

Bridging Theory and Practice: The global landscape of character building research and its contribution to sustainable education



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Abstract This study provides an overview of the trends, geographical, and institutional contributions to character building research, focusing on the importance of character education in the 21st century and its alignment with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive and quality education. Despite growing interest in character development, research on its practical application remains fragmented, and there is a gap in translating theoretical frameworks into real-world educational practices. The study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, augmented by bibliometric analysis, to examine the evolution of character building research, publication patterns, and global contributions. The results reveal a significant surge in publications since 2018, peaking in 2020, with Indonesia as the dominant contributor, surpassing other countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia. Key themes identified in the literature include Character Education, Moral Development, Leadership, and Local Wisdom, with local wisdom playing a significant role in Indonesia's character building initiatives. However, the study highlights a gap in the practical implementation of character education policies at the school and community levels. The research contributes to understanding the intersection of character education with SDG 4 and recommends further research to bridge the gap between theory and practice, evaluate the impact of character education programs, and incorporate local wisdom into character education frameworks. Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach is recommended to develop a more comprehensive framework that meets global educational needs.

Keywords: character education, local wisdom, moral development, SDG 4, publication trends

1. Introduction

Character building, as an integral component of education, plays a critical role in shaping individuals who are not only academically proficient but also morally, socially, and emotionally responsible (Hanim & Marjo, 2025; Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Kim, 2014). In the context of the 21st century, marked by rapid social changes, inequality, and environmental crises, the importance of character development in education has become increasingly pressing (Adnan et al., 2023; Asror et al., 2024; Hsiao, 2021; Sholeh et al., 2025). Within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, character education is increasingly recognized as a key pillar in fostering individuals who contribute positively to building sustainable and harmonious societies (García-Álvarez et al., 2023; Pasaribu et al., 2024).

However, despite the growing recognition of the importance of character education in global educational discourse, existing literature reveals that research on character building remains fragmented and dispersed across various disciplines (Setiyatna et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Diverse conceptualizations of character education often lead to varying interpretations and practices, with its application in broader educational contexts—both formal and informal—remaining unclear. A central issue that arises is how character education is understood, interpreted, and applied across different nations and cultural contexts. The lack of consensus on definitions, theoretical frameworks, and practical challenges in the application of character education adds to the complexity of the field.

Although substantial research has highlighted the significance of character education in shaping responsible individuals, there is a notable gap in literature regarding the translation of theoretical frameworks into practical applications within everyday educational practices. Moreover, while many countries have adopted character education principles in their national education policies, there remains a scarcity of research exploring the actual implementation and tangible impacts of these policies at the school and community levels (Effend et al., 2020; Irwan et al., 2025; Suciptaningsih & Haryati, 2020). Therefore, there is a critical need for a systematic review that identifies emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in the development of global character education research to address these gaps.

This study aims to bridge the existing gaps in the literature by providing a comprehensive overview of the development and contributions of character education research worldwide. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology,



augmented by bibliometric analysis, this research will explore publication patterns, geographic contributions, and institutional involvement in the field of character education. The primary objective of this study is to identify emerging trends in character building research, both in terms of publication volume and its influence on global educational policy development. Additionally, this study will examine the relationship between character education and SDG 4, focusing on how character building can contribute to achieving the goals of quality, inclusive, and equitable education (Effend, 2024; García-Álvarez et al., 2023; Safrilsyah et al., 2024).

The research questions guiding this study are as follows: [RQ1] What are the trends in academic publications related to character education, and how has the volume of these publications evolved over time? [RQ2] Which countries and institutions have made the most significant contributions to the field of character education research? [RQ3] How does character education intersect with key themes in global educational literature, such as moral development, leadership, and social responsibility, and how do these relate to the broader objectives of SDG 4?

This study offers several key contributions. First, it provides a clearer understanding of the patterns and dynamics of character education development, highlighting the major contributors to this field across various countries and institutions. Second, the study identifies the gap between theory and practice in character education, offering insights into the challenges faced in its application across diverse educational contexts. Finally, the research explores how character education aligns with and supports the achievement of global goals, particularly SDG 4, by emphasizing the integration of moral and social values within education systems.

The distinction of this study from other systematic reviews or bibliometric analyses on character education lies in its more comprehensive and in-depth approach, particularly in its cross-country comparison and exploration of the intersection between character education and SDG 4. Unlike studies that often focus on limited data or region-specific analyses, this research provides a broader perspective by examining the contributions from various countries and institutions worldwide that have played a significant role in the development of character education research.

Furthermore, this study not only analyzes publication trends but also investigates the gap between theory and practice in character education. It offers deeper insights into the challenges faced in applying character education principles and provides a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the success or challenges of character education implementation across different educational contexts.

Thus, this research not only contributes to the scholarly understanding of character education but also enriches the global discourse on the role of education in shaping responsible, inclusive, and capable individuals who are prepared to address the complex social, economic, and environmental challenges of the 21st century. This study offers a more holistic understanding of how character education can support the achievement of global goals, particularly SDG 4, while promoting the more effective integration of moral and social values into educational systems.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, complemented by bibliometric analysis, to investigate the body of literature on character building (character education). Figure 1 illustrates the information flow of the SLR procedure focusing on the topic of character building. The process began with a search for articles in the Scopus database on September 24, 2025, using the following search string: "TITLE-ABS-KEY ('character education' OR 'character building')". This search returned 2,365 articles. The selection process then involved applying several inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the pool of articles.

The articles were then screened based on their title, abstract, and keywords, which were required to include the terms "character education" or "character building," excluding 1,996 articles that did not meet these criteria. Consequently, 369 articles were retained for further analysis. Next, articles that did not belong to relevant document types, such as conference proceedings, books, book series, and trade journals, were removed, leaving 333 articles that met the inclusion criteria. Additionally, articles written in languages other than English, such as Spanish, Turkish, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Indonesian, and Croatian, were excluded, reducing the number of articles to 313. Finally, articles still in the publication stage were excluded, resulting in a total of 306 articles that met all the criteria and were ready for further analysis.

To address duplication, the study used the bibliometric software VOSviewer to identify and remove duplicate entries, ensuring that only unique articles were included in the analysis. The search time frame was set to include articles published between 2011 and 2025, chosen due to the growing global attention to character education in recent years. The selected data were then validated by cross-referencing the selected articles with references from major journals to ensure relevance and accuracy. Through this process, the study provides a transparent and reproducible overview of the development and contributions in the field of character education research.

3. Results

The results of this study provide an in-depth analysis of trends, geographical, and institutional contributions to character building research. Character education, an essential component in personal development, has increasingly gained attention in academic literature, particularly within the context of 21st-century educational development. This section presents the key

findings derived from the systematic literature review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis, exploring the distribution of publications over time, the geographical dominance of countries such as Indonesia, and the institutional contributions from leading universities in the field. The analysis also identifies key thematic areas in character education research, including moral development, leadership, and the integration of local wisdom. By examining the patterns and dynamics of publication trends, this study aims to provide insight into the growing global interest in character education and its alignment with broader educational goals, such as those outlined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Additionally, the findings highlight the gap between theoretical frameworks and their practical application in educational contexts, emphasizing the need for further exploration of the real-world implementation of character education policies.

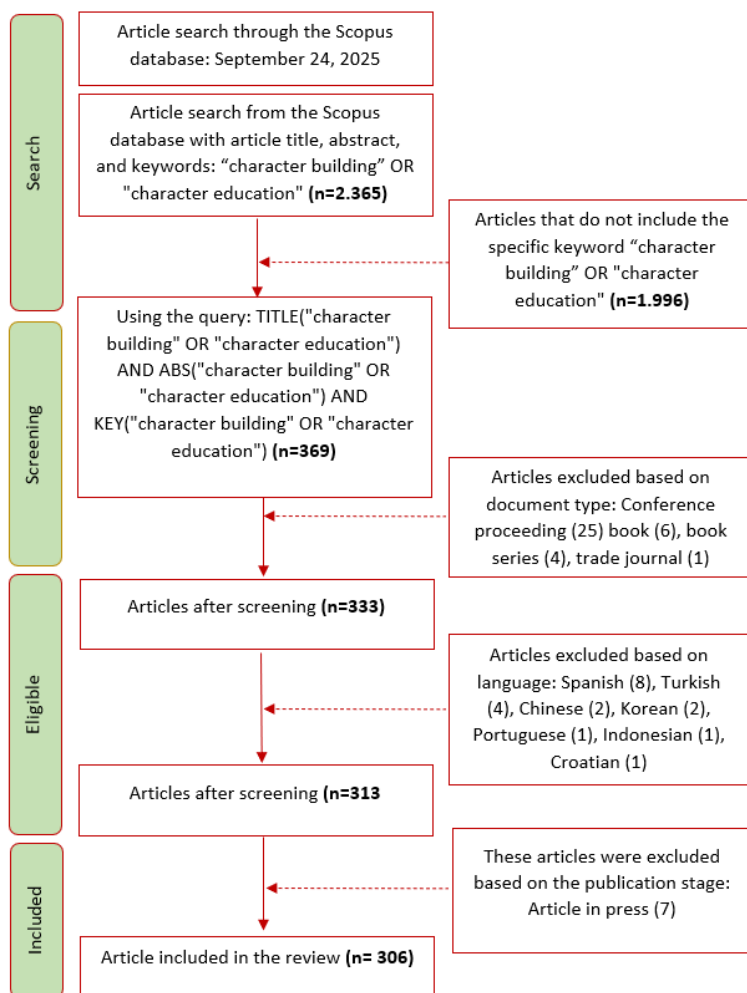


Figure 1 SLR information flow on character building.

3.1. Trends in character building research and publication patterns

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of articles on Character Building from 2011 to 2026. In the early years of the period, publications were limited, with only a few articles emerging between 2011 and 2015. This trend indicates that the topic of Character Building began to gain attention in academic research during this period. Since 2015, there has been a significant surge in the number of articles published, peaking in 2020, when more than 50 articles were published. This spike reflects the growing interest in the importance of character development in education and society (Tanzeh, 2019; Winterbottom & Schmidt, 2022), which is increasingly recognized as an essential skill in individual development in the 21st century (Dewi & Alam, 2020; Iswari, 2019; Sholeh et al., 2025).

After this peak, the number of publications shows a more stable fluctuation, with both increases and decreases occurring in subsequent years. Although the number of articles did not return to the low levels seen before 2018, the graph indicates that interest in Character Building remains consistent, albeit with more varied patterns. This fluctuation may reflect shifts in research focus and responses to various social and educational trends that influence the discourse on character development (Arizona et al., 2025; Sakti et al., 2024; Yani et al., 2025). Projections through 2026 suggest that the topic is expected to continue to evolve, albeit with more diverse dynamics, as the demand for character skills in global and educational contexts becomes more complex.

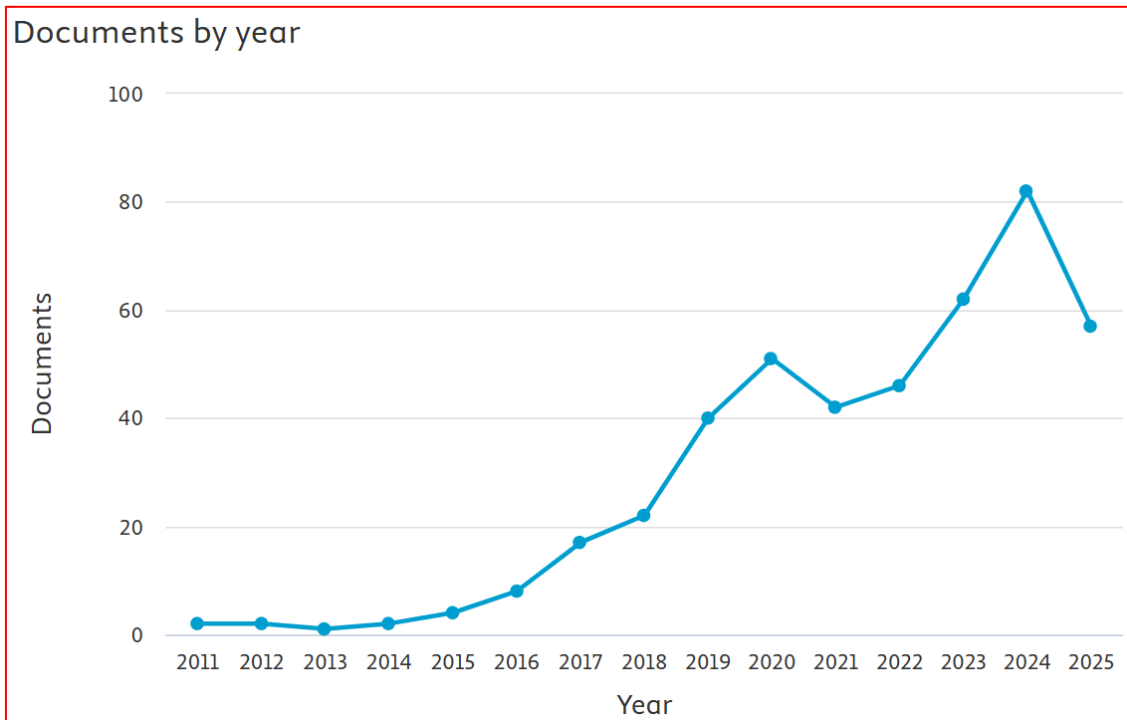


Figure 2 Distribution of character building articles by year.
 Source: Scopus data base.

3.2. Geographical and institutional contributions to character building research

Figure 3 shows the distribution of articles on Character Building by country or region. The graph displays the number of documents published by leading countries on this topic. Indonesia dominates the field with a significantly high number of articles, nearly reaching 190 documents, far surpassing other countries. The United States follows with approximately 35 articles, followed by the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and South Korea, which also contribute relatively large numbers of publications, though still much lower than Indonesia.

Other countries appearing in the graph include Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, Iceland, and Hong Kong, each contributing a smaller number of articles, ranging from 10 to 30 documents. This distribution highlights Indonesia’s dominant role in Character Building research, while other countries remain active contributors, albeit in smaller proportions. This may reflect differences in educational focus and policies related to character development across various nations.

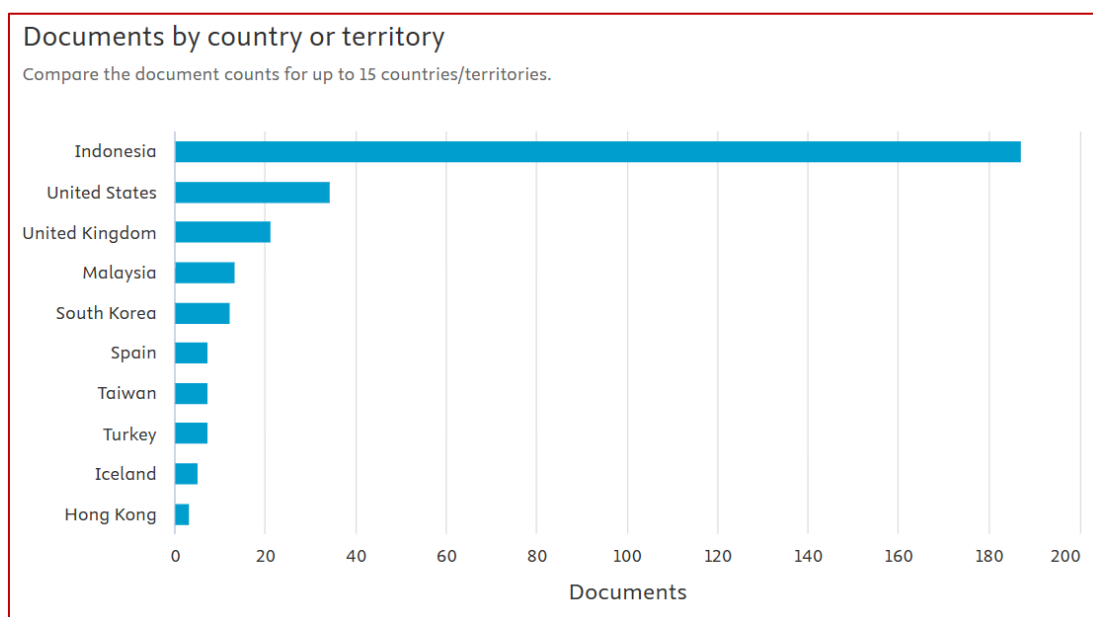


Figure 3 Distribution of character building articles by country
 Source: Scopus data base.



Figure 4 presents the distribution of articles on character building by country of origin, offering a visual representation of the relationships between countries contributing to the literature on this topic. Indonesia is prominently positioned as the leading contributor, reflected by the largest node and its central placement in the graph. This indicates Indonesia’s dominant role in the field of character-building research. Malaysia, which is closely linked to Indonesia, also shows a significant contribution, indicating a regional collaboration or shared interest in the development of character education. Other countries contributing to the literature, albeit to a lesser extent, include Taiwan, Turkey, Brunei Darussalam, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain. These countries are represented by smaller nodes, which reflect their relatively lower, yet still notable, contributions to the body of research. The positioning of these countries around Indonesia and Malaysia suggests a less centralized but still active involvement in the field.

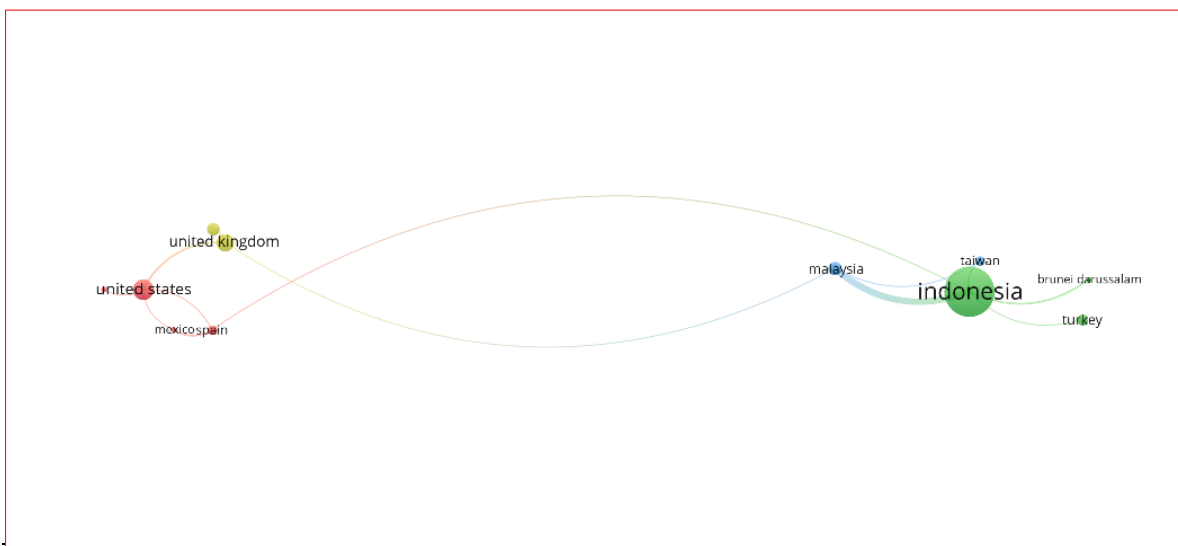


Figure 4 Distribution of character building by country affiliation.
 Source: Data analysis by VOS Viewer.

The visualization highlights a strong regional connection between Indonesia and Malaysia, suggesting a shared educational context or commonality in character education initiatives within Southeast Asia. In contrast, countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, though significant contributors, are more distanced from the central cluster of Indonesia and Malaysia, indicating that their contributions are comparatively more dispersed or less concentrated in the specific field of character building. This distribution underscores the global nature of character building research, with Indonesia emerging as the most active contributor. However, it also illustrates the varying levels of involvement across different nations, reflecting both regional and global trends in the development and application of character education practices. The analysis suggests that while Indonesia leads the discourse, other countries play complementary roles, with research emerging from diverse cultural and educational contexts. This pattern further aligns with the broader objectives of sustainable educational practices and the integration of character education as a key component of holistic development globally.

Figure 5 displays the distribution of articles on Character Building based on institutional affiliation. The graph highlights the number of articles published by various universities or academic institutions, with Universitas Negeri Jakarta recording the highest number of publications, followed by Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta and Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. These universities demonstrate a dominant role in Character Building research in Indonesia. In addition, several international universities appear in the graph, such as the University of Birmingham, contributing to the global aspect of this topic. Other Indonesian universities, such as Universitas Negeri Malang, Universitas Sebelas Maret, and Universitas Negeri Semarang, also make significant contributions with notable numbers of articles. This distribution reflects the importance of academic affiliation in Character Building research, with certain universities playing a key role in advancing research in this field.

3.3. Bibliometric analysis and key themes in character building literature

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of articles on Character Building based on publication sources from 2010 to 2025. The graph shows the number of articles published each year by various journals focused on education and character development. The most prominent journal is the *Journal of Moral Education* (indicated by the blue line), which consistently publishes a number of articles each year, although the publication volume remained relatively low until 2020, after which there was a slight increase in the following years.

Other journals, such as the *International Journal of Innovation Creativity and Change* (red line), *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* (green line), and *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology* (yellow line), also contribute



with varying numbers of articles. However, it is evident that most journals exhibit significant fluctuations in their annual publication counts. Some journals, like *Cakrawala Pendidikan* and *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, show more unstable trends, with sharper publication spikes in certain years. This graph reflects the dynamics in the selection of journal sources contributing to Character Building research, as well as variations in the frequency of article publication within each journal.

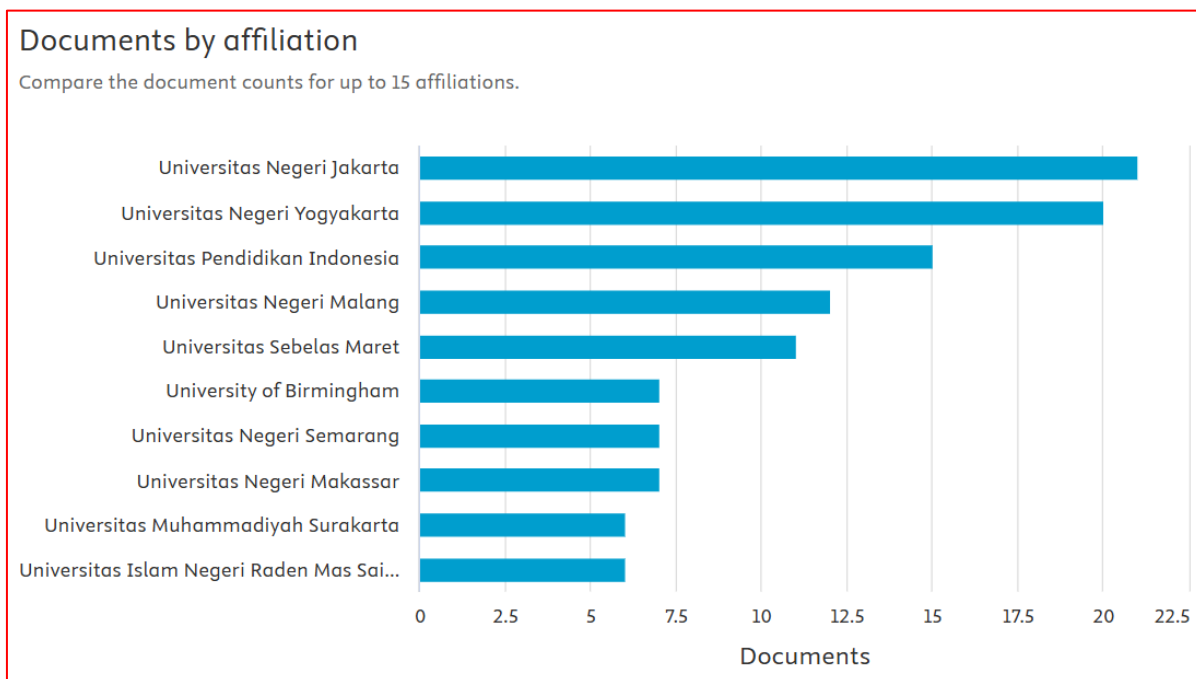


Figure 5 Distribution of character building articles by affiliation.
 Source: Scopus data base.

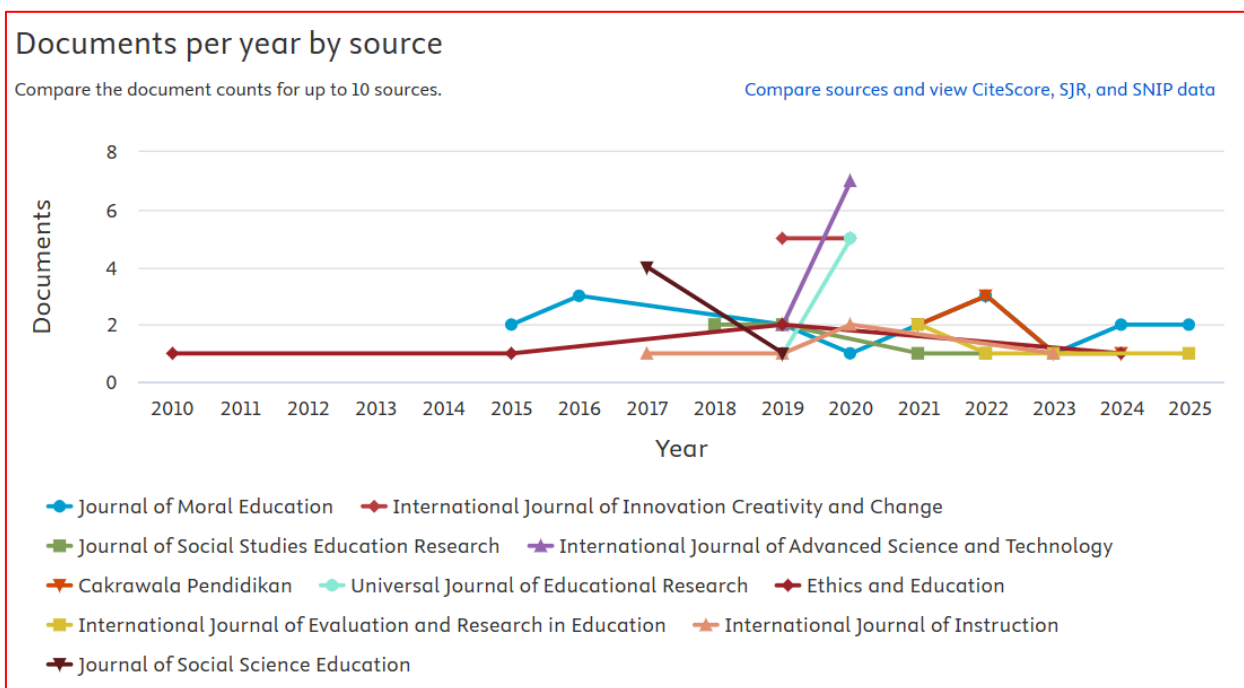


Figure 6 Distribution of character building articles by source
 Source: Scopus data base.

Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of articles on Character Building based on subject areas. The graph shows the proportion of articles published across various fields, with the largest share in the Social Sciences, accounting for 47.6% of the total articles. This indicates that the topic of character development is primarily associated with social science disciplines, including education, psychology, and sociology.



In addition, the Arts and Humanities field also makes a significant contribution, representing 17.9% of the total articles, highlighting the role of humanistic and artistic approaches in character development. Other fields such as Engineering (5.8%), Computer Science (5.6%), and Psychology (4.6%) contribute smaller but still important portions in the context of character and personal skill development. Additional fields such as Business Management, Medicine, and Environmental Science also contribute with smaller article volumes. This distribution demonstrates that the topic of Character Building has a broad scope, engaging multiple disciplines in diverse contexts.

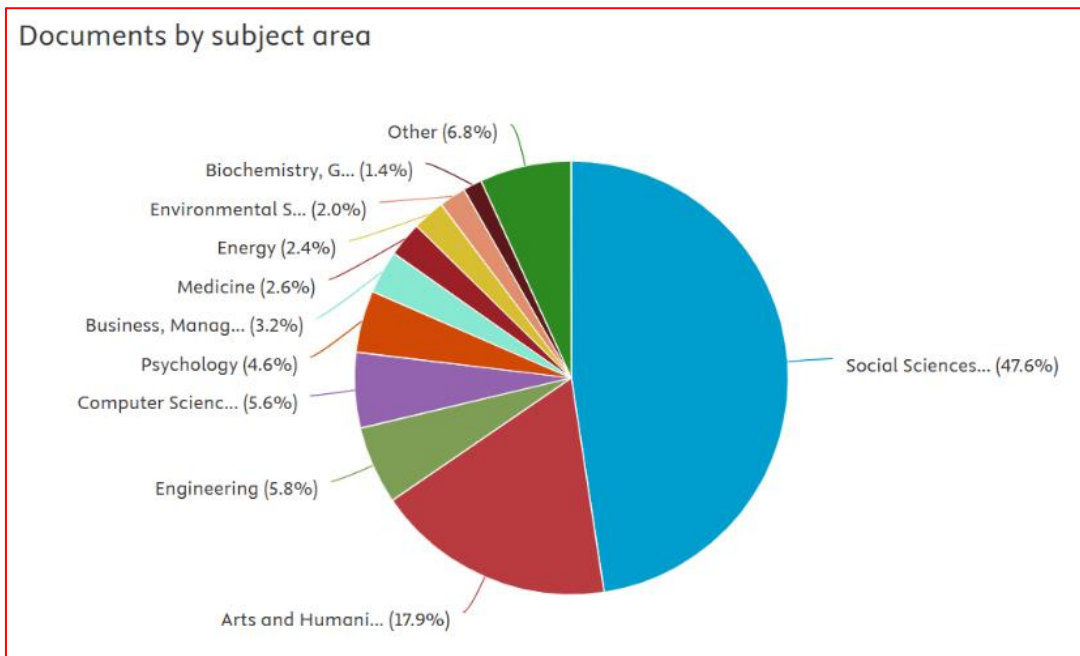


Figure 7 Distribution of character building articles by subject area.
 Source: Scopus data base.

Figure 8 presents the distribution of articles on Character Building based on authorship. The graph identifies the authors with the largest contributions to publications in this field. The author with the highest number of publications is Marini, A., with over 12 articles, followed by Safitri, D., and Nuraini, S., each with approximately 8 articles. Other authors, such as Wahyudi, A., Rihanto, T., and Arifin, I., also show significant contributions with more than 5 articles.

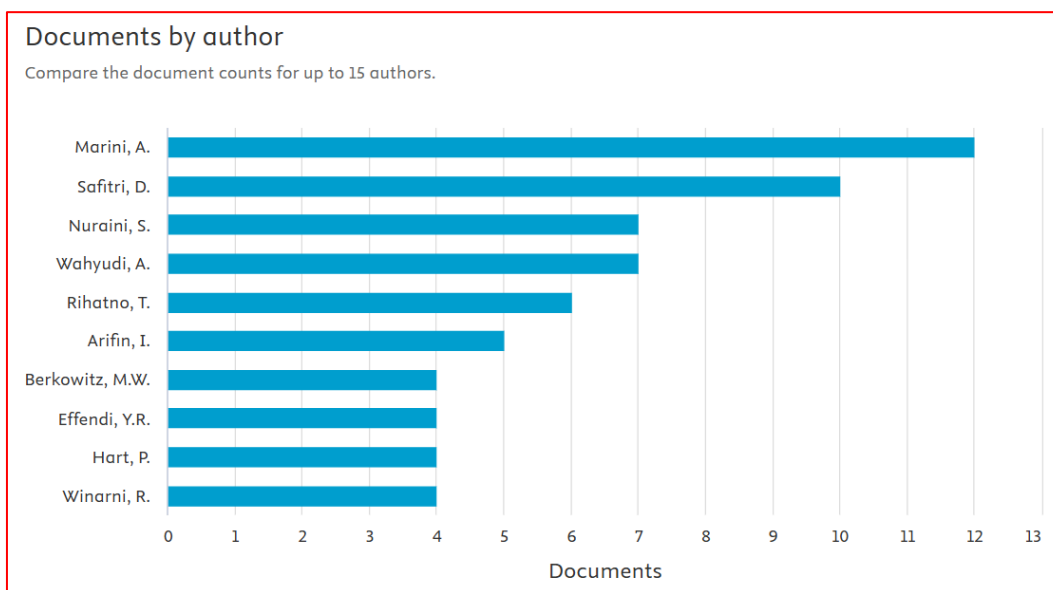


Figure 8 Distribution of character building articles by author.
 Source: Scopus data base.

This graph illustrates a high concentration of publications among a few authors, while other authors contribute fewer articles, ranging from 2 to 4. Some authors, such as Berkowitz, M.W., Effendi, Y.R., Hart, P., and Winarni, R., contribute more



limited numbers of articles but still play a role in the development of the Character Building topic. This reflects the importance of individual contributions in enriching the literature on character development, despite significant differences in the number of publications between authors.

Figure 9 illustrates the relationships between keywords related to Character Building used by authors in their research. This visualization depicts a network of interconnected keywords, with *Character Education* at the center. Keywords closely related to Character Education include concepts such as moral education, curriculum, leadership, students, and values education, highlighting the relevance of this topic within the context of education and character development among students.

Furthermore, *Character Building* is also connected to other keywords such as student character, community involvement, religious moderation, and school culture, indicating that this topic is not only associated with academic education but also with social and cultural aspects of character development. Keywords like local wisdom, traditional games, and adolescents suggest a more contextual and culturally grounded approach to research on character building. Thus, this visualization portrays the diversity and complexity of the concepts related to character development across various educational and social contexts.

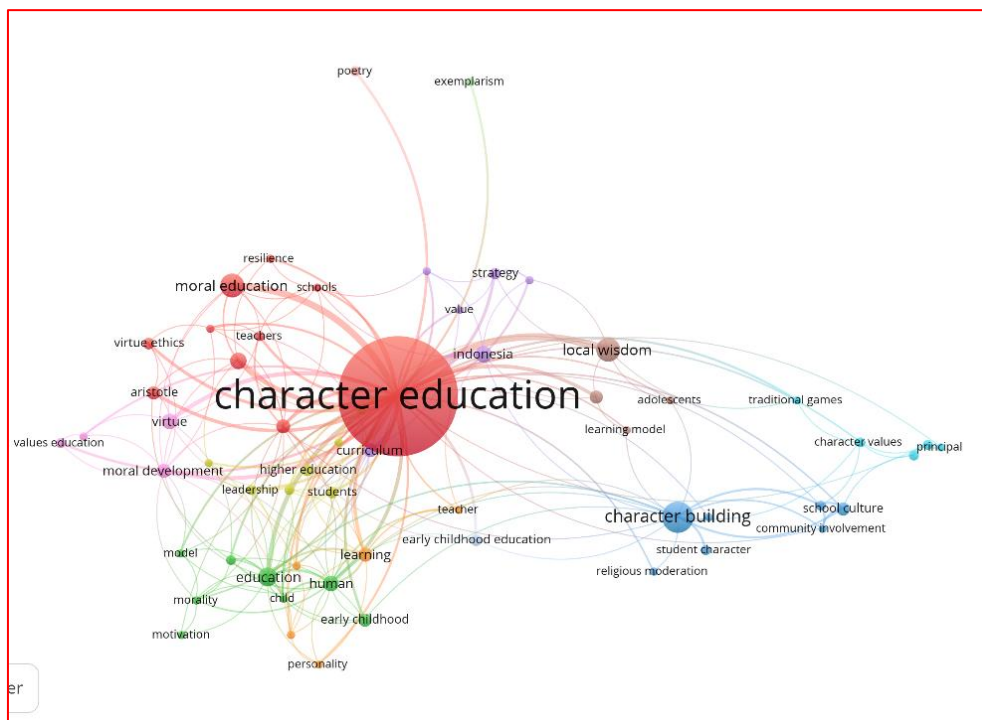


Figure 9 Relationship of character building Keywords by Author.

Table 1 presents the relationships between frequently used keywords in research on Character Building, based on their occurrences and total link strength. *Character Education* emerges as the most dominant keyword, with 237 occurrences and a total link strength of 248, indicating its central role in the literature on this topic. This concept links various important dimensions of character development, encompassing both formal and informal educational contexts. Keywords like *Human* and *Education* also show significant associations, with 8 and 11 occurrences respectively, and higher total link strengths. These findings highlight that character development is not solely focused on the individual but also on the broader educational context.

Additionally, keywords such as *Character Building* (26 occurrences, 30 link strength) remain central to the research, demonstrating strong connections with concepts like *Moral Development* and *Moral Education*. While *Moral Education* has fewer occurrences (16) and lower link strength, it still plays a crucial role in supporting the development of good character. Other keywords, such as *Learning*, *Child*, *Honesty*, and *Local Wisdom*, suggest that research in Character Building also considers psychological aspects, moral values like honesty, and the impact of culture and local wisdom on individual character development. Overall, this table illustrates that Character Building as a research topic involves various multidimensional aspects, including education, morality, and social values, interacting to shape individual character in society.

Table 2 presents the most cited articles on Character Building in the academic literature. The most cited article is "Exploring the Implementation of Local Wisdom-Based Character Education among Indonesian Higher Education Students" by Hidayati et al. (2020), published in the *International Journal of Instruction*, with 78 citations. This article emphasizes the importance of applying local wisdom-based character education among Indonesian students, highlighting the relevance of local culture in character development.



Table 1 Relationship of character building according to the authors.

No	Keyword	Occurences	Total link strength
1	Character education	237	248
2	Human	8	61
3	Education	11	50
4	Character building	26	30
5	Learning	7	30
6	Child	3	27
7	Moral development	7	24
8	Moral education	16	24
9	Honesty	4	22
10	Local wisdom	16	22

The second most cited article, "The Varieties of Character and Some Implications for Character Education" by Baehr (2017), published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, has received 66 citations. This article discusses the various types of character and their implications for character education. Other highly cited articles include "Character Education and the Disappearance of the Political" by Suissa (2015) in *Ethics and Education*, and "Towards a New Era of Character Education in Theory and Practice" by Walker et al. (2015) in *Educational Review*, with 63 and 62 citations, respectively. These works explore the relationship between character education and politics, as well as theoretical and practical developments in the field of character education. These articles demonstrate the importance of both the theory and application of character education in various social and educational contexts, and their critical role in shaping individual character in schools and society.

Table 2 Most cited character building articles.

No	Article Title	Authors	Journal Source	Year	Number of Citations
1	Exploring the implementation of local wisdom-based character education among indonesian higher education students	Hidayati, N.A., Waluyo, H.J., Winarni, R., Suyitnovan Laar, E.,	International Journal of Instruction, 13(2), pp. 179–198	2020	78
2	The Varieties of Character and Some Implications for Character Education	Baehr, J.	Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 46(6), pp. 1153–1161	2017	66
3	Character education and the disappearance of the political	Suissa, J.	Ethics and Education, 10(1), pp. 105–117	2015	63
4	Towards a new era of character education in theory and in practice	Walker, D.I., Roberts, M.P., Kristjánsson, K.	Educational Review, 67(1), pp. 79–96	2015	62
5	Character education, the individual and the political	Peterson, A.	Journal of Moral Education, 49(2), pp. 143–157	2020	55
6	The effect of hidden curriculum on character education process of primary school students	Çubukçu, Z.	Kuram Ve Uygulamada Egitim Bilimleri, 12(2), pp. 1526–1534	2012	51
7	Contextual character education for students in the senior high school	Hermينو, A., Arifin, I.	European Journal of Educational Research, 9(3), pp. 1009–1023	2020	49
8	Exploring the context of teaching character education to children in preprimary and primary schools	Birhan, W., Shiferaw, G., Amsalu, A., Tamiru, M., Tiruye, H.	Social Sciences and Humanities Open, 4(1), 100171	2021	48
9	Improving social competence through character education	Cheung, C.-K., Lee, T.Y.	Evaluation and Program Planning, 33(3), pp. 255–263	2010	42
10	No-excuses for character: A critique of character education in no-excuses charter schools	Dishon, G., Goodman, J.F.	Theory and Research in Education, 15(2), pp. 182–201	2017	41

4. Discussion

This study provides significant insights into the trends and patterns of publication in the field of character building, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education (García-



Álvarez et al., 2023; Pasaribu et al., 2024). Based on the findings from the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) combined with bibliometric analysis, it is evident that character building has become an increasingly prominent topic in academic literature, particularly since 2018, with a notable peak in 2020. This surge reflects the growing global recognition of the importance of character education in fostering individual development and addressing the educational challenges of the 21st century (Dewi & Alam, 2020; Sholeh et al., 2025; Zurqoni et al., 2018). Character education's significance extends beyond social and moral development, aligning with SDG 4's broader aim of ensuring relevant, high-quality education to address global challenges (Fiala, 2024; Udasmoro et al., 2025).

Indonesia's dominant role in character building research is particularly evident, with nearly 190 publications, far surpassing contributions from other countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia. This dominance is linked to Indonesia's national education policy, which prioritizes character development as a core component of its curriculum (Fathoni et al., 2024; Hanim & Marjo, 2025; Irawan et al., 2025). The significant focus on moral values related to local culture also explains the high interest in this topic in Indonesia, in alignment with SDG principles advocating for the integration of cultural diversity in education (Abdullah et al., 2019; Saepudin et al., 2023; Sakti et al., 2024).

However, the dominance of Indonesia in the literature presents a potential geographical bias that should be acknowledged as a limitation of the study. While this bias offers valuable contextual insight, it may also skew the global applicability of character building research. This study recognizes the geographical overrepresentation of Indonesian publications and suggests that future research should aim to balance this by exploring more diverse geographical perspectives, particularly from regions outside Southeast Asia, such as Europe or North America. This would provide a more comprehensive, global comparison of character education approaches and further strengthen the study's international relevance.

The bibliometric analysis reveals that concepts such as "Character Education" have become dominant keywords, reflecting a strong connection between moral development, leadership, and value-based education. The frequent appearance of related concepts such as "Human," "Education," and "Moral Development" indicates that character education not only focuses on individual moral growth but also on fostering social values that support sustainability and harmony within society (Hsiao, 2021; Prayitno et al., 2021; Sim & Tham, 2025; Sukrawati, 2019). This aligns with the broader objectives of SDG 4, where character education serves as a foundation for creating an inclusive and sustainable society (Choi et al., 2018; García-Álvarez et al., 2023; Jordan, 2023; Sakti et al., 2024).

Despite the increasing attention to character education in the literature, this study also highlights a significant gap in the practical application of character education theory in real-world settings. Authors like Baehr (2017) emphasize that while character education theory is widely discussed, its effective implementation in schools remains limited, which may explain the disparity between the theoretical prominence of the topic and its real-world impact. This suggests that future research should focus on integrating theoretical frameworks with practical applications, not only within educational institutions but also in broader social contexts, both inside and outside the classroom (Guttesen, 2024; Huda et al., 2024; Sakti et al., 2024).

Moreover, this study underscores the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in character education research, incorporating perspectives from diverse fields such as psychology, the arts, and technology (Agustang et al., 2021; Asror et al., 2024; Muzakir et al., 2024; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). This holistic approach facilitates a deeper understanding of character education and its integration into educational systems, aligning with SDG Goal 4, which advocates for education that is relevant and adaptive to global social and economic needs (Jaedun et al., 2024). By incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives, we can create more inclusive and sustainable educational practices (Pasaribu et al., 2024; Sakti et al., 2024; White & Shin, 2016).

Finally, this study opens avenues for future exploration of character education's application in broader social and cultural contexts, particularly with respect to local wisdom (Husni, 2021; Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Syamsi & Tahar, 2021; Tohri et al., 2022; Yani et al., 2025). Future research could examine how culturally-based character education principles, particularly those rooted in Indonesia, can be applied globally. Additionally, exploring the relationship between character education and national educational policies across various countries will deepen our understanding of the role character education plays in achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, as well as lifelong learning opportunities. Character education, in this context, can be seen as a vital foundation for creating a more sustainable and socially just society.

In conclusion, while this study provides valuable insights into the development of character building research, the potential limitations regarding geographical bias must be acknowledged. Further research comparing global approaches to character education, including perspectives from Europe, North America, and other regions, will help provide a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of how character education can contribute to the global educational agenda.

5. Conclusions

This study offers a comprehensive overview of trends, geographical, and institutional contributions to character building research, showing a significant increase in publications since 2018, with a peak in 2020, indicating a growing global interest in the importance of character development in the 21st-century education landscape. Indonesia stands out as the dominant contributor, with nearly 200 publications, far exceeding countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia, which is likely attributed to Indonesia's national education policies that prioritize character education as a key component of

the curriculum. The bibliometric analysis also identifies key themes such as Character Education, Moral Development, Leadership, and Local Wisdom, which are central to the research in this field. Local wisdom plays a crucial role in character building in Indonesia by incorporating cultural values into educational frameworks. Despite the extensive body of research, there is still a noticeable gap in translating these theoretical frameworks into practical applications within educational settings, particularly in schools and communities, indicating the need for further exploration of the real-world implementation of character education policies. Future research should focus on bridging the gap between theory and practice, evaluating the effectiveness of character education programs in terms of their impact on students' moral, social, and emotional development, while also addressing the challenges of applying these principles effectively in diverse educational contexts. In addition, incorporating local wisdom into character education will provide valuable insights into how this approach can be adapted across different cultural contexts globally. An interdisciplinary approach, integrating fields such as psychology, the arts, and technology, is recommended to create a more holistic and adaptive framework that meets the dynamic needs of global society. Furthermore, future studies should investigate how character education can align with global educational policies, particularly in relation to SDG 4, ensuring it contributes to achieving inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, promoting lifelong learning opportunities, and supporting sustainable development.

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Ethical considerations

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Conflict of Interest

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