural Values Cultivation. *European Journal of Educational Research*, *11*(3), 1699-1714.

Arifin, F., Ulfiah, U., Sauri, S., & Koswara, N. (2022). Management of strengthening character education in fostering morals of Karimah Students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Bandung Regency. *International Journal of Educational Research & Social Sciences*, *3*(5), 1920-1926.

Asif, T., Guangming, O., Haider, M. A., Colomer, J., Kayani, S., & Amin, N. U. (2020). Moral education for sustainable development: Comparison of university teachers' perceptions in China and Pakistan. *Sustainability*, *12*(7), 3014.

Atika, A., Arifin, Z., & Jannana, N. S. (2021). Integrated School Management-Character Education Affirmation: a Case Study in Muhammadiyah Wirobrajan 3 Elementary School Yogyakarta. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, *5*(2), 15-26.

Atqia, Q., Utanto, Y., & Kustiono, K. (2021). Evaluation of Moral Education Program: Study at MI Tamrinussibyan 01 Al-Hikmah. *Innovative Journal of Curriculum and Educational Technology*, *10*(1), 30-42.

Azis, F., Nur, R., & Setiawan, A. (2023). Integration of Character Value Models in Senior High School. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *15*(1), 113-120.

Badawi, S. N., Hidayat, A. W., Syarif, M. I., & Fasa, M. I. (2020, October). Moral Teaching in the Age of Digital Economy: A Model for Elementary School Character Education for Sustainable Development. In *ICBAE 2020: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of Business, Accounting and Economics, ICBAE 2020, 5-6 August 2020, Purwokerto, Indonesia* (p. 173). European Alliance for Innovation.

Badrun, B., Sugiarto, F., Rachmadhani, A., & Sh, H. (2022). Principal's Leadership Strategy in Strengthening Character Education. *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *11*(01).

Bakar, S. (2021). Investigating the dynamics of contemporary pedagogical approaches in higher education through innovations, challenges, and paradigm shifts. *Social Science Chronicle*, *1*(1), 1-19.

Bamkin, S. (2020). The taught curriculum of moral education at Japanese elementary school: the role of classtime in the broad curriculum. *Contemporary Japan*, *32*(2), 218-239.

Berkowitz, M. W. (2021). *PRIMED for character education: Six design principles for school improvement*. Routledge.

Berkowitz, M. W. (2022). Implementing and assessing evidence-based character education. *Journal of Education*, *202*(2), 191-197.

Berkowitz, M. W., Lickona, T., Nast, T., Schaeffer, E., & Bohlin, K. (2020). The Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education: A Brief History. *Journal of Character Education*, *16*(2).

Betawi, A. (2020). Calling for character education: promoting moral integrity in early childhood education in Jordan. *Early Child Development and Care*.

Birhan, W., Shiferaw, G., Amsalu, A., Tamiru, M., & Tiruye, H. (2021). Exploring the context of teaching character education to children in preprimary and primary schools. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *4*(1), 100171.

Birhan, W., Shiferaw, G., Amsalu, A., Tamiru, M., & Tiruye, H. (2021). Exploring the context of teaching character education to children in preprimary and primary schools. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *4*(1), 100171.

Bourdieu, P. (2020). Outline of a Theory of Practice. In *The new social theory reader* (pp. 80-86). Routledge.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Brooks, E., de Lara, E. C., Sánchez-Ostiz, Á., & Torralba, J. M. (2021). Literature and character education in universities. *Literature and Character Education in Universities. Routledge. https://doi. org/10.4324/9781003162209*.

Brown, M., McGrath, R. E., Bier, M. C., Johnson, K., & Berkowitz, M. W. (2023). A comprehensive meta-analysis of character education programs. *Journal of Moral Education*, *52*(2), 119-138.

Cahyanto, B. (2023). School Culture-Based Character Education: Implementation of Strengthening Religious Character in Islamic Primary Schools. *MODELING: Jurnal Program Studi PGMI*, *10*(4), 832-843.

Callista, A. P., & Simanjuntak, M. B. (2022). Analysis Life Values From Habibie And Ainun Novels. *LITERACY: International Scientific Journals of Social, Education, Humanities*, *1*(2), 33-44.

Carr, D. (2021). Where's the Educational Virtue in Flourishing?. *Educational Theory*, *71*(3), 389-407.

Carr, D. (2024). Love, knowledge (wisdom) and justice: Moral education beyond the cultivation of Aristotelian virtuous character. *Journal of Moral Education*, *53*(2), 273-291.

Chairunnisa, C. (2022). Character Education and Teacher's Attitudes in Preventing Radicalization in Junior High School Students in Indonesia. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research (EJER)*, (97).

Chazan, B., & Chazan, B. (2022). What Is "Moral Education"?. *Principles and pedagogies in Jewish education*, 23-34.

Chen, J., Liu, Y., Dai, J., & Wang, C. (2023). Development and status of moral education research: Visual analysis based on knowledge graph. *Frontiers in psychology*, *13*, 1079955.

Cheng, J., Wang, W., & Wang, X. (2021, December). The moral education: Literature review of its development from past to present. In *2021 4th International Conference on Humanities Education and Social Sciences (ICHESS 2021)* (pp. 2256-2261). Atlantis Press.

Cholifah, S. (2024). Educational Environment in the Implementation of Character Education. *Journal of Scientific Research, Education, and Technology (JSRET)*, *3*(2), 816-825.

Dabdoub, J. P., Salgado, D., Bernal, A., Berkowitz, M. W., & Salaverría, A. R. (2024). Redesigning schools for effective character education through leadership: The case of PRIMED Institute and vLACE. *Journal of Moral Education*, *53*(3), 558-574.

Damon, W., & Colby, A. (2015). *The power of ideals: The real story of moral choice*. Oxford University Press.

Datuk, A. (2020, October). Internalization of Character Education in Era 4.0 as A Moral Conservation Solution for Students in Kupang City. In *The 5th Progressive and Fun Education International Conference (PFEIC 2020)* (pp. 21-30). Atlantis Press.

Davis, I. (2024). Qualitative Investigation of Digital Technologies, Social Media, and AI on Human Behaviour, Identity, Communication, and Social Relations in Australia. *Social Science Chronicle*, *4*, 1-13.

Dempster, M. (2020). An exploration of character education as a tool of 'moral repair'in the developing world. *Journal of Religious Education*, *68*(2), 249-265.

Dewey, J. (2024). *Democracy and education*. Columbia University Press.

Dewi, E. R., & Alam, A. A. (2020). Transformation model for character education of students. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, *15*(5), 1228-1237.

Dewi, E. R., & Alam, A. A. (2020). Transformation model for character education of students. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, *15*(5), 1228-1237.

Dimmock, M., & Fisher, A. (2020). Aristotelian Virtue Ethics. *Ethics and Society*.

Ekaterina, S. (2023). Unveiling the Cultural Significance of Illness and Healing: Perspectives from Psychological and Medical Anthropology. *Social Science Chronicle*, *3*(1), 1-15.

Elbes, E. K., & Oktaviani, L. (2022). Character building in English for daily conversation class materials for English education freshmen students. *J. English Lang. Teach. Learn*, *3*(1), 36-45.

Eryong, X., & Li, J. (2021). What is the ultimate education task in China? Exploring "strengthen moral education for cultivating people"("Li De Shu Ren"). *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *53*(2), 128-139.

Fajarianto, O., Harimurti, E. R., & Harsono, Y. (2023). Character Education Learning Model for Elementary School. *EDUCATIO: Journal of Education*, *7*(4), 203-213.

Fathoni, A. M., Sulaeman, M., Azizah, E. A. N., Styawati, Y., & Ramadhan, M. U. C. (2024). The new direction of indonesian character education: bullying, moral decadence, and juvenile delinquency. *Jurnal pendidikan agama Islam*, *21*(1), 22-39.

Fatimah, M., & Aly, A. (2020). Religious culture development in community school: a case study of boyolali middle school, central Java, Indonesia. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, *8*(2), 381-388.

Fawaıt, A., Setyosarı, P., & Ulfa, S. (2020). Identification of factors affecting of character education program on high school students' self-regulation skills. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, *8*(1), 435-450.

Felini, D. (2021). Educazione morale scolastica: l'approccio della Character education. *STUDIUM EDUCATIONIS-Rivista semestrale per le professioni educative*, (1), 006-016.

Fernández Espinosa, V., & López González, J. (2024). Virtues and values education in schools: a study in an international sample. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, *45*(1), 69-85.

FHKPS, B. (2021). Moral education, character education, and citizenship education policies in Hong Kong: A critical review. *International Public Health Journal*, *13*(3), 265-276.

Firdaus, W., Eliya, I., & Sodik, A. J. F. (2020). The importance of character education in higher education (University) in building the quality students. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management* (Vol. 59, pp. 2602-2606).

Fitriyani, E. Y., Uyuni, N., Gultom, L., Anggelina, W., Permana, M. G., Triyadi, M. Y., ... & Purwanto, A. (2023). The Importance Of Character Education In Building A Resilient Nation. *Journal of Community Service and Engagement*, *3*(1), 1-7.

Gamage, K. A., Dehideniya, D. M. S. C. P. K., & Ekanayake, S. Y. (2021). The role of personal values in learning approaches and student achievements. *Behavioral sciences*, *11*(7), 102.

Gao, D., & Wang, D. (2021). Rethinking "Basic Issues" in moral education. *ECNU Review of Education*, *4*(4), 707-726.

García-Moriyón, F., González-Lamas, J., Botella, J., González Vela, J., Miranda-Alonso, T., Palacios, A., & Robles-Loro, R. (2020). Research in moral education: The contribution of P4C to the moral growth of students. *Education Sciences*, *10*(4), 119.

Gilligan, C., Kohlberg, L., Lerner, J., & Belenky, M. (1971). Moral reasoning. *Technical Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography: Preliminary Studies*, *1*, 141.

Guberina, T. (2023). Cultivating inclusive learning environments: Incorporating diversity through culturally responsive pedagogy. *Social Science Chronicle*, *2*, 1-14.

Gunawan, I., Rusdarti, R., & Ahmadi, F. (2020). Implementation of character education for elementary students. *Journal of Primary Education*, *9*(2), 168-175.

Gutmann, A. (1993). Democracy & democratic education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *12*, 1-9.

Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological review*, *108*(4), 814.

Hanafiah, H., Mawati, A. T., & Arifudin, O. (2022). Implementation of character strengthening In boarding school students. *International Journal of Education and Digital Learning (IJEDL)*, *1*(2), 49-54.

Handsman, E. (2021). From virtue to grit: Changes in character education narratives in the US from 1985 to 2016. *Qualitative Sociology*, *44*, 271-291.

Haq, E. A., Wasliman, I., Sauri, R. S., Fatkhullah, F. K., & Khori, A. (2022). Management of Character Education Based on Local Wisdom. *Nidhomul Haq: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, *7*(1), 73-91.

Hardiansyah, F. (2022). The implementation of tolerance character education through social science learning in elementary school. *AULADUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Islam*, *9*(2), 168-180.

Hardiansyah, F., & Mas' odi, M. O. (2022). The implementation of democratic character education through learning of social science materials of ethical and cultural diversity in elementary school. *Journal of Innovation in Educational and Cultural Research*, *3*(2), 234-241.

Hardiansyah, F., & Mas' odi, M. O. (2022). The implementation of democratic character education through learning of social science materials of ethical and cultural diversity in elementary school. *Journal of Innovation in Educational and Cultural Research*, *3*(2), 234-241.

Harefa, D., Hulu, F., & Siswanti, W. (2024). Mathematics learning strategies that support Pancasila moral education: Practical approaches for teachers. *Afore: Jurnal Pendidikan Matematika*, *3*(2), 51-60.

Harrison, T. (2024). Virtual reality and character education: Learning opportunities and risks. *Journal of Moral Education*, *53*(2), 219-239.

Hart, P. (2022). Reinventing character education: the potential for participatory character education using MacIntyre's ethics. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *54*(4), 486-500.

Hart, P., Oliveira, G., & Pike, M. (2020). Teaching virtues through literature: learning from the 'Narnian Virtues' character education research. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, *41*(4), 474-488.

Haryono, S. E., Muntomimah, S., & Eva, N. (2020). Planting Values Through Character Education for Early Childhood. *KnE Social Sciences*, 97-108.

Hasanah, U., Arafah, B., & Abbas, H. (2021). The Values of Character Education in Pullman's The Golden Compass. *Multicultural Education*, *7*(1), 142-148.

Hastasari, C., Setiawan, B., & Aw, S. (2022). Students' communication patterns of islamic boarding schools: The case of Students in Muallimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. *Heliyon*, *8*(1).

Hayati, F. N., & Susatya, E. (2020). Strengthening of Religious Character Education Based on School Culture in the Indonesian Secondary School. *European Educational Researcher*, *3*(3), 87-100.

Hermino, A., & Arifin, I. (2020). Contextual character education for students in the senior high school. *European Journal of Educational Research*, *9*(3), 1009-1023.

Hermino, A., & Arifin, I. (2020). Contextual character education for students in the senior high school. *European Journal of Educational Research*, *9*(3), 1009-1023.

Heryati, Y., Hoerudin, C. W., & Zaqiah, Q. Y. (2022). The Implementation of Character Education on Bahasa Indonesia through Active Learning in Elementary Schools. In *Proceedings of the 1st Bandung English Language Teaching International Conference (BELTIC 2018)-Developing ELT in the 21st Century*.

Hidayat, A. F. S., Huda, M., Amalia, D. R., Suja, A., & Sulaikho, S. (2022). The integration of character education in Arabic learning at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 4 Samarinda. *Borneo International Journal of Islamic Studies (BIJIS)*, 58-79.

Hidayati, N. A., Waluyo, H. J., & Winarni, R. (2020). Exploring the Implementation of Local Wisdom-Based Character Education among Indonesian Higher Education Students. *International Journal of Instruction*, *13*(2), 179-198.

Hidayati, R., Rahman, A., Nuryana, Z., & Yusutria, Y. (2022). Character education and the rise of mental health in Muhammadiyah Boarding School. *International Journal of Public Health Science (IJPHS)*, *11*(1), 170-178.

Huo, Y., & Xie, J. (2021). Exploring the issue of a lack of cohesion in moral education: An empirical study in Chinese primary and secondary schools. *Journal of Moral Education*, *50*(4), 512-528.

Huo, Y., Xie, J., Moller, F., & Kristjánsson, K. (2022). Character strengths and virtues in Chinese moral education: Evidence from 'the Code'and from primary and secondary schools. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *17*(4), 472-485.

Husen, A., Casmana, A., Hasan, R., & Erfinda, Y. (2022). Implementation of teaching character education, particularly in environmental care value, in labschool Jakarta. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, *13*(4), 225-249.

Husna, U., & Thohir, M. (2020). Religious moderation as a new approach to learning Islamic religious education in schools. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *14*(1), 199-222.

Ichsan, I., Tannady, H., Nuryana, A., Fuadi, T. M., & Putra, P. (2023). Efforts to Build Nationalism Values to Vocational High School Students with The implementation of Character Education. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kewirausahaan*, *11*(2), 361-372.

Imawan, O. R., & Ismail, R. (2023). Analysis of Character Education Values on the Learning Achievement of Elementary School Teacher Candidates. *International Journal of Mathematics and Mathematics Education*, *1*(2), 103-131.

Isroani, F., & Huda, M. (2022). Strengthening Character Education Through Holistic Learning Values. *Quality*, *10*(2), 289-306.

Ivanova, I. (2021). Relevance of Contemporary Communication Theories in Comprehending Media Influence and Cultural Dynamics. *Social Science Chronicle*, *1*, 1-18.

Jamo, M. S. (2023). A systematic review analysis of character education social care in elementary school. *Journal of Basic Education Research*, *4*(2), 63-69.

Jelani, A. (2021). Interpreting Human Societies and Social Dynamics through Multifaceted Exploration of Anthropological Frameworks. *Social Science Chronicle*, *1*, 1-17.

Jensen, L. A. (2008). Through two lenses: A cultural–developmental approach to moral psychology. *Developmental Review*, *28*(3), 289-315.

Jerome, L., & Kisby, B. (2022). Lessons in character education: incorporating neoliberal learning in classroom resources. *Critical Studies in Education*, *63*(2), 245-260.

Jhon, W., Zubaidah, E., & Mustadi, A. (2021). Challenges in the implementation of character education in elementary school: experience from Indonesia. *Ilkogretim Online*, *20*(1).

Johnson, K., Brown, M., McGrath, R. E., Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. (2022). A Meta-Analysis of the What Works in Character Education Research. *Journal of Character Education*, *18*(1).

Jónsson, Ó. P., Harðarson, A., Sigurðardóttir, Þ. B., Jack, R., & Jóelsdóttir, S. S. (2021). Young people, old literature and character education in Icelandic schools. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *65*(2), 212-225.

Jumriani, J., Abbas, E. W., Isnaini, U., Mutiani, M., & Subiyakto, B. (2022). Pattern Of Religious Character Development at The Aisyiyah Orphanage In Banua Anyar Village Banjarmasin City. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *14*(2), 2251-2260.

Keleher, L. (2014). Sen and Nussbaum: Agency and Capability-Expansion1. *Éthique et économique= Ethics and economics*, *11*(2).

Khadijah, K., Suciati, I., Khaerani, K., Manaf, A., & Sutamrin, S. (2021). Schools' character education values and students' mathematics learning achievement: A meta-analysis. *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, *40*(3), 670-683.

Khaidir, E., & Suud, F. M. (2020). Islamic education in forming students' characters at as-shofa Islamic High School, pekanbaru Riau. *International Journal of Islamic Educational Psychology*, *1*(1), 50-63.

Khashimova, M. K., Mustafoeva, D. A., Kamilova, M. O., Saydullaev, A. N., & Mamazhanov, I. G. (2021). Integrated approach to moral education. *Annals of the Romanian Society for Cell Biology*, *25*(2), 2987-2992.

Koehler, J., Pierrakos, O., Lamb, M., Demaske, A., Santos, C., Gross, M. D., & Brown, D. F. (2020, June). What can we learn from character education? A literature review of four prominent virtues in engineering education. In *2020 ASEE Virtual Annual Conference Content Access*.

Kohlberg, L. (1987). The psychology of moral development. *Ethics*, *97*(2).

Kohn, A. (1997). How not to teach values: A critical look at character education. *Phi delta kappan*, *78*, 428-439.

Komara, E., Hendriana, H., & Suherman, U. (2021). The Roles of Character Education In 21st Century Learning. *Journal Of Educational Experts (JEE)*, *4*(1), 10-17.

Komariah, N., & Nihayah, I. (2023). Improving the personality character of students through learning Islamic religious education. *At-Tadzkir: Islamic Education Journal*, *2*(1), 65-77.

Kristjánsson, K. (2014). Phronesis and moral education: Treading beyond the truisms. *Theory and Research in Education*, *12*(2), 151-171.

Kristjánsson, K. (2021). Recent attacks on character education in a UK context: A case of mistaken identities?. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, *42*(3), 363-377.

Kristjánsson, K., Harrison, T., & Peterson, A. (2025). Reconsidering the 'ten myths' about character education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *73*(1), 49-72.

Lavy, S. (2020). A review of character strengths interventions in twenty-first-century schools: Their importance and how they can be fostered. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *15*(2), 573-596.

Lilja, A., & Osbeck, C. (2020). Understanding, acting, verbalizing and persevering–Swedish teachers' perspectives on important ethical competences for students. *Journal of Moral Education*, *49*(4), 512-528.

Luthar, S. S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child development*, *71*(3), 543-562.

Maisyaroh, M., Untari, S., Chusniyah, T., Adha, M. A., Prestiadi, D., & Ariyanti, N. S. (2023). Strengthening character education planning based on Pancasila value in the international class program. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, *12*(1), 149-156.

Malik, H. A., & Malik, F. A. (2022). Emile Durkheim contributions to sociology. *Sociology*, *6*(2), 7-10.

Mansur, M., & Sholeh, M. (2024). Implementing Character Education Based on Local Wisdom in a Public Islamic Elementary School. *Journal of Integrated Elementary Education*, *4*(1), 54-70.

Marsakha, A. T., Hariri, H., & Sowiyah, S. (2021). Management of character education in school: A literature review. *Kelola: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, *8*(2), 185-194.

Martin, D. A., Conlon, E., & Bowe, B. (2021). A multi-level review of engineering ethics education: Towards a socio-technical orientation of engineering education for ethics. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, *27*(5), 60.

Martinez, J. A., & Partin, J. M. (2023). Character Education Initiatives and Preparation for School Administrators: A Review of Literature. *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research*, *9*(1), 80-99.

Marzuki, M., & Samsuri, S. (2022). The strategy of three education centers for strengthening character education in Indonesia in the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0. *Jurnal Civics: Media Kajian Kewarganegaraan*, *19*(1), 119-133.

McGrath, R. E., Han, H., Brown, M., & Meindl, P. (2022). What does character education mean to character education experts? A prototype analysis of expert opinions. *Journal of Moral Education*, *51*(2), 219-237.

Metcalfe, J., & Moulin-Stożek, D. (2021). Religious education teachers' perspectives on character education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, *43*(3), 349-360.

Metcalfe, J., Kristjánsson, K., & Peterson, A. (2024). Exploring religious education teachers' perspectives on character development and moral virtues, in state-funded, non-faith schools in England. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, *45*(4), 518-535.

Mezi, M., & Dewantara, J. A. (2020). Implementation of character education in the student council. *Jurnal Basicedu*, *4*(3), 765-774.

Milal, A., Rohmah, Z., Kusumajanti, W., Basthomi, Y., Sholihah, D. N., & Susilowati, M. (2020). Integrating character education in the English teaching at Islamic junior high schools in Indonesia. *Teflin Journal*, *31*(1), 88-107.

Mills, S. (2021). *Mapping the Moral Geographies of Education: Character, citizenship and values*. Routledge.

Minas, A., & Charles, A. (2020). Character schools in supporting character education in students. *Journal Educational Verkenning*, *1*(2), 1-7.

Ministry of Education (2020). *National Education Policy 2020.* Government of India.

Minsih, M., Fuadi, D., & Rohmah, N. D. (2023). Character education through an independent curriculum. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *15*(1), 597-602.

Muhajir, A. A. (2022). Inclusion of Pluralism Character Education in the Islamic Modern Boarding Schools during the Pandemic Era. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, *13*(2), 196-220.

Muhyiddin, D. S., Suhada, D., Yamin, M., Arifin, B. S., & Hasanah, A. (2022). The relevance of the character education development model in Islamic boarding schools. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *5*(3), 1129-1145.

Muis, A., Eriyanto, E., & Readi, A. (2022). Role of the Islamic Education teacher in the Moral Improvement of Learners. *Jurnal At-Tarbiyat: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *5*(3).

Mujahid, I. (2021). Islamic orthodoxy-based character education: creating moderate Muslim in a modern pesantren in Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, *11*(2), 185-212.

Mulianti, W. O., & Sulisworo, D. (2023). Character education management of elementary school students. *International Journal of Learning Reformation in Elementary Education*, *2*(01), 1-13.

Murcahyanto, H., & Mohzana, M. (2023). Evaluation of Character Education Program Based on School Culture. *IJE: Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, *1*(1), 38-52.

Murti, D. K. (2020). Development of Educational Comic with Local Wisdom to Foster Morality of Elementary School Students: A Need Analysis. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, *6*(2), 337-343.

Mustoip, S., Al Ghozali, M. I., As, U. S., & Sanhaji, S. Y. (2023). Implementation of Character Education through Children's Language Development in Elementary Schools. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, *6*(2), 91-100.

Mustoip, S., Al Ghozali, M. I., As, U. S., & Sanhaji, S. Y. (2023). Implementation of Character Education through Children's Language Development in Elementary Schools. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, *6*(2), 91-100.

Muthohar, A. (2021). Implementation and development models of character education in school. *Tarbiyah Wa Ta'lim: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 69-82.

Muzakkir, Hussin, Z., & Razak, R. A. (2024). Teachers' beliefs towards character education curriculum in primary school: a systematic literature review. *Education 3-13*, *52*(8), 1178-1192.

Narvaez, D. (2016). *Embodied morality: Protectionism, engagement and imagination*. Springer.

Natalia, V. E. D., Pratama, A. O., & Astuti, M. D. (2021). Implementation of Pancasila values in character education: A literature review. *International Journal Pedagogy of Social Studies*, *6*(1), 35-44.

Ningsih, T. (2020). Mental revolution education strategy in realizing child-friendly schools based on character education strengthening. *Akademika*, *90*(1), 113-122.

Noddings, N. (2013). Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education (updated). *Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press (Original work published 1984)*.

Nucci, L., & Ilten-Gee, R. (2021). *Moral education for social justice*. Teachers College Press.

Nur, R., & Kanji, H. (2021). Integrated Model of Character Education Development Based on Moral Integrative to Prevent Character Value Breaches. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *13*(1), 107-116.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Harvard University Press.

Osío, J. B. (2023). Unveiling the Intersection: Anthropological Insights into Health Disparities and Well-Being. *Social Science Chronicle*, *2*(1).

Panggabean, J. Z. Z. (2022). Reflecting the value of character education in lesson planning. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Dasar*, *6*(1), 66-74.

Papadopoulos, S. (2022). Philosophical Roots and Global Influence of Postmodern Thought and its Ongoing Dialogue with Humanities. *Social Science Chronicle*, *2*, 1-18.

Patra, L. (2022). Value education: Eastern and western human value and virtues. *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, *39*(2), 69-84.

Peterson, A. (2020). Character education, the individual and the political. *Journal of Moral Education*, *49*(2), 143-157.

Peterson, A. (2020). Character education, the individual and the political. *Journal of Moral Education*, *49*(2), 143-157.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification* (Vol. 1). Oxford university press.

Pradana, D. A., Mahfud, M., Hermawan, C., & Susanti, H. D. (2020). Nasionalism: Character education orientation in learning development. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal) Volume*, *3*, 4026-4034.

Pratama, F. I. P., Kristiyanto, A., & Widyastono, H. (2021). Character values of Third Grade slow learner in character education at the inclusive elementary school. *JPI (Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia)*, *10*(2), 345-352.

Pratiwi, A., Darmiany, D., & Setiawan, H. (2021). Character education values: is learning process in elementary school implement it?. *Prisma Sains: Jurnal Pengkajian Ilmu dan Pembelajaran Matematika dan IPA IKIP Mataram*, *9*(2), 267-279.

Pring, R. (2021). Education as a moral practice. In *The RoutledgeFalmer reader in the philosophy of education* (pp. 195-205). Routledge.

Putri, D. D. W., & Simanjuntak, M. B. (2022). Analysis of moral values in Tere Liye's novel "Pulang". *LITERACY: International Scientific Journals of Social, Education, Humanities*, *1*(1), 21-25.

Rachmadtullah, R., Pramujiono, A., Rasmitadila, R., & Syamsi, A. (2024). Teacher Perceptions in Implementing Religious Character Education in Elementary Schools. *KnE Social Sciences*, 139-147.

Rahayu, E., Sitepu, M. S., & Sari, M. I. (2023). The Role of Character Education in Public Elementary Schools. *Indonesian Journal of Education and Mathematical Science*, *4*(2), 93-101.

Rahman, H. (2020, May). The Development of Character Education Model Based on School Culture. In *1st Borobudur International Symposium on Humanities, Economics and Social Sciences (BIS-HESS 2019)* (pp. 596-601). Atlantis Press.

Raj, C., Mukherjee, A., Caliskan, A., Anastasopoulos, A., & Zhu, Z. (2024, October). Breaking bias, building bridges: Evaluation and mitigation of social biases in llms via contact hypothesis. In *Proceedings of the AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society* (Vol. 7, pp. 1180-1189).

Renita, M. F. A. (2023). Implementation of School Religious Activities in Forming Student Islamic Character Education. *Elementaria: Journal of Educational*

Research, *1*(1), 28-41.

Retnasari, L., Hidayah, Y., & Prasetyo, D. (2021). Reinforcement of character education based on school culture to enhancing elementary school students' citizenship character. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Dasar*, *5*(2), 351-358.

Ridha, D. S. M., Buska, W., & Prihartini, Y. (2020, February). The Development of Character Education Curriculum Model for Islamic Elementary Schools In Muaro Jambi. In *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* (Vol. 1471, No. 1, p. 012030). IOP Publishing.

Rihatno, T., Safitri, D., Nuraini, S., Marini, A., Ferdi Fauzan Putra, Z. E., & Wahyudi, A. (2020). The development of character education model using stop motion animation for elementary school students in Indonesia. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, *29*(8), 103-109.

Rina, N., Suminar, J., Damayani, N., & Hafiar, H. (2020). Character education based on digital comic media.

Rinenggo, A., & Kusdarini, E. (2021). Moral values and methods of moral education at Samin community. *Jurnal Civics: Media Kajian Kewarganegaraan*, *18*(1), 26-37.

Rochadiana, A., Narimo, S., Prastiwi, Y., & Rahmawati, L. E. (2022). The Implementation of Tembang Macapat Learning as A Means of Primary School Character Education. *Journal of Innovation in Educational and Cultural Research*, *3*(4), 508-518.

Rusmin, L., Hasan, S., La Rabani, M. M., & Suardika, I. K. (2020). The role of civic education in the student moral development in elementary school: A descriptive study. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, *8*(12), 6405-6414.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2024). Self-determination theory. In *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research* (pp. 6229-6235). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Sakban, A., & Sundawa, D. (2023). Character Education: Direction and Priority for National Character Development in Indonesia. *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian Dan Kajian Kepustakaan Di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran*, *9*(3), 794-807.

Sanjani, M. A. F. (2024). The Impact of School Principals on Graduate Quality Through Character Education Initiatives. *Journal of Educational Management Research*, *3*(1), 30-46.

Sari, Y. Y., Solihati, N., & Fatayan, A. (2022). Development of a Prophetic Character Education Model for Elementary School Students through the Work. *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian Dan Kajian Kepustakaan Di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran*, *8*(4), 1052-1062.

Saripudin, D., Komalasari, K., & Anggraini, D. N. (2021). Value-Based Digital Storytelling Learning Media to Foster Student Character. *International Journal of Instruction*, *14*(2), 369-384.

Satria, R., & Shahbana, E. B. (2020). The SWOT analysis of strengthening character education in junior high school. *Jurnal Iqra': Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan*, *5*(2), 56-67.

Self, L. S. (1979). Rhetoric and phronesis: The Aristotelian ideal. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, *12*(2), 130-145.

Shiddiq, A., Ulfatin, N., Imron, A., & Imron, A. (2024). Developing student character education through Islamic boarding school culture in Islamic elementary schools. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *16*(2), 2276-2288.

Shih, Y. H. (2022). Moral education in Taiwanese preschools: importance, concepts and methods. *Policy Futures in Education*, *20*(6), 717-730.

Shim, J. (2023). Investigating the effectiveness of introducing virtual reality to elementary school students' moral education. *Computers & Education: X Reality*, *2*, 100010.

Silvia, M. (2021). Unveiling Human Behaviour a Comprehensive Exploration of Influential Paradigms in Psychology. *Social Science Chronicle*, *1*, 1-16.

Simanjuntak, M. B. (2020). The Educational Values of the Main Character in Beautiful Mind Film. *Journal of Advanced English Studies*, *3*(1), 1-6.

Sin, T. H., & Cahyani, F. I. (2022). Character education to improving student learning outcomes. *Jurnal Konseling Dan Pendidikan*, *10*(1), 12-19.

Smith, O. (2021). Exploring Dynamics of Anthropological Frameworks in Unveiling Insights Into Human Societies. *Social Science Chronicle*, *1*, 1-18.

Smith, R. (2022). Character education and the instability of virtue. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *56*(6), 889-898.

Suartama, I. K., & Salehudin, M. (2020). Development of e-learning oriented inquiry learning based on character education in multimedia course.

Suchyadi, Y., Muhajang, T., Indriani, R. S., & Mirawati, M. (2022). Implementation Of Supervision In Improving The Learning Process And Character Education In Elementary Schools. *Journal of Social Studies Arts and Humanities (JSSAH)*, *2*(2), 143-146.

Suciati, I., Idrus, I., Hajerina, H., Taha, N., & Wahyuni, D. S. (2023). Character and moral education based learning in students' character development. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, *12*(3), 1185-1194.

Suhifatullah, M. I., Sutarman, S., & Thoyib, M. (2021). Character education strategies in improving students' spiritual intelligence. *International Research Journal of Management, IT and Social Sciences*, *8*(2), 155-162.

Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & behavior*, *7*(3), 321-326.

Sulistiyo, U., Supiani, S., Kailani, A., & Lestariyana, R. P. D. (2020). Infusing moral content into primary school English textbooks: A critical discourse analysis. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *10*(1), 251-260.

Sumartias, S., Unde, A. A., Wibisana, I. P., & Nugraha, A. R. (2020, February). The importance of local wisdom in building national character in the industrial age 4.0. In *3rd International Conference on Learning Innovation and Quality Education (ICLIQE 2019)* (pp. 1305-1312). Atlantis Press.

Suprianto, G., & Nurdyansyah, N. (2020). Analysis of character education in curriculum 13 to build moral awareness in education at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Sidoarjo. *Proceedings of the ICECRS*, *5*.

Suprianto, G., & Nurdyansyah, N. (2020). Analysis of character education in curriculum 13 to build moral awareness in education at SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Sidoarjo. *Proceedings of the ICECRS*, *5*.

Supriyadi, S., Berliana Khofifah Febriyanti, B. K. F., & Feri Tirtoni, F. T. (2024). Implementation of integral character education based on school curriculum integration. *MIMBAR PGSD Undiksha*, *12*(1), 141-151.

Surachmi, S., & Rondli, W. S. (2024). Analysis Implementation of Character Education Through the Adiwiyata Program in SMP Negeri 1 Batangan Pati. *ASEANA Science and Education Journal*, *4*(1), 28-33.

Surawan, S., Syabrina, M., Zakariyas El Bilad, C., & Azmy, A. (2022). Implementation of character education at madrasahs and integrated islamic schools in central kalimantan. *Ta'dib*, *25*(1), 19-26.

Suryanto, A., Saliman, S., & Sudrajat, S. (2023). The weakness of character education in indonesian teenager. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA*, *9*(5), 3869-3874.

Susatya, E., Santosa, B., Andriyani, A., & Ariyani, D. (2021). Evaluating the implementation of the character education strengthening program of vocational high schools in Yogyakarta City. *REID (Research and Evaluation in Education)*, *7*(1), 3.

Susilo, M. J., Dewantoro, M. H., & Yuningsih, Y. (2022). Character education trend in Indonesia. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, *16*(2), 180-188.

Syarnubi, S., Mansir, F., Purnomo, M. E., Harto, K., & Hawi, A. (2021). Implementing character education in madrasah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *7*(1), 77-94.

Syarnubi, S., Syarifuddin, A., & Sukirman, S. (2023). Curriculum Design for the Islamic Religious Education Study Program in the Era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *15*(4), 6333-6341.

Tabroni, I., Nasihah, F., & Bahijah, I. (2021). The Implementation Of School Culture-Based Character Education In Salem State Elementary School, Pondoksalam Subdistrict, Indonesia. *Erudio Journal of Educational Innovation*, *8*(2), 202-208.

Tambak, S., Hamzah, H., Sukenti, D., & Sabdin, M. (2021). Internalization of Islamic Values in Developing Students' Actual Morals. *JPI (Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia)*, *10*(4), 697-709.

Tang, H., & Wang, Y. (2021). Moral education curriculum reform for china's elementary and middle schools in the twenty-first century: Past progress and future prospects. *ECNU Review of Education*, *4*(4), 727-742.

Taufik, M. (2020). Strategic role of Islamic religious education in strengthening character education in the era of industrial revolution 4.0. *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, *20*(1), 86-104.

Taufik, R., & Nurhayati, S. (2023). Character Education for Developing State Police School Students' Bhayangkara Character Philosophy in the Society 5.0 Era. *Jurnal Paedagogy*, *10*(4), 944-954.

Tohri, A., Rasyad, A., Sururuddin, M., & Istiqlal, L. M. (2022). The Urgency of Sasak Local Wisdom-Based Character Education for Elementary School in East Lombok, Indonesia. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, *11*(1), 333-344.

Tohri, A., Rasyad, A., Sururuddin, M., & Istiqlal, L. M. (2022). The Urgency of Sasak Local Wisdom-Based Character Education for Elementary School in East Lombok, Indonesia. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, *11*(1), 333-344.

Tyas, E. H., Sunarto, S., & Naibaho, L. (2020). Building superior human resources through character education. *TEST Engineering & Management*, *83*, 11864-11873.

Tyas, E. H., Sunarto, S., & Naibaho, L. (2020). Building superior human resources through character education. *TEST Engineering & Management*, *83*, 11864-11873.

Tyler, T. R., & Blader, S. L. (2003). The group engagement model: Procedural justice, social identity, and cooperative behavior. *Personality and social psychology review*, *7*(4), 349-361.

Victorynie, I., Husnaini, M., & Amili, N. (2020). Model of religious character education: A case study in Al-Hilal Islamic Primary School Bekasi, Indonesia. *Journal of Social Studies (JSS)*, *16*(2), 103-120.

Vrabec, N., & Furtáková, L. (2024). Ways of defining digital competences and their components in the EU, EC and UNESCO recommendations. *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Cultura*, *16*(2), 5-17.

Watts, P., & Kristjánsson, K. (2022). Character education. In *Handbook of philosophy of education* (pp. 172-184). Routledge.

Watts, P., Fullard, M., & Peterson, A. (2021). *Understanding character education: Approaches, applications and issues*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Winarni, R., Slamet, S. Y., & Syawaludin, A. (2022). Indonesian textbook based on character education through active learning for the elementary school students. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Dasar*, *6*(1), 39-47.

Yeager, D. S., Henderson, M. D., Paunesku, D., Walton, G. M., D'Mello, S., Spitzer, B. J., & Duckworth, A. L. (2014). Boring but important: a self-transcendent purpose for learning fosters academic self-regulation. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *107*(4), 559.

Yolandini, B., Suabuana, C., Muhammad, I., & Triansyah, F. A. (2023). Analysis bibliometric: Character education research in elementary schools on one decades. *JIIP-Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, *6*(7), 5485-5492.

Yuan, X. (2022). Construction of moral education evaluation model based on quality cultivation of college students. *Scientific Programming*, *2022*(1), 5641782.

Yusnan, M. (2022). Implementation of character education in state elementary school. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, *5*(2), 218-223.

Zaenab, S., Chamisijatin, L., & Wahyuni, S. (2020). Strengthening character education through literacy movement at Muhammadiyah junior high school. *Journal of Community Service and Empowerment*, *1*(1), 54-63.

Zhang, Q., Saharuddin, N. B., & Aziz, N. A. B. A. (2022). The analysis of teachers' perceptions of moral education curriculum. *Frontiers in psychology*, *13*, 967927.

Zuhroh, F. (2022). Exploring Children's Character Education through the Moral Teachings of Raden Mas Panji Sosrokarton. *Journal of Childhood Development*, *2*(2), 139-148.

Zulela, M. S., Neolaka, A., Iasha, V., & Setiawan, B. (2022). How is the education character implemented? The case study in Indonesian elementary school. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, *12*(1), 371.