

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INDONESIAN AND JAPANESE EDUCATION CURRICULA IN SHAPING STUDENTS' CHARACTER

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Abstract

Education plays a crucial role in shaping students' character as preparation for facing increasingly complex global challenges. The differences in curriculum approaches between Indonesia and Japan are important to examine, as both countries emphasize character education as an essential component of their educational systems. This study aims to analyze the comparison of educational curricula in Indonesia and Japan in developing students' character. The method used is a bibliometric approach by analyzing relevant scientific publications through mapping research trends, keywords, and study focuses. The results show that Indonesia emphasizes character education through specific subjects, while Japan integrates character values into all learning activities and school culture. Japan applies a student-centered approach with collaborative and experiential learning, whereas Indonesia still shows a tendency toward academically oriented instruction. These differences influence the effectiveness of character development in both countries. In conclusion, the success of character education is strongly determined by the consistency of curriculum implementation and the integration of values into daily learning practices.

Keywords: *education, curriculum, character, education, indonesia and japan*

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1. Pendahuluan

Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character to prepare them to face the increasingly complex challenges of life. In the era of globalization, every country strives to design a curriculum that emphasizes not only cognitive aspects but also moral and social values [1]. Indonesia and Japan are two countries with different cultural backgrounds, yet both regard character education as a vital component of their educational systems [2]. Problems arise when the implementation of the curriculum in Indonesia is deemed not yet fully effective in consistently shaping students' character. Meanwhile, Japan is often held up as a model for its success in instilling discipline, responsibility, and social ethics from an early age [3]. These differing approaches highlight the need for an in-depth comparative analysis.

The research problem focuses on how differences in curriculum structure, approach, and implementation in Indonesia and Japan shape students' character [4]. Furthermore, there is a gap between the stated curriculum objectives and actual practices in the field, particularly in the context of character education in Indonesia. On the other hand, Japan demonstrates consistency in integrating character values into daily learning activities [3]. This raises questions about the factors influencing this success. The lack of integration between theory and practice often poses

an obstacle in the Indonesian education system. This study aims to explore these differences as well as opportunities for development that can be adapted.

The problem-solving perspective in this study was conducted through a comparative approach that systematically examined both curricula. The analysis was carried out by comparing aspects of educational objectives, teaching methods, and student character assessment. This approach allows for the identification of best practices that can serve as a reference for curriculum development in Indonesia. In addition, this study also considers cultural factors that influence the successful implementation of the curriculum in each country. Japan is known for its strong culture of collectivism, while Indonesia has a high degree of social diversity [5]. These differences are important variables in understanding the effectiveness of character education. The results of the analysis are expected to provide relevant and practical recommendations.

The purpose of this study is to analyze a comparison of the Indonesian and Japanese educational curricula in shaping students' character. In addition, this study aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each curriculum in its implementation. Another objective is to understand how character values are integrated into the learning process in both countries. This study also seeks to examine the factors that support the success of character education in Japan. Furthermore, the research findings are expected to contribute to the development of the educational curriculum in Indonesia. Through this analysis, it is hoped that innovative ideas will emerge to improve the quality of character education. The ultimate goal of this study is to produce recommendations that can be effectively implemented.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the concept of curriculum as a set of plans and arrangements regarding learning objectives, content, and instructional materials. Character education theory emphasizes the importance of fostering moral values, ethics, and social responsibility in students [6]. In addition, the constructivist approach is also used to understand how students construct knowledge through learning experiences. In the Japanese context, learning theories based on habits and hands-on practice serve as the primary foundation for character education. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, character education is more frequently integrated through academic subjects and extracurricular activities [7]. These differing approaches form the primary focus of the comparative analysis.

A summary of theoretical studies indicates that the success of character education is greatly influenced by the consistency of curriculum implementation and the support of the social environment. Integrating character values into daily activities has proven to be more effective than purely theoretical approaches. Japan has successfully internalized these values through structured school routines. In contrast, Indonesia still faces challenges in ensuring continuity between policy and practice on the ground [3]. Therefore, innovation is needed in curriculum design to make it more contextual and adaptive. A holistic approach that involves all elements of education is key to success.

2. Metode Penelitian

This study employs a bibliometric design to analyze and compare the development of scientific research on the Indonesian and Japanese educational curricula in shaping students' character [8]. This approach allows for the systematic and measurable mapping of research trends, publication patterns, and evolving research focuses. The study population includes all scientific articles relevant to the topics of curriculum and character education, while the sample was determined through purposive sampling based on specific criteria, such as indexed publications with a direct relevance to the research topic. The selection process involved screening article titles, abstracts, and content to ensure data suitability. Data were obtained from various scientific databases, such as Google Scholar and Scopus, within a specific time frame to reflect the latest developments [9]. Additionally, only articles with full access were used to ensure the completeness of the information.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search using a combination of keywords related to the curriculum, character education, Indonesia, and Japan. The data collected

consisted of publication metadata such as author names, publication years, titles, abstracts, and keywords, which were then downloaded in a specific format to facilitate analysis [10]. The research instruments consisted of bibliometric software such as VOSviewer and Publish or Perish, which were used to visualize research networks and analyze relationships between data. The tools' specifications included capabilities for citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence, and the visual mapping of research trends [11]. Data analysis was conducted through descriptive analysis and network analysis to identify publication patterns and relationships between concepts in the research

3. Results of a Bibliometric Analysis of Educational Curriculum Studies

The results of a bibliometric analysis of various scientific publications indicate a significant increase in academic attention to studies on elementary education curricula and student character development over the past decade. This trend has emerged alongside the rise of global challenges such as digitalization, social change, and the demand for 21st-century competencies, which have driven educational reforms in various countries [12]. The analyzed literature includes accredited national journals and international publications that consistently address basic education systems across countries, particularly Indonesia and Japan. The most dominant keywords identified include basic education curriculum, character education, student-centered learning, and comparative education. The emergence of these keywords indicates that the research focus not only highlights academic aspects but also positions character as a vital component of the educational process. Furthermore, research trends reveal a shift in approach from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. This signifies that global education policy is increasingly emphasizing the importance of students' active engagement in the learning process.

The results of the bibliometric mapping also reveal that research in Indonesia is largely oriented toward changes in curriculum policy and its implementation at the school level [13]. This focus has grown stronger since the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides schools with flexibility in developing instruction tailored to students' needs. Various studies highlight how teachers adapt the curriculum and the challenges they face in implementing it in the field. Meanwhile, studies on the education system in Japan tend to be more consistent in discussing the success of character development through a holistic approach. Research on Japan not only highlights policies but also real-world practices that have been consistently implemented over the long term. This situation indicates a difference in academic orientation between the two countries, with Indonesia still in the phase of strengthening its education system. In contrast, Japan places greater emphasis on maintaining the quality of education that has been systematically established [14]

An analysis of the interrelationships between topics in bibliometric studies reveals fundamental differences in the implementation of character education in the two countries. In Japan, character values are not treated as a separate subject but are integrated into all learning activities and daily school life. This approach is reflected in various activities such as group work, responsibility for maintaining cleanliness, and social interactions that foster discipline and empathy [15]. In contrast, in Indonesia, character education is still often confined to specific subjects such as Pancasila Education and Religious Education. This situation indicates that the integration of values has not yet been fully incorporated into the entire learning process [16]

Further analysis of the bibliometric mapping reveals a trend in research themes focused on the use of technology to support character-based curriculum design [17]. Several studies indicate that digital media is increasingly being integrated into the learning process to enrich students' experiences [18]. In the Indonesian context, greater attention is focused on the readiness of educators and the uneven availability of resources across various regions. In Japan, technology is utilized proportionately as a tool without undermining the essence of values formation [19]

Research mapping also shows an increase in the involvement of academics from various countries in conducting comparative studies of education systems. Cross-regional collaboration opens up opportunities for a broader exchange of ideas regarding effective learning strategies for character development [20]. In a comparison between Indonesia and Japan, this approach offers

new perspectives on best practices that can be adapted to local needs [21]. Several studies also highlight the importance of a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates social, cultural, and psychological aspects in understanding the educational process. These developments have spurred the emergence of more comprehensive and in-depth analyses [22]

There has been an increased focus in research on evaluating the effectiveness of curricula in shaping students' character. A number of studies have begun to examine the relationship between curriculum design and tangible outcomes observed in students' behavior both within the school environment and in the community. In Indonesia, research tends to highlight the gap between policy design and on-the-ground implementation, particularly regarding the consistent application of values. In Japan, studies focus more on the sustainability of existing practices and their impact on fostering discipline and a sense of responsibility [23]. These differences indicate that research is directed not only toward concepts but also toward tangible, measurable outcomes.

Bibliometric mapping also reveals a growing body of research highlighting the role of school leadership in supporting the success of character education curricula [8]. School principals and educational administrators are viewed as key factors in creating a learning environment conducive to values formation. In Indonesia, several studies emphasize the importance of enhancing leadership capacity in managing dynamic curriculum changes. On the other hand, in Japan, school leadership is more focused on maintaining the stability of the system and ensuring the consistent implementation of values in daily activities [24]. This indicates that the success of a curriculum is determined not only by its design but also by effective governance. Strong leadership is capable of sustainably integrating policy with practice.

Another finding that emerged from the bibliometric analysis relates to the importance of strengthening teachers' competencies in implementing a character-based curriculum. Research shows that teacher quality significantly influences the success of learning not only in academic terms but also in the development of attitudes. In Indonesia, common challenges include limited training opportunities and varying abilities to adapt innovative teaching approaches. Meanwhile, in Japan, teachers' professional development is carried out continuously through collaboration and reflection on teaching practices. This enables teachers to continually improve the quality of learning in accordance with students' needs. These differences indicate that investment in human resource development is a critical factor in the success of the curriculum [24]

Research is increasingly focusing on how the curriculum can prepare students to face the accelerating pace of social, economic, and technological change. In Indonesia, these efforts are evident through the integration of new forms of literacy such as digital literacy and financial literacy into the curriculum. In Japan, the approach places greater emphasis on fostering adaptive skills and independence through contextual learning experiences [25]. This demonstrates that the curriculum serves not only as a guide for current learning but also as a tool for building future readiness. These differing approaches illustrate that each country has strategies tailored to its own needs and context.

The Elementary Education Curriculum System in Indonesia

The results of the literature review indicate that the elementary education curriculum system in Indonesia has undergone dynamic development in response to the demands of the times and the needs of society [26]. The curriculum is designed to cover three main domains knowledge, skills, and attitudes as the foundation for developing students' competencies [27]. The government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, continues to update policies to improve the quality of learning. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is one strategic step that provides schools with greater flexibility in managing the learning process [28]

In practice, the learning process in elementary schools is still heavily influenced by an academic orientation that emphasizes the achievement of learning outcomes. Although a scientific approach has been implemented to foster analytical and systematic skills, its implementation has not been fully consistent across educational institutions. Some learning activities remain teacher-

centered, resulting in suboptimal student engagement in the learning process [29]. This situation results in underdeveloped exploration skills and a lack of active participation in the classroom. Evaluation systems that use standards such as the Minimum Competency Standard (KKM) also tend to focus on achieving final grades [24]. Consequently, the learning process is often directed toward meeting academic targets rather than fostering deep understanding.

In terms of character development, basic education in Indonesia actually has a strong foundation through the integration of values into subject matter and programs designed to strengthen student profiles [30]. Values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social awareness are taught systematically starting from the early grades. However, the results of a bibliometric analysis indicate that the effectiveness of applying these values depends heavily on implementation strategies in the field [31]. In many cases, character development remains conceptual and has not yet been fully integrated into daily learning activities.

The Merdeka Curriculum organizes the learning process into specific phases so that the material presented is better aligned with students' ability levels. Each phase is designed to ensure the gradual attainment of competencies in literacy, numeracy, and character development [32]. The curriculum also provides schools with the flexibility to develop projects that strengthen student profiles as part of implementing values through real-world activities. Through these projects, students are encouraged to understand contextual issues and develop critical and creative thinking skills. This demonstrates that Indonesia's curriculum system has been designed quite comprehensively; however, its success depends heavily on the quality of implementation at each educational institution [21]

The Elementary Education Curriculum System in Japan

The study findings indicate that Japan's elementary education curriculum system is characterized by its structured, stable, and consistent nature over the long term [33]. The curriculum is developed nationally by MEXT, yet it allows schools flexibility to adapt teaching methods to the needs of students and the local environment [25]. Elementary education in Japan consists of six years of elementary school followed by three years of junior high school as part of compulsory education. The government also plays an active role by guaranteeing free access to education at the compulsory level, thereby ensuring that educational equity is well maintained [34]. Furthermore, the Japanese education system is built on the principles of legality, fairness, and neutrality, which ensure that every child receives their right to education without discrimination.

One of the key strengths of the Japanese education system lies in the application of the Chi-Toku-Tai principle, which integrates intellectual, moral, and physical aspects into a unified learning experience [23]. Character values are not merely taught theoretically but are directly practiced through daily school activities such as group work, cleaning the classroom, and taking responsibility for the environment [35]. This approach helps students become accustomed to applying the values of discipline, cooperation, and social responsibility in real life. Furthermore, the concept of "Ikiru Chikara" serves as a crucial foundation in Japanese education, emphasizing students' ability to live independently and adapt to changes in their environment. The curriculum is also designed to be flexible and is regularly updated to remain relevant to the times [15]. Learning is not solely focused on academic achievement but also on the development of a well rounded personality.

In terms of the learning process, the Japanese education system adopts a student-centered approach that emphasizes collaboration, discussion, and hands-on experience. Students are encouraged to actively participate so they can gain a deep understanding of the material while developing social skills. In the early grades, learning focuses on reinforcing basic concepts through repetition and contextual activities, including through subjects such as *Seikatsuka*, which fosters independence [15]. Additionally, learning activities are often conducted outside the classroom to provide real-world experiences that enrich students' understanding. The evaluation system is comprehensive, taking into account aspects of attitude, participation, and individual

development not merely academic achievement alone. Assessment uses an absolute approach that evaluates student achievement based on predetermined standards without comparing them to other students. According to bibliometric analysis, this holistic, student-centered approach is one of the key factors behind the success of the Japanese education system in shaping students who are independent, disciplined, and possess strong character [36].

In Japan's elementary education curriculum system, the school day is structured to strike a balance between academic and non-academic activities. The daily schedule not only includes core subjects but also sets aside specific time for activities aimed at fostering positive attitudes and healthy lifestyle habits. The curriculum allocates a clear portion to moral education and activities that support students' personal development [37]. This organizational structure demonstrates that character development has become an inherent part of the curriculum design, rather than merely an add-on. The national curriculum sets clear competency standards while still allowing schools flexibility to adapt their teaching strategies. Students not only develop intellectually but also gain the readiness to navigate social life [24]

A Comparison of the Indonesian and Japanese Education Curricula in Character Development

A comparison of the educational curricula of Indonesia and Japan reveals differences in their approaches to character development. Both countries view character education as an important component of their basic education systems, but they take different approaches to its implementation. Indonesia tends to incorporate character values into specific subjects, while Japan integrates them into all daily learning activities.

Aspect	Indonesia	Japan
The Character Approach	Taught through specific subjects such as Religion and Civic Education	Integrated into all learning activities and the school culture
Basic Principles	Moral values, ethics, and patriotism	The Chi-Toku-Tai Principle (knowledge, morality, physical fitness)
Implementation	More conceptual and structured in the curriculum	Focused on hands-on application in everyday life
Learning Methods	The scientific approach still tends to be teacher-centered in some cases	Student-centered, collaborative, and experience-based
Grading System	Based on the Minimum Competency Standard (KKM) and academic performance	Comprehensive assessment covers attitude, participation, and social skills
Supporting Activities	Classroom learning activities and school programs	Routine activities such as group work, cleaning, and social responsibility

Table 1. Comparison of the Indonesian and Japanese Educational Curricula in Character Development

Based on the comparison table presented, it can be explained that there are fundamental differences in character development through the elementary education curricula in Indonesia and Japan. First, regarding the approach to character education, Indonesia tends to incorporate values education into specific subjects such as Religious Education and Pancasila Education, resulting in a more structured delivery within an academic context. Meanwhile, Japan integrates these values into all school activities, so they do not stand as separate subjects. In terms of basic principles, Indonesia emphasizes moral, ethical, and national values as the foundation for

students' character development. In contrast, Japan applies the Chi-Toku-Tai principle, which combines intellectual, emotional, and physical aspects in a balanced manner [3].

Second, in terms of implementation and teaching methods, Indonesia still tends to deliver character education conceptually through classroom activities. While the scientific approach used does encourage systematic thinking, in practice it has not yet fully optimized students' active engagement. This contrasts with Japan, which employs a student-centered approach that incorporates collaborative methods and discussions as central components of the learning process. Students do not merely receive material but are also directly involved in activities that foster a sense of responsibility, cooperation, and discipline. Additionally, routine activities such as maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment serve as a tangible means of building positive habits. This difference illustrates that Japan places greater emphasis on experience-based learning, whereas Indonesia is still in the process of strengthening implementation to make it more contextual.

Third, regarding the assessment system and character development, Indonesia uses an approach based on Minimum Proficiency Criteria that focuses more on academic achievement as the primary indicator of learning success. Although attitude is also taken into account, it has not yet become the central focus of evaluation. In contrast, Japan implements a more comprehensive assessment system that considers student participation, behavior, and social development. In terms of character development, Indonesia's strength lies in instilling the values of honesty, discipline, and social responsibility from an early age; however, its implementation still depends on the teaching methods used. On the other hand, Japan takes a more holistic approach by making character an integral part of school culture through consistently practiced habits. Values such as responsibility and cooperation are built through direct experience, making them easier to instill in students [15].

Fourth, regarding the learning environment and school culture, there are significant differences between Indonesia and Japan in terms of supporting students' character development. In Indonesia, the school environment generally still focuses on academic activities in the classroom, supplemented by additional programs such as extracurricular activities. Although these activities can support character development, their implementation has not yet been fully integrated into students' daily routines. In contrast, in Japan, school culture plays a vital role in the character education process, with students actively participating in daily activities such as cleaning the classroom, organizing learning materials, and maintaining punctuality. The learning environment serves not only as a place to acquire knowledge but also as a space for instilling social values [38].

Fifth, regarding the role of teachers in learning, Indonesia and Japan demonstrate different approaches to supporting students' character development. In Indonesia, teachers still often serve as the primary source of information who direct the learning process, resulting in interactions that tend to be one-way. Although there have been efforts to develop active learning, its implementation has not been consistent across all educational institutions. In Japan, teachers act more as facilitators who guide students in independent and collaborative learning processes. Teachers not only teach the subject matter but also serve as role models in their daily attitudes and behavior. The interactions that take place are more dialogic in nature, giving students the opportunity to develop critical thinking and social skills [39].

Sixth, regarding parental and community involvement, Indonesia and Japan also differ in their approaches to supporting character education. In Indonesia, parental involvement is often limited to formal activities such as school meetings or monitoring students' academic performance. The role of the community in character education has also not been systematically integrated into school programs. In contrast, Japan demonstrates stronger synergy among schools, families, and the social environment in shaping students' character. The values taught in school are reinforced through habits at home and interactions within the community. This support creates continuity in the character education process, ensuring that students have consistent experiences across various environments [7].

Seventh, regarding the sustainability and consistency of curriculum implementation, Japan demonstrates greater stability than Indonesia. In Indonesia, curriculum changes occur quite frequently as a means of adapting to the times, but this sometimes poses challenges for consistent implementation in the field. Uneven adaptation means that curriculum implementation does not always proceed optimally. In contrast, Japan has a more stable system with periodic updates that still uphold the fundamental principles of character education. This consistency allows schools and teachers to carry out educational programs in a more focused and continuous manner. As a result, the development of students' character can take place systematically and sustainably [2].

4. Conclusion

A comparison of the elementary education curricula in Indonesia and Japan regarding student character development reveals significant differences in approach, implementation, and consistency. Indonesia has established a strong foundation through the integration of moral values into the formal curriculum, both through academic subjects and character-building programs. However, implementation still faces challenges, particularly in integrating these values into daily learning activities. An approach that tends to be conceptual and focused on academic achievement has prevented character education from becoming a fully ingrained habit among students. Furthermore, variations in the quality of implementation across educational institutions also affect the overall effectiveness of character development.

Japan demonstrates a more holistic system by making character education an integral part of all school activities. Values such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation are not only taught but also instilled through consistent hands-on practice. This approach is supported by a learning environment, the role of teachers, and the involvement of families and the community, all of which are seamlessly integrated. Curriculum stability and consistent implementation are key factors in the sustained development of students' character. Lessons from the Japanese education system can serve as an important reference for Indonesia in strengthening the implementation of a curriculum that is more contextual, integrative, and focused on instilling values in daily life.

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