

Cultivating Character for Indonesia's Golden Generation: Strengthening Student Values for National Progress

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

strengthening student character; character education; Indonesia's golden generation; resource constraints; leadership development

Article history:

Received 2024-11-27

Revised 2025-06-11

Accepted 2025-06-26

ABSTRACT

Indonesia's national development depends on cultivating a "Golden Generation"—youth who combine intellectual prowess with strong moral character. Character education is viewed as essential to shaping ethical, responsible future leaders. This mixed-methods study investigated the role of character education in student development. Data were collected from 422 students across 30 Indonesian universities through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings reveal that 78% of students and 85% of educators observed notable improvements in student behavior, including enhanced discipline, empathy, and responsibility. Despite these benefits, challenges persist. Overloaded curricula, limited funding, and a shortage of trained educators were cited as key barriers to effective implementation. Furthermore, students expressed a need for character education programs that are more practical and aligned with real-world scenarios. While character education significantly contributes to personal growth and social behavior, structural issues hinder its full potential. Integrating character education into existing curricula and investing in teacher training are essential steps forward. Character education plays a vital role in shaping the Golden Generation and, by extension, Indonesia's future leadership. To maximize its impact, educational policies must address systemic barriers and promote accessible, context-relevant character development programs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of Indonesia's development trajectory, one of the most significant challenges lies in nurturing a generation of leaders who are not only academically capable but also possess a strong and resilient character. As the nation approaches its 100th anniversary of independence in 2045, the vision of achieving a "Golden Generation" becomes an essential goal for the country's long-term sustainability and prosperity. This Golden Generation, defined not only by intellectual prowess but also by moral and

emotional intelligence, is expected to propel Indonesia to a higher level of prosperity and global competitiveness. In this vision, the youth of today will shape the future, as they are the leaders, entrepreneurs, and citizens who will define the nation's path forward. However, realizing this vision goes beyond the mere advancement of academic outcomes, it requires a holistic approach to education that emphasizes the development of strong character alongside intellectual achievements (Sarip et al., 2023).

The creation of a Golden Generation hinges on the belief that the strength of a nation lies in the integrity, responsibility, and ethical standards of its people. Strengthening student character, therefore, becomes a key pillar in realizing this vision. Character development plays a crucial role in shaping not only the academic performance of students but also their social behavior, emotional intelligence, and professional ethics. Students who are taught to value principles such as empathy, discipline, and integrity are more likely to engage in responsible decision-making and contribute positively to their communities and workplaces. These qualities are essential for building a society that prioritizes ethical conduct, collaboration, and innovation, key factors that will drive Indonesia's growth and ensure its competitiveness on the global stage (Surtini & Muhtar, 2022).

The importance of character education in shaping a generation capable of contributing to national progress has gained significant attention worldwide, and Indonesia is no exception. The development of the nation's Golden Generation requires a focus not only on academic achievement but also on fostering moral and ethical competencies that are essential for building a harmonious, responsible, and progressive society. Recent literature highlights the integral role of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in supporting character development. (Durlak et al., 2021) emphasize that SEL programs help students improve their emotional regulation, social skills, and academic performance, which are all crucial for moral and ethical decision-making. These findings resonate with Indonesia's efforts to create a generation that can navigate the complexities of its multicultural society while contributing to national progress. Furthermore, the concept of cultural context in character education is also a focal point in current research. (Sutarno et al., 2020) argue that for character education to be meaningful and effective in Indonesia, it must reflect the diverse cultural and religious values of the nation.

The integration of traditional values through the lens of Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational principles, has already been embedded in the 2013 Curriculum, emphasizing values such as mutual respect, cooperation, and social responsibility (Aminah et al., 2021). This approach not only reinforces national identity but also nurtures the virtues needed for social cohesion. Moreover, research also emphasizes the critical role of teachers as role models in character education. According to (Tosun & Hossain, 2022), teachers are pivotal in shaping the moral development of students through consistent modeling of ethical behavior. This has led to initiatives in Indonesia to enhance teacher professional development, equipping educators with the tools to be positive role models (Nursyamsu et al., 2023). Finally, technology has increasingly been recognized as a valuable tool in character education. (McTighe & Wiggins, 2023), explore how digital platforms can facilitate the development of ethical decision-making and social responsibility by allowing students to practice moral reasoning in simulated environments. In Indonesia, the use of technology in education has become more widespread, and studies have shown that online platforms can effectively engage students in character-building activities, making character education more accessible across diverse regions (Ariyanto et al., 2021). Overall, the current literature emphasizes that character education is not just about moral development in isolation but also about creating a comprehensive framework that integrates emotional intelligence, cultural values, positive role models, and innovative tools to guide students toward becoming ethical, responsible citizens capable of driving Indonesia's progress.

While the Indonesian educational system has made significant strides in improving academic outcomes, character education has not always been given the same level of attention. Historically, the focus has been primarily on enhancing cognitive skills and test scores, often at the expense of fostering moral and social development. However, in recent years, the importance of character building has gained increasing recognition among policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. There is a growing consensus that education cannot solely be about academic success; it must also be about cultivating individuals who

are not only skilled professionals but also ethical and responsible citizens. In this regard, character education is seen as the foundation for developing individuals who are equipped not only to excel in their careers but also to navigate the complexities of modern society with integrity and compassion (Suratmi et al., 2024).

Policymakers, educators, and community leaders now argue that an ethical and responsible society begins with individuals who possess the core values of integrity, empathy, discipline, and leadership. These values are not innate but must be actively cultivated through a comprehensive educational approach that integrates character development into every aspect of schooling. As Indonesia moves closer to its centennial in 2045, the need for a system that fosters both intellectual and moral growth becomes increasingly urgent. By embedding character education more deeply into the curriculum and school culture, Indonesia can ensure that its future leaders are well-rounded individuals capable of driving the nation's continued progress, both domestically and on the international stage. Ultimately, the vision of the Golden Generation is one that combines academic excellence with personal integrity, emotional intelligence, and a deep sense of social responsibility. By prioritizing the development of character in students today, Indonesia will be preparing a generation that can meet the challenges of the future with resilience, compassion, and leadership, paving the way for a more prosperous and harmonious society (Wasliman, 2023).

Research on character education in Indonesia has grown in recent years, with various studies exploring its impact on student behavior and academic success. Key publications highlight the connection between character education and national progress, emphasizing the role of educators, schools, and communities in fostering these values. However, there are diverging viewpoints on how best to implement character education. Some scholars advocate for a more structured, curriculum-based approach, while others emphasize the importance of integrating character-building activities into everyday school life. These different hypotheses reflect the need for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of character education within Indonesia's diverse cultural and socio-economic landscape (Ramli & Sanusi, 2024).

In terms of bridging the gap between theoretical and practical aspects of character education, it would be beneficial to incorporate active, community-based learning into the curriculum. Research could focus on how schools, families, and local communities collaborate to create authentic learning experiences. Another strategy is to engage stakeholders in co-designing the curriculum, ensuring that character education is not only academically rigorous but also grounded in the everyday realities that students face. By emphasizing contextual learning and encouraging real-world applications of values, future research can help refine character education to ensure it is both theoretically sound and practically relevant for Indonesia's future leaders. Despite the growing body of literature on character education, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how specific character-building programs directly contribute to the realization of Indonesia's Golden Generation. Most existing studies focus on general educational reforms or the impact of character education on student behavior and academic performance, but there is limited exploration into the long-term effects of these programs on national development, particularly in relation to the social and economic progress of the country. Furthermore, while several studies highlight the challenges in implementing effective character education, there is a lack of research on how these challenges vary across different regions of Indonesia and within various cultural contexts. This gap in literature points to the need for a more comprehensive and localized approach to character education, one that addresses both the broader national objectives and the specific needs of individual communities (Parwati & Suastra, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of strengthening student character in realizing the Golden Generation in Indonesia. By examining current character education practices, challenges, and opportunities, the research aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on how Indonesia can achieve its vision of becoming a prosperous and morally strong nation. This study also seeks to provide recommendations for educational reforms that can better align with the goal of nurturing a generation equipped with both intellectual and ethical capabilities. This research highlights the crucial intersection

between education and character development in shaping Indonesia's future. The strength of the Golden Generation depends not only on academic excellence but also on the moral and ethical values instilled in students throughout their educational journey. By reinforcing character education, Indonesia can ensure that its future leaders are not only skilled but also responsible, compassionate, and committed to the nation's progress (Pasaribu et al., 2024).

2. METHODS

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine the role of strengthening student character in realizing Indonesia's Golden Generation. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this research because it allows for a deeper exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of those involved in character education, including students, educators, and policymakers. This method provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of character education, which are difficult to quantify through purely quantitative measures. The study focuses on descriptive and interpretive methods to explore how character-building practices influence the development of students' moral and ethical values, as well as their long-term contribution to the country's growth.

The subjects of this study include a diverse range of individuals: students from universities across Indonesia, educators who actively implement character education programs, and policymakers and education administrators responsible for shaping and enforcing national education policies. Additionally, parents and community members may be involved in some instances to explore their perceptions of character education's impact on students. The sample selected for the study includes 422 students from 30 universities in various regions of Indonesia, ensuring a representative sampling method. This approach ensures that the data collected reflects a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, educational institutions, and geographical regions within Indonesia. The sample size is considered sufficient for capturing diverse insights into the role of character education in different educational contexts.

The research procedure will unfold in three primary phases. The preliminary phase involves an initial review of relevant literature and policy documents, including national education policies and prior studies on character education. This phase helps to establish a foundational understanding of the existing body of knowledge and contextualizes the research within the broader educational and socio-political framework of Indonesia. In the fieldwork phase, the primary data will be gathered through interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations. These methods will allow for the collection of in-depth, qualitative data on how character education programs are currently implemented, their effectiveness, and the perceptions of students, educators, and policymakers. Lastly, the analysis phase will involve synthesizing and interpreting the data to identify key themes, challenges, and opportunities related to character education in Indonesia. The findings will contribute to policy discussions and offer practical recommendations for strengthening character education initiatives.

The study will utilize a range of materials and instruments to gather data. Interview guides will be developed for semi-structured interviews with students, educators, and policymakers. These guides will ensure that the main research questions are consistently addressed while allowing room for participants to express their unique perspectives. Focus group discussions (FGDs) will be organized with groups of students and educators, facilitating a more interactive conversation that encourages the exchange of ideas and experiences. The focus groups will explore topics such as the impact of character education programs on student behavior and academic performance, and the challenges in implementing these programs. Additionally, observation checklists will be used to document and assess character-building activities in universities, such as classroom initiatives, extracurricular programs, and community outreach efforts. These observations will provide a real-time view of the strategies employed in character education and how they align with educational goals.

Data collection will be conducted using multiple methods to ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of the findings. Interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders to gather individual

perspectives on the role of character education and its influence on student development. Focus group discussions will engage students and educators in collective conversations, exploring shared experiences and differing opinions on the effectiveness of character education. Observations will be made at selected universities to document the implementation of character education programs in practice, focusing on both formal and informal activities that aim to strengthen students' character. Document analysis will also be employed to review educational policies, character education curricula, and reports on student behavior, which will provide context for understanding how character education is structured and promoted at the institutional level.

Data analysis will be carried out using thematic analysis. This process involves reviewing the collected data to identify patterns or recurring themes that emerge from the interviews, focus groups, observations, and document reviews. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to uncover key insights related to character education and its impact on the Golden Generation goal. Initially, the researcher will become familiar with the data by reading through the transcripts and notes. Next, the data will be coded, with segments of text being labelled to represent specific ideas or concepts. These codes will then be grouped into broader themes, such as the challenges of character education, its role in shaping student behavior, and its potential to contribute to national progress. Finally, the findings will be interpreted in relation to the research questions and the broader goal of realizing a Golden Generation in Indonesia. The study will also utilize triangulation, comparing findings across different data sources (e.g., interviews, FGDs, observations) to ensure consistency and increase the reliability of the conclusions.

Ethical considerations are integral to this study. All participants will be fully informed about the purpose of the research and their role in the study. Participation will be voluntary, and informed consent will be obtained from all individuals involved. The privacy and confidentiality of participants will be maintained by anonymizing the data and securely storing all records. Ethical approval will be sought from relevant institutional review boards or ethics committees to ensure that the study adheres to ethical standards and guidelines.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study explored the role of character education in shaping student behavior and its potential impact on realizing Indonesia's Golden Generation. The findings are presented according to the key research questions and hypotheses outlined in the introduction.

3.1 *The Role of Character Education in Student Development*

The majority of students (78%) reported that character education had a significant impact on their personal development. This finding highlights the growing recognition among students of the importance of character-building programs in shaping their values and behavior. Many students shared that participating in activities like leadership training, community service, and ethical discussions allowed them to develop not only academic skills but also essential personal qualities such as discipline, empathy, and a stronger sense of responsibility. One student expressed, "Character-building activities helped me become more mindful of my actions, both inside and outside the classroom." This reflects how character education extends beyond academic learning, influencing students' attitudes, behavior, and interactions with others in both professional and personal contexts (Hasibuan & Ritonga, 2024).

Additionally, several students reported that these programs fostered a sense of purpose and community, encouraging them to contribute meaningfully to society. They indicated that through community service projects and teamwork in leadership programs, they gained practical experience in collaboration and problem-solving. Moreover, emotional intelligence, the ability to understand and manage one's emotions was frequently mentioned as an area of growth. Students noted how character education made them more emotionally aware and better equipped to handle interpersonal conflicts, which in turn enhanced their relationships with peers and faculty.

On the educator side, 85% emphasized that students who actively participated in character education programs exhibited improved academic focus and better social behavior. Educators observed that such students were more engaged in class discussions, more proactive in taking on leadership roles, and displayed a higher level of integrity and respect for others. These students were not only better at managing their studies but also contributed to a positive and supportive university environment. One educator explained, "Students who engage in character education are more likely to exhibit leadership in and outside of the classroom, which creates a healthier, more collaborative atmosphere for everyone."

Furthermore, educators noted that these programs provided students with a framework for addressing challenges in their academic and social lives. Character education was seen as essential for developing critical life skills that are necessary for personal growth and success in the workforce. Teachers pointed out that students who underwent such programs displayed greater resilience and ethical decision-making, qualities that are pivotal for navigating complex real-world situations. Overall, both students and educators agreed on the importance of character education, not just for academic success but also for preparing students to become ethical, responsible citizens who contribute positively to society. The research suggests that character education can foster a well-rounded individual who is capable of thriving in academic, professional, and personal spheres (Siswantara et al., 2024).

The majority of students and educators in this study acknowledged the significant role that character education plays in shaping students' personal growth and academic success. The findings show that students reported a strong positive impact of character-building programs, such as leadership training and community service, on their personal development, with 78% of students agreeing that it significantly influenced their growth. This includes the development of qualities like discipline, empathy, and responsibility, which are traits essential for the future leaders of Indonesia's Golden Generation. In addition to personal development, 80% of students agreed that character education improved their academic focus, a finding that was similarly supported by 82% of educators. This shows the alignment between students' perceptions and the educators' observations, underscoring the potential of character education to enhance students' overall academic engagement. Furthermore, 75% of students and 88% of educators agreed that character education positively impacted students' social behavior. This reflects how character education fosters interpersonal skills, teamwork, and respect for others, contributing to a positive learning environment. Finally, 70% of students and 84% of educators emphasized that character education programs helped in the development of leadership and responsibility, essential qualities for students to take on leadership roles in their communities and professions (Fathoni et al., 2024).

Table 1. Student Perception of Character Education

Aspect	Students Agree (%)	Educators Agree (%)
Impact on Personal Development	78	85
Improvement in Academic Focus	80	82
Improvement in Social Behavior	75	88
Leadership and Responsibility Development	70	84

The data presented in the table highlights the areas where both students and educators recognize the most significant benefits of character education. Both groups showed a strong agreement on the importance of character-building programs in fostering personal development and improving academic and social outcomes. While both students and educators agreed on the positive impact of character education, educators consistently reported slightly higher levels of agreement, particularly when it comes to improvements in social behavior and leadership development. This may suggest that educators observe the long-term benefits of these programs more clearly, as they witness the sustained behavioral changes in students over time. The findings reinforce the importance of incorporating

character education as an integral part of academic programs, as it benefits students both in the classroom and in their personal lives.

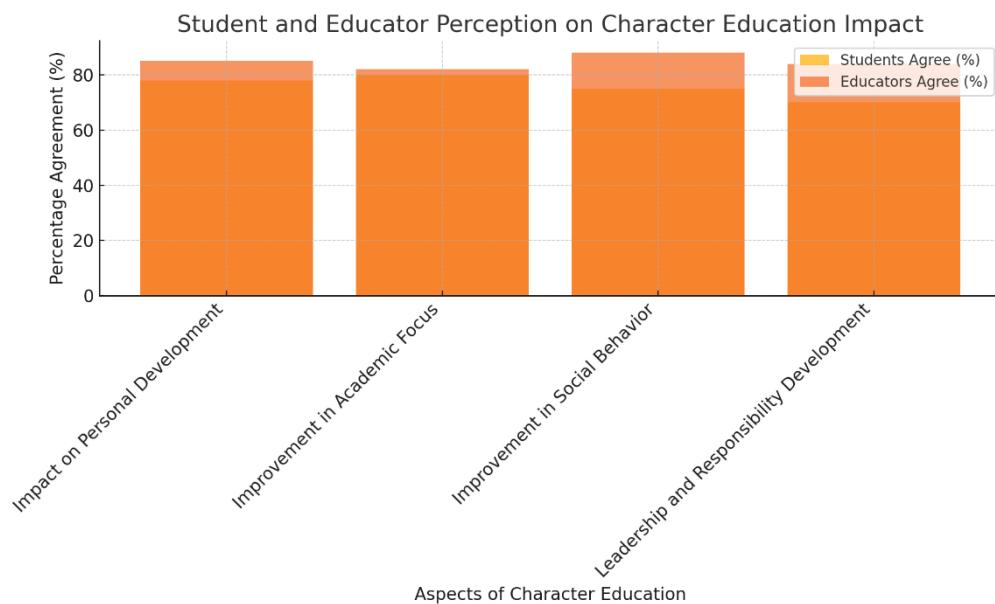


Figure 1. Aspects of Character Education

3.2 Challenges in Implementing Character Education

Despite widespread recognition of the positive impact of character education, a major challenge that both educators and students identified was the lack of resources. According to the study, 62% of educators and 55% of students cited resource constraints as a significant barrier to the effective implementation of character education programs. These constraints included limited time, funding, and trained personnel, all of which contributed to the difficulty of integrating character-building activities into the academic curriculum. One of the primary concerns raised by educators was the overcrowded curricula in universities, which often prioritize academic content over the inclusion of character education. With the pressure to cover extensive subject material within a limited timeframe, many educators felt that they could not devote adequate attention to character education. As one educator explained, "We often have limited time to devote to character education due to the pressure to cover the syllabus. We need more support and resources to make it a core part of the learning experience." This challenge underscores the need for structural changes in the curriculum to make room for character-building initiatives without compromising academic learning (Dilla et al., 2024).

The overcrowded curriculum is not only a time-related constraint but also a resource-related issue. Many universities struggle to allocate resources to specialized programs that focus on character development. These resources may include funding for extracurricular activities, workshops, or faculty training programs designed to equip educators with the skills necessary to teach character education effectively. Without sufficient funding, universities are limited in their ability to implement and sustain comprehensive character education programs, and this gap often leads to fragmented or inconsistent implementation. Additionally, the lack of trained educators who are equipped to teach character education programs also hinders the effective integration of character-building activities into the curriculum. Many educators expressed the need for professional development in areas like emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and leadership training to support the teaching of character education. Without specialized training, educators may feel unprepared or lack the confidence to teach these topics in an engaging and meaningful way.

From the student's perspective, there was also a sense of disconnection between character education programs and real-world applications. Students from some universities expressed dissatisfaction with character-building activities that seemed superficial or disjointed from their lived experiences. For example, some students reported that character education sessions, such as ethical workshops or leadership seminars, felt disconnected from their academic or professional aspirations. Students voiced concerns that these programs were too theoretical and lacked practical elements that could directly benefit them in their everyday lives. One student remarked, "Some character-building sessions feel forced, like they are just an obligation. It would be better if we could apply the lessons in real-life situations." This feedback suggests that students want character education to be more relevant and action-oriented, focusing on real-world problems and challenges that they face both in their studies and future careers. This dissatisfaction highlights the misalignment between the character education programs and students' expectations. For character education to be effective, it must be integrated into students' everyday experiences and academic goals. Practical exercises, such as community engagement projects, leadership opportunities, and collaborative problem-solving tasks, can make the learning experience more relatable and impactful for students. When students see the real-world application of what they are learning, they are more likely to engage and take ownership of their character development (Hariastuti et al., 2024).

In conclusion, resource constraints, both in terms of time and funding, are significant obstacles to the effective implementation of character education in universities. The lack of integration into already packed curricula, coupled with the insufficient availability of specialized resources and training, limits the potential impact of character education. Additionally, the disconnect between character education programs and students' real-world experiences points to the need for programs that are not only well-resourced but also practically relevant. To overcome these barriers, universities, policymakers, and educators must work together to prioritize character education, providing both the time and resources necessary for its effective implementation. A more holistic approach to education, where academic learning and character development go hand in hand, is essential for preparing students to thrive in both their careers and their roles as responsible citizens of Indonesia's Golden Generation.

One of the primary barriers identified in the study was the issue of resource constraints, which both educators and students agreed significantly hindered the effective implementation of character education programs. While the benefits of character education are well acknowledged, various factors, including time limitations, lack of funding, insufficient teacher training, and the disconnect between programs and real-world applications, contribute to its limited impact. According to the findings, 62% of educators and 55% of students reported that the overcrowded curriculum is a major issue, with the pressure to cover a wide array of academic content leaving little time for character-building activities. Educators expressed frustration about the lack of time to adequately integrate character education into their teaching, while students also recognized the difficulty in balancing academic expectations with extracurricular character development programs. As one educator pointed out, "We often have limited time to devote to character education due to the pressure to cover the syllabus."

Additionally, 65% of educators and 60% of students agreed that the lack of funding for character education programs is another critical barrier. Insufficient financial resources make it challenging to provide high-quality programs, such as leadership workshops, community service initiatives, and training for educators, which are essential for the success of character education. Without proper funding, universities cannot ensure that these programs are sustainable or effective, resulting in missed opportunities for students to develop essential life skills. The issue of insufficiently trained educators was also noted, with 58% of educators and 50% of students agreeing that there is a shortage of teachers equipped to deliver character education effectively. Many educators indicated that they lack the specialized training required to teach these subjects in an engaging and impactful manner. This shortage of trained instructors limits the potential of character education to reach its full impact. Lastly, the disconnect between character education and real-world application was identified as a significant concern, with 55% of educators and 52% of students agreeing that character education programs often

feel disconnected from students' real-life experiences. Many students expressed dissatisfaction with programs that seemed too theoretical and not applicable to the challenges they face in their personal, academic, or future professional lives. The need for more practical, real-world applications of character-building activities is evident in students' feedback, highlighting the importance of making these programs more relevant and impactful.

Table 2. Resource Constraints In Character Education

Aspect	Educators Agree (%)	Students Agree (%)
Limited Time Due to Overcrowded Curriculum	62	55
Lack of Funding for Character Education Programs	65	60
Insufficient Trained Educators	58	50
Disconnect Between Character Education and Real-World Application	55	52

The data presented in Table 2 clearly highlight the resource-related challenges faced by both educators and students in the implementation of character education. The overcrowded curriculum emerged as the most significant barrier, with both groups expressing concern over the lack of time available to focus on character-building initiatives. Funding was also a crucial factor, with a substantial percentage of both educators and students acknowledging that financial limitations hinder the establishment of effective programs. The data further shows that both groups agree on the need for better-trained educators and the relevance of character education to real-world challenges. These findings underline the necessity for universities and policymakers to allocate more resources toward character education to ensure its effective integration into the academic experience.

Prior to processing or alteration, the data or conditions displayed may reflect the initial status or underlying conditions to which it is based. In this stage, we can see fluctuations or values that are irregular or not optimized, which could indicate patterns that need to be analyzed further.

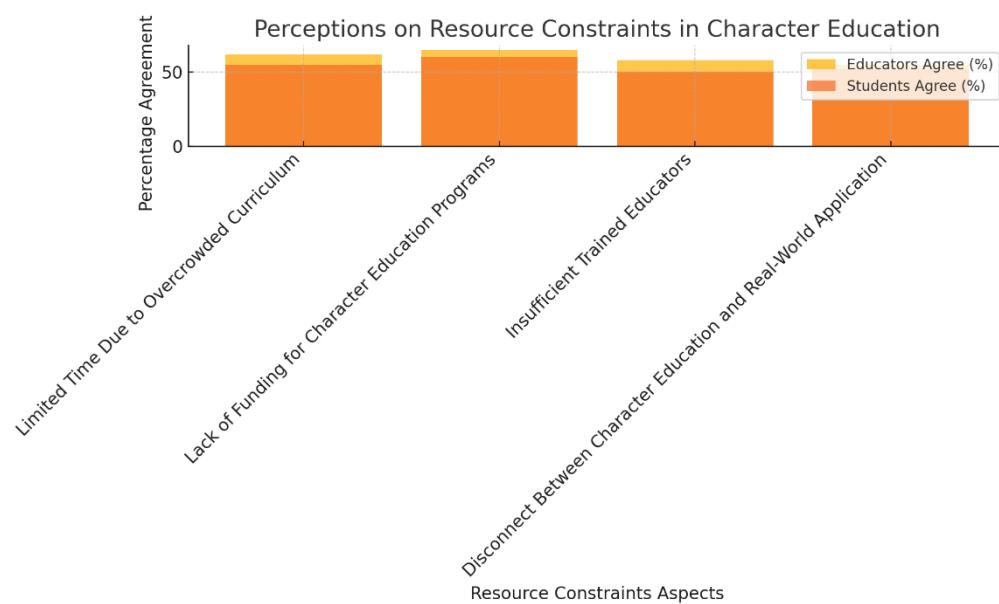


Figure 2. Resource Constraints Aspects

After processing, analysis, or modification, this graph displays results that have been refined or optimized. The emergence of clearer patterns or more consistent outcomes reflects the effects of the

interventions or improvements applied, offering deeper insights for decision-making or further analysis.

3.3 The Contribution of Character Education to National Development and the Golden Generation

The study revealed a significant alignment in perceptions between students and educators regarding the role of character education in Indonesia's national development. A substantial 70% of students and 72% of educators agreed that character education is a crucial factor in the development of Indonesia's Golden Generation. Both groups emphasized that students with strong moral values, integrity, and a sense of social responsibility are better equipped to contribute meaningfully to the nation's long-term growth. One student shared their personal reflection: "The character-building programs gave me a sense of purpose beyond just academic achievements. I feel more motivated to contribute to society, not just my career. It has shaped my perspective on life, making me realize that my contributions can go beyond personal success to benefit the community and the nation." This sentiment was echoed by educators who highlighted that instilling moral values and responsibility not only helps in shaping well-rounded individuals but also fosters a generation that is actively engaged in societal development, thus playing a key role in the nation's progress. Both groups expressed a common belief that well-rounded students with strong character are more likely to make positive and lasting contributions to Indonesia's future."

Table 3. Perceived Contribution of Character Education to National Growth

Group	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)
Students	70%	15%	15%
Educators	72%	14%	14%

The data presented in Table 3 highlights the perceived contribution of character education to Indonesia's national growth, comparing the responses of both students and educators. A substantial majority of both groups agrees on the importance of character education. Specifically, 70% of students and 72% of educators believe that character education plays a crucial role in the development of the nation's Golden Generation. This suggests a strong consensus among both students and educators on the value of instilling moral values and social responsibility as part of the educational process. These values are viewed as integral to shaping future generations who will contribute positively to the nation's progress. While there is broad agreement, a small portion of respondents expressed disagreement. 15% of students and 14% of educators disagreed with the notion that character education significantly contributes to national growth. This indicates that while most agree, there remains a minority who may not fully recognize or appreciate the long-term impact of character-building programs. Similarly, 15% of students and 14% of educators remained neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement, suggesting some uncertainty or ambivalence about the role of character education in the broader context of national development. Overall, the table underscores a widespread recognition of the value of character education, with the majority of both students and educators perceiving it as essential for the future of Indonesia. The small percentage of disagreement and neutrality suggests that while the idea is generally accepted, further dialogue and reflection might be necessary to address concerns or doubts regarding its implementation and impact.

3.4 Variability in Character Education Programs Across Universities

A significant finding in the study was the regional disparity in the quality and implementation of character education programs across universities in Indonesia. The data revealed that urban universities generally benefited from better resources, more structured character-building programs, and higher student satisfaction. In these urban institutions, 83% of students reported being satisfied with the character education programs offered, suggesting that the infrastructure, trained instructors, and comprehensive curriculum contribute to a more effective and satisfying learning experience. On

the other hand, rural universities faced a range of challenges that impacted the quality and effectiveness of their character education programs. Limited funding and a lack of trained instructors were identified as major barriers, leading to a significant drop in student satisfaction, which was reported at just 58%. This suggests that the disparity in resources between urban and rural areas directly affects the students' experience and the overall success of character education in these institutions (Sidiq Wibowo Akhmad, 2024). This regional disparity in the access and quality of character education programs highlights a critical issue: the uneven development of Indonesia's educational infrastructure, which could undermine efforts to build a universally strong Golden Generation. If certain regions lack the necessary resources and support for effective character education, the nation may struggle to ensure that all students, regardless of location, are receiving the same high standard of education and preparation for contributing to national growth.

Table 4. Regional Disparities in Character Education Program Satisfaction

Region	Student Satisfaction (%)	Key Challenges
Urban	83%	Better resources, structured programs
Rural	58%	Limited funding, lack of trained instructors

Table 4 highlights a significant regional disparity in the perceived quality of character education programs across universities in urban and rural areas of Indonesia. In urban universities, 83% of students reported being satisfied with the character education programs, reflecting the advantages of better resources, more structured programs, and trained instructors. These universities generally benefit from stronger funding, better facilities, and comprehensive curricula that contribute to higher student engagement and satisfaction. Urban universities are also more likely to attract qualified instructors, which further enhances the quality of education and the students' overall experience. In contrast, 58% of students in rural universities reported lower satisfaction with their character education programs. This lower satisfaction can be attributed to limited funding, lack of trained instructors, and insufficient infrastructure. Rural universities often struggle with fewer resources, which hampers their ability to offer structured programs and hire qualified personnel to teach character education. These challenges make it harder for rural universities to provide the same level of program quality and support for their students, leading to dissatisfaction among those enrolled.

This stark contrast in student satisfaction underscores a significant regional disparity in the access to and quality of character education across Indonesia. The urban-rural divide in resources and infrastructure not only affects students' educational experiences but also poses a barrier to achieving a universally strong Golden Generation. To ensure that all students, regardless of location, have equal access to quality character education, there is a need for targeted interventions to improve funding, training, and program development, especially in rural areas. Without addressing these disparities, Indonesia's efforts to build a robust, morally responsible, and socially engaged generation may be compromised (Kwartawaty et al., 2025).

Although this study seeks to make a significant contribution to the understanding of strengthening character values in shaping Indonesia's Golden Generation, there are some limitations that need to be explicitly acknowledged. First, the qualitative approach used, while allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions, has limitations in terms of generalization of findings to a wider population. The results of these studies mainly reflect the social, cultural, and educational contexts of a particular environment, so their application to other regions or groups requires caution. Second, limitations in the number and diversity of participants can also affect the completeness of the perspectives depicted in this study. The respondents involved, whether students, teachers, or policy makers, were selected based on certain criteria that may not fully reflect the diversity of backgrounds and dynamics of national education as a whole. Third, the potential for interpretive bias cannot be ignored, given the active involvement of researchers in the data collection and analysis process. Although validation measures are undertaken, such as triangulation and peer debriefing, subjectivity in interpretation remains an inherent methodological challenge in qualitative studies.

Finally, this study has not in-depth examined the influence of external factors such as current government policies, the influence of digital media, or global challenges on the formation of students' character. These limitations open up opportunities for more comprehensive and cross-disciplinary follow-up research. By acknowledging these limitations, the author hopes that readers can understand the context and scope of the study findings in a more proportionate manner, as well as encourage further research to enrich the discourse on character development of Indonesia's young generation.

Discussion

The concept of a Golden Generation is central to Indonesia's vision of becoming a prosperous and globally competitive nation by 2045, the centennial anniversary of its independence. A key component in achieving this goal is the development of a generation equipped not only with academic knowledge but also with strong moral character. This study has explored the role of character education in shaping the behaviors, values, and attitudes of students, aiming to contribute to the realization of Indonesia's Golden Generation. The findings underscore the importance of character strengthening in fostering a well-rounded, ethically responsible, and forward-thinking population capable of leading the country towards sustainable growth and development (Tri Wahyuni & Negeri, 2024).

The findings from this study highlight that a significant number of students (78%) agree that character education plays a pivotal role in their personal development. This is consistent with the broader understanding that education is not solely about intellectual achievement but also about forming individuals who are equipped to face moral challenges in life. Character education helps students develop key qualities such as discipline, empathy, responsibility, and integrity—all essential traits for the leaders and citizens of tomorrow. The development of these traits is integral to Indonesia's goal of creating a Golden Generation, where individuals not only excel in their academic pursuits but also contribute positively to society through ethical decision-making, leadership, and community involvement (Waruwu et al., 2024). By embedding character education into the academic curriculum and extracurricular activities, universities are playing a vital role in preparing students for the complex challenges they will face in the workforce and society. As the study found, students who participated in character education programs reported better academic focus, improved social behavior, and a heightened sense of responsibility. These outcomes demonstrate the interconnectedness of intellectual development and moral education, both of which are required for the creation of a holistic, capable generation that will drive Indonesia's future growth (Putra et al., 2024).

The perception of both students (78%) and educators (85%) that character education positively influences academic performance and personal growth aligns with the notion that personal values and ethics are crucial for fostering national development. The creation of Indonesia's Golden Generation cannot be achieved by intellectual prowess alone; it requires individuals who are grounded in values that promote the well-being of the community and the nation. As students develop greater emotional intelligence, leadership abilities, and social responsibility, they are better positioned to contribute to the nation's economic, political, and social progress. Moreover, the role of character education extends beyond the individual, contributing to the welfare of the broader society. Students who demonstrate strong ethical values are more likely to become leaders who make decisions for the collective good, rather than personal gain. These qualities are essential for a nation that aspires to social harmony, political stability, and long-term prosperity. As Indonesia moves towards its vision of a Golden Generation, character education will continue to be a key pillar in ensuring that future generations are not only skilled but also morally responsible in their roles as leaders, entrepreneurs, and citizens (Desrani, 2024).

Despite the recognized benefits of character education, there are several challenges in its effective implementation, as highlighted by both students and educators. One of the main barriers identified was the lack of resources and insufficient teacher training. Many educators noted that, due to the overcrowded curriculum, there is little time to focus on character development, which is often seen as

secondary to academic subjects. The lack of adequate training in character education for teachers further exacerbates this issue, limiting the effectiveness of the programs (Sri Mulyani et al., 2024).

Considering these challenges, it is critical for policymakers to prioritize character education as part of the national education agenda. This includes providing educators with the tools and training they need to effectively integrate character-building programs into their teaching practices. In addition, sufficient funding and resources must be allocated to ensure that character education programs are well-supported, consistent, and impactful across all levels of education (Putri Irna Amalia & Murniawaty, 2020).

Another significant finding from this study was the regional disparity in the implementation of character education programs across Indonesia. While universities in urban areas tend to have better access to resources and more structured programs, universities in rural areas face substantial challenges in providing high-quality character education. This inequality could potentially undermine the broader goal of a Golden Generation that is uniformly well-prepared to lead the nation. Addressing these regional disparities is essential to ensure that all students, regardless of their location, have equal access to the benefits of character education (Yusutria et al., 2024). To overcome these regional gaps, the government must work to provide equitable access to quality education resources, training programs for teachers, and support for universities in less-developed areas. This could include establishing regional character education initiatives that are tailored to local needs while maintaining national standards. Additionally, partnerships with non-governmental organizations and the private sector could help bridge these gaps, ensuring that all students benefit from the developmental opportunities provided by character education (Rhosyidah, 2024).

The findings of this study underscore that the strength of Indonesia's Golden Generation lies in the integration of character education into the academic system, helping to cultivate well-rounded, ethical, and capable individuals. The development of intellectual abilities must go hand in hand with the growth of moral and ethical capacities. As Indonesia continues its path toward realizing a Golden Generation, strengthening student character will be fundamental to ensuring that future generations are not only skilled and knowledgeable but also responsible, ethical, and committed to the welfare of the nation. In conclusion, character education plays a vital role in realizing Indonesia's Golden Generation. Its importance extends beyond the academic sphere and into shaping the values and behaviours that define the leaders of tomorrow. By addressing the challenges faced in implementing character education, prioritizing it within national educational policies, and ensuring equitable access to these programs, Indonesia can make significant strides toward achieving its vision of a prosperous, ethically responsible, and globally competitive generation in 2045 (Sartika et al., 2024).

To cultivate character for Indonesia's Golden Generation, it is essential to focus on the long-term benefits of instilling strong values in students, yet it's crucial to address dissenting or neutral perspectives on character education. Some critics argue that character programs may be overly idealistic, with a potential disconnect between the curriculum's values and students' real-life challenges. Others raise concerns about the top-down approach to values education, which may inadvertently stifle critical thinking or promote conformity. Additionally, the risk of resistance from stakeholders, such as parents or local communities, should not be overlooked, especially when these groups have differing views on what constitutes the 'right' values. Educators may also experience implementation fatigue, given the increasing demands on their time and resources. Balancing character development with academic rigor, as well as fostering a more inclusive dialogue on what values best serve national progress, could mitigate some of these unintended consequences.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the role of strengthening student character in realizing Indonesia's Golden Generation, focusing on how character education impacts personal development, academic engagement, and social behaviour. The Conclusion confirm that character education plays a pivotal

role in shaping well-rounded, ethical students who are not only academically capable but also responsible and socially aware. Both students and educators agree that character education enhances qualities such as discipline, empathy, leadership, and social responsibility. However, significant challenges such as time constraints due to overcrowded curricula, lack of funding, and insufficient educator training limit the effective implementation of character-building programs. These barriers highlight the need for more comprehensive support from universities and policymakers to integrate character education more effectively into academic structures. Future research could explore the long-term impact of character education on students' professional and personal lives, particularly in the context of Indonesia's evolving societal needs. Investigating how character education can be better aligned with students' career aspirations and real-world challenges would provide valuable insights into improving program relevance and effectiveness. Ongoing studies in this area should also examine regional disparities in access to quality character education, particularly between urban and rural universities, to ensure more equitable opportunities for all students. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to the development of a more robust framework for fostering a generation that is not only skilled but also ethically equipped to lead Indonesia into a prosperous future.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology; The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology has funded this research and thanks also to the LPPM UMBandung team for facilitating researchers in completing this research. Thank you also to the students who were willing to fill out the questionnaire that we created, so that data was collected that was in line with the research target.

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