

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHARACTER EDUCATION PRACTICES ACROSS NATIONS: LESSONS AND INSIGHTS FOR GLOBAL IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the character education practices in four countries: Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, offering a comparative analysis of their policies, curricula, and implementation strategies. Character education is vital in shaping students' values and ethics, fostering responsible global citizens. The research examined the national frameworks and cultural contexts that influenced these programs, identifying common core values such as respect, responsibility, and social harmony, while highlighting the unique approaches in each nation. The study also evaluated the challenges faced, including resource limitations, high academic pressure, and balancing traditional values with modern needs. The findings provided insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each system, emphasizing the importance of government support, teacher training, and community involvement. This research offered valuable lessons for global education systems and presents recommendations for adopting culturally sensitive and adaptable models. Future research directions include examining the long-term impact of character education on societal development and exploring the potential for international collaboration to enhance global character education practices.

Keywords: *Character Education, Comparative Analysis, Educational Policies, Cultural Values*

I. INTRODUCTION

Character education is a fundamental aspect of developing students' moral and ethical values, fostering responsible behavior, and shaping their identities as individuals and members of society. It seeks to cultivate virtues such as respect, honesty, responsibility, and empathy, which are essential for personal growth and societal harmony (Lickona, 1991). Beyond personal development, character education is a critical tool for addressing broader societal challenges, including social fragmentation, ethical dilemmas in professional contexts, and the erosion of civic responsibility. As Berkowitz and Bier (2005) highlight, well-implemented character education programs can lead to measurable improvements in students' academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and community involvement.

In the global context, character education also plays a pivotal role in fostering global citizenship. UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that global citizenship education equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to address interconnected global challenges, such as inequality, climate change, and cultural conflicts. Character education, as a subset of this broader goal, helps students develop empathy, cross-cultural understanding, and a commitment to sustainable and equitable practices, making it indispensable in an increasingly interconnected world.

Different nations have adopted unique approaches to character education, reflecting their cultural values, historical backgrounds, and educational priorities. For example, Indonesia integrates character education into its national curriculum, emphasizing values derived from Pancasila, the state philosophy (Kemendikbud, 2013). Singapore, on the other hand, focuses on "Values in Action" programs that combine character development with community service (Tan, 2014). Japan's moral education (*doutoku*) emphasizes social harmony and respect for others, deeply rooted in its cultural traditions (Yamamoto, 2010). Similarly, Korea's character education highlights respect, diligence, and social responsibility, reflecting Confucian ideals (Lee, 2017). While these approaches share common goals, their differences provide an opportunity for comparative analysis to identify best practices and challenges in various cultural and policy contexts.

Previous studies have explored the implementation and impact of character education in individual nations. For instance, Raihani (2014) examined how Indonesia's multicultural context influences the design of its character

education programs, highlighting challenges in aligning national policies with local cultural diversity. Similarly, Lee (2017) analyzed the impact of Korea's character education policies on students' moral development but noted gaps in addressing issues such as academic stress and mental health. In Singapore, Tan (2014) documented the effectiveness of values education in promoting civic engagement but identified concerns about students' genuine internalization of values. Yamamoto (2010) studied Japan's moral education curriculum and emphasized the tension between traditional values and modern societal changes.

While these studies provide valuable insights, there remains a gap in the literature regarding comprehensive cross-national comparisons of character education practices. Few studies have examined how these systems interact with their respective cultural, social, and political contexts or explored how lessons from one country could inform improvements in another. This research seeks to address these gaps by conducting a comparative analysis of character education practices in Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and Korea, offering a nuanced understanding of their similarities, differences, and effectiveness.

The study is guided by the following research questions: How is character education conceptualized and implemented in the educational systems of Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and Korea? What are the similarities and differences in their approaches, particularly in terms of curriculum design, teacher roles, and cultural influences? What lessons can be drawn from these practices to inform global character education strategies? By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on character education and provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers worldwide..

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition and Theoretical Foundations of Character Education

Character education is broadly defined as the intentional effort to develop virtues and moral habits in students that enable them to act ethically and responsibly in various aspects of life. Lickona (1991) describes character education as the deliberate cultivation of virtues that shape individuals' decisions and behaviors, such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and empathy. It emphasizes the holistic development of students, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. This aligns with Aristotle's concept of *ethos*, where

character is seen as the result of habituation, built through repeated ethical actions and reflection (Arthur, 2003).

The theoretical foundation of character education is grounded in various disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Philosophically, it draws on virtue ethics, which emphasizes the development of moral character as central to ethical behavior (Hursthouse, 1999). This perspective is evident in educational practices that prioritize virtues like integrity and perseverance as goals of moral education. From a psychological standpoint, character education incorporates developmental theories such as Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Kohlberg (1981) argues that individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning, from focusing on self-interest to considering universal ethical principles, which can be facilitated through structured character education programs.

Sociological theories also underpin character education by highlighting the role of social contexts in shaping moral behavior. Durkheim (1925) emphasized the importance of social integration and collective norms in moral education, arguing that schools serve as microcosms of society where students learn to internalize societal values. This perspective supports the inclusion of activities such as collaborative projects and community service in character education programs, enabling students to develop a sense of social responsibility.

Modern frameworks for character education often integrate these theoretical underpinnings into practical approaches. For instance, Berkowitz and Bier (2005) propose a framework that combines direct teaching of virtues, creating a positive school climate, and providing opportunities for students to practice ethical behavior in real-world settings. Similarly, Narvaez's (2006) integrative ethical education model emphasizes the importance of fostering ethical skills through explicit instruction, role modeling, and experiential learning.

These theoretical foundations provide a robust basis for understanding the goals and methods of character education. However, their application varies across cultures and educational systems, influenced by societal values and priorities. While Western models of character education often focus on individual autonomy and moral reasoning, many Asian approaches, such as those in Japan and Korea, emphasize social harmony and collective responsibility (Lee, 2017; Yamamoto, 2010). This divergence highlights the importance of contextualizing character education to align with cultural and societal needs.

Historical Development of Character Education Globally

Character education has evolved over centuries, shaped by philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions that prioritize moral and ethical development. Its roots can be traced to ancient civilizations, where the cultivation of virtues was a central goal of education. In ancient Greece, philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle emphasized the importance of moral education as a means of achieving individual and societal well-being. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (c. 350 BCE) introduced the concept of virtue ethics, asserting that character is developed through habitual practice of virtues such as courage, temperance, and justice (Arthur, 2003).

Similarly, Confucianism in ancient China placed significant emphasis on moral education, stressing the cultivation of virtues like filial piety, respect, and benevolence (*ren*). Confucius (551–479 BCE) argued that education should not only transmit knowledge but also shape virtuous individuals who contribute to social harmony (Lee, 2017). These philosophical traditions laid the groundwork for character education as an integral part of educational systems in both the East and the West.

During the Middle Ages, religious institutions became the primary drivers of character education. In Europe, Christian teachings heavily influenced the moral curriculum, with schools focusing on virtues like humility, obedience, and charity as central to moral development (Durkheim, 1925). Similarly, in Islamic education, the concept of *tarbiyah* emphasized the holistic development of character, including spiritual, moral, and intellectual growth (Halstead, 2004).

The Enlightenment era in the 18th century marked a shift toward secular approaches to character education, emphasizing reason and individual autonomy. Thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau championed education as a means of fostering natural goodness and moral sensibilities in children. In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau argued that education should nurture children's innate morality through experiential learning rather than rigid instruction (Noddings, 2013). This perspective laid the foundation for modern pedagogical approaches that prioritize student-centered learning and moral autonomy.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, formalized character education programs emerged in response to industrialization, urbanization, and social change. In the United States, Horace Mann advocated for public education as a vehicle for instilling democratic values and moral character in students (Berkowitz & Bier,

2005). The introduction of programs like scouting and moral education curricula further institutionalized character education during this period.

Globally, character education gained prominence in the late 20th and early 21st centuries as nations grappled with issues like social cohesion, ethical dilemmas, and global citizenship. UNESCO (2015) promoted education for global citizenship as a framework for integrating moral and ethical values into education systems worldwide. This initiative underscored the importance of character education in addressing global challenges such as inequality, environmental sustainability, and cultural conflicts.

Despite its universal appeal, the implementation of character education has varied across cultures and contexts. Western approaches often emphasize individual autonomy and moral reasoning, while Eastern traditions prioritize social harmony and collective responsibility (Lee, 2017; Yamamoto, 2010). This divergence reflects broader cultural differences in values and educational philosophies, highlighting the need for culturally responsive approaches to character education.

The historical development of character education reveals its enduring significance in shaping individuals and societies. From ancient philosophical traditions to modern global initiatives, character education has evolved to address the moral and ethical challenges of each era. However, the diverse cultural and historical contexts in which it has developed underscore the importance of adapting character education to meet the unique needs of different societies.

The Significance of Cultural and Societal Values in Shaping Character Education Policies

Character education is deeply intertwined with the cultural and societal values of the communities in which it is implemented. These values serve as both the foundation and the framework for developing policies and practices aimed at nurturing moral character in students. Durkheim (1925) emphasized that moral education must reflect the collective values and norms of society, as schools are microcosms where students internalize societal expectations and learn to contribute as responsible citizens. This dynamic relationship between culture, society, and education underscores the importance of tailoring character education policies to local contexts.

In many Asian societies, character education policies are influenced by Confucian values that prioritize social harmony, respect for authority, and

collective responsibility. For example, South Korea's character education policies emphasize the cultivation of virtues like diligence, respect, and filial piety, reflecting the country's Confucian heritage (Lee, 2017). These policies are designed not only to promote ethical behavior but also to strengthen societal cohesion in a rapidly modernizing nation. Similarly, Japan's moral education curriculum, known as *doutoku*, integrates traditional cultural values with modern educational objectives, fostering respect, empathy, and cooperation among students (Yamamoto, 2010).

In contrast, Western approaches to character education often emphasize individual autonomy, critical thinking, and moral reasoning. These values are rooted in Enlightenment ideals that prioritize individual rights and self-determination (Arthur, 2003). For instance, character education policies in the United States focus on developing ethical reasoning and leadership skills, reflecting the country's emphasis on democratic values and civic engagement (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). However, these policies also face challenges in addressing the diverse cultural and social backgrounds of students in multicultural societies.

Indonesia provides a unique example of how character education policies can blend national philosophies with cultural diversity. Guided by the principles of Pancasila, Indonesia's character education policies aim to instill values such as religious tolerance, national unity, and social justice (Kemendikbud, 2013). These policies acknowledge the country's cultural plurality, emphasizing the need for inclusive approaches that respect local traditions while promoting shared national values (Raihani, 2014).

Global initiatives also reflect the importance of cultural and societal values in shaping character education. UNESCO's framework for global citizenship education highlights the need to integrate local cultural contexts into character education policies while fostering universal values such as human rights, sustainability, and peace (UNESCO, 2015). This approach recognizes that effective character education must balance global ideals with local realities, ensuring its relevance and resonance across diverse communities.

Previous research underscores the significance of cultural and societal values in shaping both the content and implementation of character education. While universal principles such as respect and empathy are often shared across cultures, their interpretation and prioritization can vary significantly. This divergence highlights the challenges and opportunities of designing character

education policies that are culturally responsive and globally informed. Moreover, as societies become increasingly interconnected, character education must address the complexities of global citizenship without undermining local cultural identities (Halstead, 2004).

The development of character education policies is profoundly influenced by cultural and societal values. By reflecting the unique traditions, priorities, and challenges of different communities, these policies play a crucial role in fostering ethical and responsible individuals. However, the growing emphasis on global citizenship and interconnectedness calls for a more nuanced approach that bridges local and universal values, ensuring that character education remains both relevant and impactful in diverse contexts.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a comparative analysis approach to examine character education practices in Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and Korea. Comparative analysis was a well-established method in social sciences that enables researchers to identify similarities and differences across cases, providing insights into contextual factors influencing policies and practices (Hantrais, 2009). The approach was particularly relevant for exploring character education, as it allows for an examination of how cultural, societal, and institutional contexts shape educational frameworks and outcomes.

The framework for comparison was structured around five key dimensions: policies, curriculum, implementation strategies, teacher roles, and outcomes. These dimensions were selected based on their prominence in existing character education literature and their relevance to educational practices across the studied countries. Policies encompass national guidelines and legislative frameworks that define the objectives and priorities of character education. Curriculum refers to the integration of character education into formal educational programs, including specific subjects, themes, or extracurricular activities. Implementation strategies focus on the methods and processes through which character education is delivered, such as classroom instruction, community involvement, or experiential learning. Teacher roles examine educators' responsibilities and contributions to character development, including their training, pedagogical approaches, and mentorship. Outcomes evaluate the effectiveness of character education in achieving its goals, such as fostering ethical behavior, civic responsibility, and social-emotional skills.

Data for this study were collected from three primary sources: policy documents, academic studies, and case studies. Policy documents, such as national curricula, educational guidelines, and government reports, provide official insights into the goals and strategies of character education in each country. For example, Indonesia's Pancasila framework (Kemendikbud, 2013), Japan's *doutoku* curriculum guidelines (MEXT, 2018), Singapore's Character and Citizenship Education framework (MOE, 2020), and Korea's Moral Education curriculum (KEDI, 2019) were analyzed to understand national priorities and approaches.

Academic studies, including peer-reviewed articles and books, offered critical analyses and evaluations of character education practices, highlighting both successes and challenges. These studies provided a broader context for interpreting the data, allowing for a deeper understanding of cultural and institutional factors. Case studies from schools, teachers, and students further enrich the analysis by providing practical examples and lived experiences of character education in action. These sources included qualitative accounts of classroom practices, interviews with educators, and evaluations of program outcomes.

The analysis involved a systematic comparison of the collected data using thematic coding and synthesis. Themes such as cultural alignment, inclusivity, and adaptability were identified to assess the extent to which character education policies and practices address the unique needs of each country. By comparing these themes across Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and Korea, the study aims to highlight best practices, identify common challenges, and propose recommendations for improving character education globally. This methodology ensured a comprehensive and culturally sensitive analysis of character education practices. By integrating diverse data sources and focusing on key dimensions of comparison, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how character education can be effectively implemented in varied educational and societal contexts.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Character Education in Indonesia

National Policy Framework: Pancasila and Educational Curriculum

In Indonesia, character education is deeply rooted in the nation's foundational philosophy, Pancasila, which outlines five principles: belief in one supreme God, a just and civilized humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy guided by consensus, and social justice for all. These principles serve as the ethical and moral foundation for the country's educational system, emphasizing the cultivation of holistic character development in students (Kemendikbud, 2013). Pancasila reflects Indonesia's commitment to fostering values such as religious tolerance, national unity, social harmony, and civic responsibility, which are deemed essential for maintaining the nation's diverse and pluralistic society.

The implementation of Pancasila-based values in education is primarily achieved through the Kurikulum 2013 (K-13), a national curriculum introduced to integrate character education into all levels of schooling. K-13 emphasizes the development of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, with character education explicitly embedded in both academic subjects and extracurricular activities (Raihani, 2014). Key character values promoted under K-13 include integrity, discipline, cooperation, empathy, and environmental awareness. For instance, subjects such as religion and civics (PPKn) are designed to teach ethical principles and democratic values, while extracurricular activities like community service and student councils provide practical opportunities for students to apply these principles in real-life contexts.

Indonesia's character education framework also prioritizes religious and moral education, reflecting the country's strong religious heritage. Religious education is mandatory in schools and aims to instill virtues such as honesty, humility, and respect across diverse faiths (Hendarman & Tjakraatmadja, 2012). This approach aligns with the government's broader goal of fostering interfaith harmony and reducing social conflicts rooted in religious differences.

Furthermore, national initiatives such as the Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education (Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter, or PPK) underscore the government's commitment to character development. The PPK program focuses on nurturing five core values: religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity. These values are promoted through collaborative efforts involving schools, families, and communities, recognizing that character education extends beyond the classroom (Zubaidah, 2018).

Despite these comprehensive frameworks, challenges persist in implementing character education effectively. Issues such as inconsistent teacher training, resource disparities among schools, and cultural diversity complicate efforts to achieve uniform outcomes across the archipelago. Research indicates that while some schools excel in integrating character education, others struggle to balance academic and character development priorities due to limited resources and overemphasis on standardized testing (Raihani, 2014).

Implementation in Schools: Integration into Subjects and Extracurricular Activities

In Indonesia, the integration of character education into the school system is a multifaceted effort that spans both formal curriculum subjects and extracurricular activities. The Kurikulum 2013 (K-13), which underpins the national education framework, incorporates character education across a wide range of subjects. For example, the civics education (Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan, PPKn) and religious education (Pendidikan Agama) subjects are central to teaching moral values and ethical behavior. These subjects focus on fostering respect, discipline, integrity, and tolerance, in line with the national values espoused by Pancasila (Kemendikbud, 2013). Additionally, subjects such as Bahasa Indonesia, Social Studies, and History provide opportunities for students to reflect on historical events, national identity, and civic responsibility, all key aspects of character formation.

Extracurricular activities also play a vital role in character development. Activities such as student councils, community service programs, sports, and arts offer students hands-on opportunities to practice the values they are learning in the classroom. For instance, student councils provide leadership training and emphasize collaboration, while community service initiatives allow students to engage in real-world problem-solving and develop empathy for others. Schools also organize moral education events such as religious observances, charity drives, and environmental awareness campaigns, which directly align with the core values of Pancasila (Zubaidah, 2018). This holistic approach helps students not only learn about values in theory but also practice them in their daily lives.

Challenges: Resource Limitations, Teacher Training, and Consistency in Rural and Urban Areas

Despite the well-intentioned frameworks for character education, the implementation in Indonesian schools faces significant challenges, especially in the areas of resource limitations, teacher training, and inconsistencies between rural and urban settings. One major challenge is the disparity in resources across different regions. Schools in urban areas generally have better access to educational materials, facilities, and extracurricular programs, while schools in rural areas often face shortages in teaching resources, infrastructure, and extracurricular activities. This imbalance means that students in rural areas may not have the same opportunities to engage in comprehensive character education programs, despite national policies aiming for universal access (Raihani, 2014).

Teacher training is another critical issue. While character education is embedded in the curriculum, teachers often receive insufficient professional development on how to integrate character education into their daily teaching practices. Many educators lack the specific pedagogical skills needed to effectively teach moral and ethical values, and character education is sometimes viewed as secondary to academic subjects. As a result, character education may not be given the emphasis it requires in classrooms (Zubaidah, 2018). This issue is exacerbated by a shortage of teachers, especially in rural regions, where schools may struggle to hire qualified staff. Teacher training programs are also often disconnected from real classroom needs, and many teachers may not be equipped to address the cultural diversity and complex moral dilemmas students encounter in their communities.

Consistency in the implementation of character education is another challenge. While the Kurikulum 2013 aims for a nationwide standard, local variations in educational practices and philosophies can lead to uneven outcomes. Rural schools may face additional challenges due to limited access to training, materials, and guidance from educational authorities. On the other hand, urban schools often benefit from more robust networks of professional development and greater governmental oversight, leading to a more consistent and rigorous approach to character education. These disparities can result in uneven levels of character development across different student populations (Hendarman & Tjakraatmadja, 2012).

While the integration of character education in Indonesia's school system has seen positive advancements, there remain substantial barriers to its full implementation. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from the government, educational institutions, and communities to ensure that all students, regardless of geographic location, have access to high-quality character education. Enhancing teacher training, providing more resources to rural schools, and ensuring consistency in the application of policies will be essential to achieving the goal of nurturing ethically responsible and socially engaged citizens.

Character Education in Japan

Moral Education (Doutoku) as a Core Subject in Schools

In Japan, moral education, known as *doutoku* (道徳), is a core subject in the school system, deeply embedded in both the formal curriculum and broader educational philosophy. The Japanese approach to character education is designed to cultivate ethical awareness, respect for others, and a strong sense of social responsibility. The importance of moral education in Japan can be traced back to its historical roots in Confucianism, which emphasizes virtues such as loyalty, respect, and filial piety, as well as its incorporation of Buddhist values that focus on compassion and mindfulness (MEXT, 2018). These traditions have played a critical role in shaping the values and ethical norms promoted in Japanese schools today.

The *doutoku* curriculum is systematically integrated into the education system at every level, from elementary through to high school, with a specific focus on developing moral reasoning and emotional intelligence in students. Unlike subjects such as math or science, *doutoku* does not have formal exams; instead, its goal is to encourage students to reflect on and internalize moral principles through discussions, storytelling, and ethical dilemmas. For example, students may be asked to consider situations involving honesty, kindness, or respect for others and to discuss the best course of action in these scenarios. These activities are designed to promote critical thinking about moral issues and to help students develop an ethical framework that guides their decisions and actions.

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has continually reinforced the role of *doutoku* in fostering

moral and civic responsibility. In 2006, MEXT introduced the "Moral Education Guidelines," which formalized the integration of character education into the curriculum (MEXT, 2006). These guidelines highlight the importance of not only teaching moral values but also fostering a collective sense of responsibility and compassion toward others in both the school and community context. In schools, *doutoku* classes focus on promoting values such as sincerity, respect, and responsibility, with an emphasis on understanding the social impact of individual behavior.

In addition to classroom lessons, character education in Japan extends into various aspects of school life, including student participation in school cleaning activities, group work, and school festivals, where cooperation, empathy, and community service are strongly emphasized. For instance, cleaning the classroom and school grounds is a daily activity that promotes the value of shared responsibility and respect for public spaces. These activities serve as important practical lessons in character development, reinforcing the ethical values taught in *doutoku* classes.

Moreover, the role of teachers in Japan's character education system extends beyond instruction to include guidance and mentorship. Teachers are expected to serve as moral role models, demonstrating ethical behavior and interacting with students in a respectful and nurturing manner. This holistic approach encourages students not only to learn about moral values but also to experience and embody them in their relationships with others. Teacher training programs in Japan place a significant emphasis on moral education, ensuring that educators are well-prepared to facilitate *doutoku* lessons and support students' moral development.

Japan's moral education system represents a comprehensive effort to cultivate ethical citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also virtuous and socially responsible. The *doutoku* curriculum serves as the cornerstone of this effort, with its emphasis on values such as respect, sincerity, and responsibility woven into every aspect of school life. The holistic integration of character education within Japan's educational framework aims to create a balanced and harmonious society, where individuals contribute to the well-being of the collective.

Integration with Cultural Practices, Discipline, and Social Harmony

In Japan, the integration of character education into the school system is closely linked to the country's deep cultural traditions, which emphasize social harmony, respect for authority, and collective responsibility. The practice of *doutoku* not only addresses moral values but also reinforces cultural practices that shape students' understanding of their role within society. For instance, traditional Japanese customs such as bowing, addressing others with appropriate honorifics, and participating in group activities are incorporated into daily school life as methods of fostering discipline and respect for others (MEXT, 2018). These cultural practices are not simply taught as abstract values in the classroom but are actively practiced in students' interactions with teachers, peers, and the wider community, helping students internalize respect and etiquette as essential components of social conduct.

Discipline is also a key component of character education in Japan. Schools emphasize the importance of self-discipline, responsibility, and attention to detail. For example, the practice of having students clean their classrooms and school grounds is not only an opportunity to promote cooperation but also a lesson in personal responsibility and respect for public spaces. This practice instills a sense of collective duty, ensuring that students understand the importance of maintaining shared spaces for the benefit of all. Similarly, the emphasis on group work and collective decision-making in extracurricular activities teaches students to collaborate harmoniously and contribute to the greater good of the group. These practices align with Japan's cultural values of social harmony (*wa*) and the collective well-being, where the needs of the group often take precedence over individual desires (Ikegami, 2005).

Moreover, the integration of character education with cultural values also strengthens social harmony. In Japan, a strong sense of national pride and community responsibility is cultivated through moral education programs, where students are encouraged to think about their roles in maintaining social cohesion and contributing to society. The value of respecting others and placing importance on communal well-being is essential in Japan's educational philosophy. Social harmony, achieved through respect, understanding, and cooperative behavior, is often seen as a vital component of national identity, and this is reflected in the school's character education approach.

Challenges: Balancing Traditional Values with Modern Societal Changes

Despite its strengths, Japan's character education system faces challenges in balancing traditional cultural values with the rapid societal changes brought about by globalization and modernization. One key issue is the tension between Japan's deeply rooted Confucian and Buddhist moral traditions and the pressures of modern consumerism and individualism. As Japanese society becomes more globalized, students are increasingly exposed to diverse cultural norms and values, which can sometimes conflict with traditional Japanese ideals of respect, humility, and social harmony (MEXT, 2006). For example, the influence of Western media and consumer culture, which often emphasize individual success and material wealth, can challenge the communal and self-sacrificial values promoted through *doutoku*. This creates a challenge for educators, who must navigate the tension between fostering respect for traditional values and encouraging critical thinking and personal autonomy among students.

Additionally, the rapid technological advancements and the rise of digital media present challenges in maintaining the relevance of *doutoku* in the modern world. The use of social media and digital platforms often exposes students to a wide range of behaviors and ethical issues that may not align with the moral principles taught in schools. Issues such as cyberbullying, online identity, and the ethics of digital communication require new approaches to character education that address modern dilemmas while preserving traditional values of respect, empathy, and responsibility.

Another challenge is the pressure on students to perform academically in a highly competitive educational system, which can sometimes lead to the neglect of character education in favor of academic achievement. The emphasis on standardized testing and entrance exams often leads to a focus on cognitive learning, which may not leave enough room for the development of moral reasoning and character development (Ikegami, 2005). This overemphasis on academic performance can result in a superficial approach to character education, where the values taught in *doutoku* classes are not deeply integrated into students' daily lives.

While Japan's integration of character education with cultural practices, discipline, and social harmony is a strength, balancing these traditional values

with the demands of modern society presents ongoing challenges. Addressing these challenges requires a flexible approach that allows character education to evolve in response to contemporary societal issues while preserving the ethical foundations that have been central to Japanese education for centuries.

Character Education in Singapore

The "Values in Action" Program and Holistic Education Approach

In Singapore, character education is integrated into the education system through a variety of initiatives, with one of the most prominent being the Values in Action (VIA) program. The VIA program was launched in 2006 as part of the Ministry of Education's (MOE) broader effort to develop students not only intellectually but also morally and socially. The core philosophy of the VIA program is to encourage students to actively practice values by applying them in real-world contexts. This program emphasizes that character education should not be limited to classroom learning but should also be demonstrated through meaningful actions and contributions to the community. VIA encourages students to engage in activities that benefit others, fostering a sense of responsibility, empathy, and social consciousness (MOE, 2006).

The holistic education approach in Singapore aims to develop well-rounded individuals who are not only academically capable but also emotionally intelligent, socially responsible, and ethically grounded. Character education is thus embedded in various aspects of the curriculum, alongside academic subjects and co-curricular activities. For example, values such as integrity, respect, and responsibility are reinforced through subjects like Civics and Moral Education (CME), as well as through activities such as leadership training, peer mentoring, and volunteerism. The holistic approach ensures that students understand the importance of these values in both personal and societal contexts, fostering their growth into responsible citizens (Tan, 2015).

Emphasis on Community Involvement and Practical Applications of Values

One of the distinguishing features of Singapore's character education system is its emphasis on community involvement and the practical application of values. The VIA program encourages students to identify needs within their communities and to take active steps to address them, thereby translating abstract values into concrete actions. For instance, students may participate in community

service projects, such as organizing food drives, tutoring underprivileged children, or supporting environmental sustainability initiatives. These activities not only allow students to practice values like kindness, empathy, and teamwork but also help them develop a deeper understanding of societal issues and the role they can play in creating positive change.

The community involvement aspect of character education is also evident in the broader emphasis on service learning, which integrates community service with academic learning. This approach encourages students to apply their classroom knowledge to real-world situations, deepening their understanding of both academic subjects and the social values they are meant to uphold. For example, a student studying environmental science may collaborate with local organizations to promote sustainability efforts, while a student studying social studies might volunteer at a shelter for the homeless. Such experiences bridge the gap between theory and practice, enabling students to internalize values through hands-on engagement (MOE, 2006).

Success Factors: Strong Government Support and Clear Benchmarks

The success of character education in Singapore can largely be attributed to strong government support and the establishment of clear benchmarks for student development. The Singaporean government has consistently emphasized the importance of character education in its educational policies, recognizing that a well-rounded education that nurtures students' values and social skills is essential to the nation's long-term success. For example, the Civics and Moral Education curriculum, which is part of the national curriculum, has been specifically designed to teach students about moral reasoning, citizenship, and community responsibility (MOE, 2006). This policy ensures that character education is not relegated to an optional or supplementary activity but is an integral part of the national educational framework.

In addition to strong governmental support, Singapore's clear benchmarks for character development have also been instrumental in the effectiveness of its character education system. The Values in Action program, for example, has established specific criteria for evaluating student progress, such as the extent to which students have engaged in community service and demonstrated leadership qualities. These benchmarks help ensure that character education is not abstract or vague but measurable and aligned with the broader goals of the educational system. Schools are also encouraged to document and

report students' progress in character development, which allows for consistent monitoring and continuous improvement of the program (Tan, 2015).

Moreover, the active involvement of parents and community partners has contributed to the success of character education. Schools regularly collaborate with parents, community organizations, and government agencies to provide a supportive and consistent environment for students. This partnership reinforces the importance of values both inside and outside of school, creating a collective effort to nurture responsible, ethical citizens.

Singapore's character education system, underpinned by programs like Values in Action, exemplifies a holistic approach to nurturing students' moral, emotional, and social development. The emphasis on community involvement, practical applications of values, and strong government support has created a robust and effective framework for shaping responsible, empathetic individuals. By combining academic education with community service and clear benchmarks for success, Singapore ensures that its students are equipped not only with knowledge but also with the character and values necessary to succeed as ethical global citizens.

Character Education in Korea

Emphasis on Respect, Diligence, and Social Responsibility in Character Education

In South Korea, character education is deeply intertwined with the nation's cultural and ethical values, focusing on principles such as respect, diligence, and social responsibility. These values are rooted in Confucianism, which has historically influenced Korean society, emphasizing the importance of family loyalty, respect for authority, and a strong work ethic (Park, 2007). In the context of education, these values are not only taught but also reinforced through various activities and behaviors within the school system. For example, respect for elders, teachers, and peers is central to student behavior, and this is encouraged through formal lessons, school rules, and the expectation of proper conduct in both academic and extracurricular settings.

Diligence is another core value emphasized in Korean character education. Students are expected to work hard, demonstrate perseverance, and excel academically. This focus on diligence aligns with South Korea's highly competitive educational environment, where academic achievement is often viewed as a reflection of an individual's future success. The importance of diligence is also

instilled through daily routines, such as long study hours and a culture of self-discipline that values effort and dedication over innate talent.

Social responsibility is a key aspect of character education in Korea as well. Schools encourage students to engage in community service and understand the importance of contributing to society. Activities such as volunteering in local communities, helping the less fortunate, and participating in environmental campaigns are common ways for students to practice social responsibility. The goal is to nurture students who not only excel academically but also actively contribute to the well-being of their communities and society at large (Kwon, 2014).

Government Initiatives and Integration with School Curricula

The South Korean government plays a significant role in shaping character education, providing both guidelines and frameworks for its integration into school curricula. In 2011, the Ministry of Education introduced a "Character Education Framework" that set clear objectives for schools in teaching moral values and promoting personal development. This initiative emphasizes the development of the "Five Major Moral Values" (respect, responsibility, diligence, integrity, and citizenship), which schools are encouraged to integrate into all aspects of school life, from curriculum content to extracurricular activities (Ministry of Education, 2011).

In practice, character education in Korea is woven into various subject areas, such as ethics, moral education, and social studies. The curriculum includes lessons on ethical decision-making, the role of individuals in society, and the responsibilities of citizens. Additionally, character education is reinforced through extracurricular programs that promote teamwork, volunteerism, and leadership. School activities like peer counseling, group projects, and community service programs are designed to allow students to apply the values they learn in the classroom to real-life situations.

Furthermore, the emphasis on character education is evident in the daily school environment, where students are encouraged to demonstrate good behavior, mutual respect, and cooperation. Teachers are expected to serve as role models, guiding students not only in academic matters but also in ethical behavior and decision-making. Teacher training in South Korea includes modules on character education, ensuring that educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills to foster moral and ethical development in their students (Kim & Lee, 2012).

Challenges: High-Pressure Educational Environment and Mental Health Concerns

Despite the comprehensive approach to character education, South Korea faces significant challenges in maintaining a balance between academic achievement and students' well-being. The country's highly competitive education system, characterized by long hours of study, high-stakes exams, and intense pressure to succeed, can sometimes conflict with the goals of character education. Students often face immense stress due to the high expectations placed on them, not only by their families but also by society at large (Choi, 2017). This pressure can undermine their mental health and well-being, making it difficult for them to fully embrace the values of respect, diligence, and social responsibility that character education seeks to promote.

One of the most pressing concerns is the mental health of students, particularly those in their final years of high school, who experience significant anxiety due to the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), the primary means of gaining entrance to top universities in Korea. The overwhelming focus on academic success often leaves little room for the development of emotional intelligence and moral values, which are key components of character education. In recent years, there have been growing concerns about rising rates of student depression, anxiety, and suicide, prompting calls for reform in the educational system to address students' mental health needs (Kwon, 2014).

In addition, the emphasis on academic performance can sometimes overshadow the importance of social responsibility and community involvement. Although volunteerism and community service are promoted in schools, the pressure to achieve high academic standards often leads to students prioritizing their studies over extracurricular activities that foster social responsibility and personal growth. This imbalance can make it challenging for character education programs to have their desired impact on students' overall development.

While South Korea's character education system is rooted in strong cultural values and supported by government initiatives, it faces significant challenges in balancing academic pressures with the promotion of moral development and mental well-being. Addressing these challenges will require a more holistic approach to education that prioritizes not only academic excellence but also emotional health, ethical decision-making, and social responsibility. Ensuring that character education remains relevant and effective in the face of

these challenges will be crucial for developing well-rounded, resilient, and responsible citizens in the future.

Similarities Across the Four Nations: Shared Focus on Core Values

Character education in Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea shares several common elements, notably the emphasis on core values such as respect, responsibility, and social harmony. All four nations recognize the importance of these values in shaping ethical and responsible citizens who can contribute to the welfare of their communities and societies. In Indonesia, the integration of Pancasila into the national curriculum underscores the importance of respect and responsibility toward others, while in Japan, moral education is rooted in respect for authority and social harmony, particularly influenced by Confucianism. Similarly, in Korea, values like respect and social responsibility are closely tied to moral education and societal expectations. Singapore, too, prioritizes these values through its Values in Action program, which focuses on cultivating respect, empathy, and a sense of responsibility in students.

All four nations also acknowledge the role of education in promoting social harmony, recognizing that fostering peaceful and cooperative communities is essential for societal stability. In each country, character education is woven into the fabric of the educational system and is seen as integral to students' personal development, alongside academic achievement. Whether through formal curricula or extracurricular activities, schools in each country emphasize the importance of developing students' moral character, emphasizing the need for students to be responsible citizens who contribute positively to society.

Differences in Implementation: Cultural Contexts, Government Involvement, and Educational Priorities

While the core values may be similar, the implementation of character education in each country varies significantly due to differing cultural contexts, government involvement, and educational priorities. In Indonesia, the Pancasila-based curriculum and the integration of character education into national policies provide a foundation for ethical education, though challenges remain in terms of resources and training in rural areas. The cultural diversity of Indonesia, with its various ethnic and religious groups, also means that character education must be flexible and inclusive, addressing the values and traditions of different communities.

In contrast, Singapore's government plays a prominent and active role in character education, with clear policies and structured programs such as Values in Action, which ensure consistency and alignment across schools. The strong governmental framework allows for standardized implementation and clear benchmarks for success, enabling a cohesive approach to character education across the country. Additionally, Singapore's emphasis on community involvement and the application of values in real-life contexts distinguishes its approach from other nations.

Japan's approach is deeply influenced by its Confucian heritage, where moral education (Doutoku) plays a central role in the curriculum. Character education is integrated into daily school life, with schools placing great emphasis on discipline, respect for others, and the collective good. However, Japan's emphasis on discipline and social harmony sometimes comes at the cost of individual expression, creating tension between traditional values and modern societal expectations. In recent years, Japan has faced challenges in adapting its character education to address the needs of a rapidly changing society, particularly in terms of encouraging students to develop independent thought and critical reasoning skills.

South Korea's character education, similarly, is influenced by Confucian principles, with a strong focus on respect, diligence, and social responsibility. However, the intense pressure to succeed academically in Korea has raised concerns about the impact of this competitive environment on students' mental health. The national focus on academic performance often creates a gap between the goals of character education and the reality of students' daily lives. While character education is integrated into the curriculum, its effectiveness is sometimes undermined by the overwhelming pressure to excel academically, leaving little room for moral development outside of the academic sphere.

Strengths and Limitations of Each Approach

Each of the four countries has strengths and limitations in its approach to character education. Singapore's strength lies in its well-organized and structured character education programs, supported by strong government involvement and clear benchmarks for student development. This ensures that values are consistently taught and practiced across schools. The integration of community service into character education also offers students meaningful, real-world applications of the values they are taught. However, a limitation of Singapore's

approach could be its potential to be overly structured, potentially leaving little room for individual interpretation or flexibility in how values are practiced in different contexts.

Japan's character education is grounded in deep cultural traditions, emphasizing respect for others and social harmony, which has contributed to high levels of social cohesion. The moral education curriculum (Doutoku) is designed to instill a sense of duty and collective well-being, which has proven effective in creating responsible and ethical citizens. However, Japan's reliance on traditional values may limit students' ability to think critically or develop an individual sense of morality outside the societal framework, potentially stifling creativity and personal expression.

South Korea's focus on respect and diligence has been instrumental in fostering a disciplined and hardworking student body. However, the highly competitive nature of the education system can create negative consequences for students' mental health and well-being. The pressure to excel academically may detract from the emphasis on character education, making it harder for students to fully internalize values such as social responsibility or empathy. Additionally, the intense focus on academic achievement may limit students' opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities that foster character development.

Indonesia's approach to character education, rooted in Pancasila, is reflective of the country's diverse cultural and religious contexts. The inclusive nature of its character education policies allows for a broad and flexible framework that can accommodate the varied values of its citizens. However, the country faces challenges in implementation, particularly in terms of resources and teacher training, especially in rural areas. The disparity between urban and rural schools may result in unequal access to quality character education, which limits the effectiveness of national policies.

Lessons and Insights for Global Implementation

The comparative analysis of character education in Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea reveals several important insights that can be applied to global educational contexts. A key takeaway is the universal importance of instilling core values such as respect, responsibility, social harmony, and empathy. These values transcend cultural boundaries and are essential for fostering responsible and ethical citizens who can contribute positively to society. The four

nations emphasize different aspects of character education, yet all recognize the significance of moral development alongside academic achievement.

Singapore's systematic and government-supported Values in Action program offers a model of how structured, outcome-oriented character education can be implemented successfully across a diverse range of schools. This approach ensures consistent and measurable outcomes, reinforcing the importance of clear objectives and regular assessment in character education programs. Similarly, South Korea's emphasis on respect, diligence, and social responsibility shows how character education can be intertwined with societal expectations and national values, promoting both academic and personal development. However, South Korea's experience also highlights the need to manage the pressure of high-stakes academic achievement to prevent negative effects on students' mental health.

Japan's approach, grounded in Confucian values of respect and social harmony, offers important lessons in the integration of traditional values into contemporary educational systems. However, the challenges Japan faces in balancing these values with modern societal changes underline the importance of adaptability in character education. Lastly, Indonesia's flexible approach, shaped by its diverse cultural and religious landscape, highlights the need for character education systems to be inclusive and adaptable to local contexts, addressing the unique values and challenges of different communities.

One of the key lessons from the four nations' experiences is the necessity for adaptability in character education models. A one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective, as cultural, social, and political factors significantly influence the values emphasized in character education. For countries aiming to implement or improve character education, it is crucial to adopt models that are both adaptable to local contexts and sensitive to the cultural values of their populations.

First, character education programs should be flexible and allow for cultural customization. This means that while core values such as respect, responsibility, and empathy should be universally emphasized, the specific practices, methods, and content of character education should reflect the unique traditions, beliefs, and societal norms of each country. For example, while some countries may focus more on community service, others may prioritize personal discipline or respect for authority, depending on cultural expectations.

Second, government involvement plays a critical role in ensuring that character education is consistently integrated into national educational

frameworks. Clear policies, standards, and regular evaluations are essential for ensuring that character education is not only a peripheral aspect of schooling but a core component of the curriculum. However, government initiatives should also be flexible enough to allow schools the autonomy to tailor their programs based on local needs and realities. Collaborative efforts between schools, communities, and policymakers can help bridge gaps between the national vision and local practices.

Third, there is a growing recognition of the importance of addressing mental health and well-being in character education. As seen in South Korea, the intense pressure on students can undermine the goals of character education by creating environments where students prioritize academic success over personal growth. Therefore, global character education models should incorporate strategies for managing academic stress and promoting emotional resilience, ensuring that students' mental health is considered alongside their moral development.

International collaboration is crucial for advancing character education globally. While each country's approach is shaped by its own unique cultural and societal context, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the experiences of others. Collaboration allows countries to share best practices, compare successes and failures, and adapt strategies to their local contexts. By fostering cross-border dialogue on the importance of character education, nations can collectively raise the standard of moral education, benefiting students worldwide.

Global partnerships can also lead to the development of universal frameworks for character education that are adaptable to local contexts. For example, international organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD have already recognized the importance of moral and ethical education in preparing students for the challenges of a globalized world. These organizations play a pivotal role in facilitating international exchanges, conferences, and research initiatives that bring together educators, policymakers, and researchers from different countries to share insights and collaborate on improving character education.

Furthermore, collaboration between countries can help to address global challenges such as social inequality, environmental sustainability, and cultural understanding, all of which are integral components of character education. By working together, countries can develop shared values and goals that contribute to a more just, sustainable, and harmonious world. The exchange of ideas and

resources can create a more comprehensive and inclusive global framework for character education, ultimately fostering a generation of students who are not only academically competent but also ethically responsible and socially engaged.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has examined the character education practices in Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, highlighting the shared focus on core values such as respect, responsibility, and social harmony. Despite differing cultural contexts and educational priorities, these countries demonstrate that character education plays a vital role in shaping ethical and responsible citizens. Key findings emphasize the importance of government support, structured programs, and community involvement in ensuring the success of character education initiatives.

Future research should focus on exploring the long-term impact of character education on societal development, including its influence on social cohesion, civic engagement, and ethical leadership. Longitudinal studies can further investigate the effectiveness of character education programs and their role in addressing global challenges. This study provides valuable insights that can guide the development of adaptable, culturally sensitive character education models worldwide.

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