

Evaluating Character Education in “Sekolah Penggerak” Senior High Schools: Implications for Global Competitiveness

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Abstract

Character education is widely recognized as a crucial element in enhancing educational quality in an increasingly competitive global context; however, evaluative studies that specifically investigate its implementation within the Sekolah Penggerak Program at the senior high school level remain limited. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of character education in the Sekolah Penggerak Program and to examine its outcomes and impact on students' character development. An evaluative research approach was employed using the CIPPO model. The research was conducted at State Senior High Schools 4, 5, and 10 in Jambi City, involving principals or vice principals, teachers, and students as research participants. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive percentage analysis, while interview data were analyzed qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results reveal that character education has been implemented in a systematic and integrated manner through school policies, instructional practices, and school culture, with most achievement indicators classified as high to very high. Furthermore, the implementation contributes positively to students' character development, particularly in the areas of integrity, discipline, collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy, thereby supporting improvements in educational quality aligned with contemporary global demands.

Keywords: character education, Sekolah Penggerak, CIPPO model, student character development, global competitiveness.

Introduction

Character education has increasingly attracted attention in global educational discourse as societies face complex challenges brought about by globalization, digital transformation, and shifting social values (Berkowitz & Bier, 2022; OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Contemporary educational debates emphasize that schools are no longer responsible solely for academic achievement but also for fostering moral values, social responsibility, and civic awareness among students as part of holistic education (Carsiwan, 2024; Hadi et al., 2025). In many countries, including Indonesia, concerns have emerged regarding students' declining ethical sensitivity, social engagement, and critical judgment, highlighting the urgency of strengthening character education within formal schooling.

Scholars and education experts respond to these concerns by emphasizing that character education should be systematically embedded within school practices rather than treated as an add-on to academic instruction (Berkowitz & Bier, 2022; OECD, 2021;

UNESCO, 2021). Research underscores that effective character education contributes to the development of ethical reasoning, collaborative skills, and reflective thinking, which are essential competencies in a globally competitive environment (Hadi et al., 2025). These perspectives reinforce the argument that character education must be supported by coherent policies, instructional leadership, and school culture to ensure meaningful internalization of values.

At the national level, Indonesia has addressed this issue through curriculum reform and school-based innovation. The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Sekolah Penggerak Program reflects a policy response aimed at integrating character education into learning processes, leadership practices, and school culture (Widaningsih et al., 2023). This initiative positions character education as a foundational component of educational quality, emphasizing integrity, discipline, cooperation, and social awareness as key outcomes of schooling alongside academic competence.

Empirical studies, however, reveal that the implementation of character education in schools remains uneven. Several researchers report that character education is often applied inconsistently, lacks cross-subject integration, and is insufficiently supported by institutional systems and stakeholder collaboration (Handoko et al., 2024). Moreover, much of the existing research focuses on instructional strategies or subject-based implementation, particularly at the elementary school level (Carsiwan, 2024). As a result, there is limited empirical evidence evaluating how character education is implemented within comprehensive reform programs such as Sekolah Penggerak, especially at the senior high school level.

Recent studies have provided valuable insights into the implementation of character education in Indonesian schools, yet several limitations remain. Studies by Handoko et al. (2024) primarily examined classroom-based practices, teacher strategies, or curriculum implementation, with limited attention to evaluating the overall effectiveness of school-wide character education programs. Likewise, Carsiwan (2024) emphasized character development in elementary education but did not investigate how institutional leadership, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and educational outcomes interact within large-scale educational reform initiatives. International studies have similarly highlighted the importance of comprehensive evaluation frameworks for character education, arguing that sustainable character development depends on the alignment of educational policies, school leadership, organizational culture, teaching

practices, and community participation rather than isolated classroom interventions (Berkowitz & Bier, 2022; Nucci et al., 2024). Nevertheless, empirical studies employing comprehensive evaluation models to assess these interrelated dimensions remain scarce, particularly in the context of Indonesia's Sekolah Penggerak Program at the senior secondary level.

This gap highlights the novelty of the present study. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined classroom practices or curriculum implementation, this study evaluates character education as an integrated school reform initiative by employing the CIPPO evaluation model. The model enables a comprehensive assessment of contextual readiness, institutional inputs, instructional processes, program implementation, and educational outcomes within the Sekolah Penggerak Program. Focusing on senior high schools, this study provides empirical evidence regarding how leadership, school culture, stakeholder participation, and learning practices collectively contribute to students' character development. Therefore, the research extends the existing literature by offering a holistic evaluation framework for character education implementation in Indonesia's educational reform context.

Method

This study employed an evaluative research design to assess the implementation of character education within the Sekolah Penggerak program as an effort to enhance the quality of education in response to global competitiveness. An evaluative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed not only to document implementation practices, but also to systematically examine program effectiveness and generate evidence to support program improvement and policy decision-making. Evaluative research has been widely recognized as suitable for education programs involving policy interventions and institutional change, as it provides a structured basis for assessing program merit and effectiveness (Rossi et al., 2004; Schwandt & Gates, 2021).

The evaluation adopted a program evaluation design using the Context, Input, Process, Product, and Outcome (CIPPO) model. The CIPPO model was derived from the CIPP evaluation framework developed by Stufflebeam and was expanded by incorporating an outcome component to assess longer-term program impacts (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). This model was selected because it enabled a comprehensive and systematic examination of educational programs, including policy context and needs, institutional

readiness and resources, implementation processes, program outputs, and program outcomes. The holistic nature of the CIPPO model aligns with contemporary approaches to educational program evaluation that emphasize system-oriented assessment (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017).

This study applied a descriptive qualitative approach supported by quantitative descriptive data. The qualitative approach was used to explore in depth how character education was planned and implemented at the school level, as well as how stakeholders perceived the program. Quantitative data were used to provide a numerical overview of students' perceptions of character education outcomes. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data allowed for a more comprehensive interpretation of findings and strengthened the evaluation results, consistent with mixed-methods research principles in educational evaluation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The population of this study consisted of all senior high schools in Jambi City that had participated in the Sekolah Penggerak Program. The research sample was selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which participants or research sites are intentionally chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Patton, 2015). This technique was considered appropriate because the study sought to evaluate the implementation of character education within schools that had completed the Sekolah Penggerak Program and possessed sufficient experience to provide comprehensive information regarding program implementation. Accordingly, three former Sekolah Penggerak senior high schools were purposively selected because they had completed the implementation phase of character education initiatives and were therefore considered information-rich cases for program evaluation (Patton, 2015).

Research participants included school principals or vice principals responsible for curriculum management, teachers, and students. Principals or vice principals were selected as key informants due to their role in institutional leadership and policy implementation. Teachers participated as implementers of character education in instructional and school-wide activities, while students were involved as direct recipients of the program. The selection of participants followed the principle of information-rich cases, which is commonly applied in qualitative evaluation research (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The research instruments were developed based on the evaluation objectives and the CIPPO

framework to ensure alignment with each evaluation component. Content validity of the instruments was established through expert judgment by an educational psychologist, who has expertise in educational assessment and character education, following established procedures for instrument development and validation in educational research (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data related to the product and outcome components of character education. It consisted of 18 closed-ended statements developed from established character education frameworks and indicators aligned with twenty-first-century competencies, including critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (Binkley et al., 2012). A dichotomous response scale (agree/disagree) was employed to obtain clear, consistent, and objective responses from students, particularly for measuring the presence or absence of specific attitudes and behaviors (Allen & Yen, 2002; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals or vice principals and teachers to obtain in-depth qualitative data related to the context, input, process, product, and outcome components of the CIPPO evaluation model. The interview guidelines were developed based on established character education frameworks, the principles of the Sekolah Penggerak Program, and the four core competencies of twenty-first-century learning, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). This interview format allowed flexibility to explore participants' experiences and perspectives while maintaining consistency across interviews, consistent with recommendations for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Kallio et al., 2016).

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency tabulation and percentage calculations for each statement. The results were interpreted using predetermined category criteria to describe the level of achievement of character education indicators, as commonly applied in educational evaluation studies (Sugiyono, 2022). Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). To enhance the credibility of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing data from principals, teachers, and students, and by corroborating interview findings with

questionnaire data and relevant school documents, following established criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results and Discussion

This research was conducted at three public senior high schools in Jambi City, Indonesia, all of which had participated in the Sekolah Penggerak Program. The identities of the participating schools have been withheld to ensure institutional confidentiality. The schools were purposively selected because they shared similar characteristics as public senior high schools while exhibiting variations in the implementation of character education, thereby providing a comprehensive basis for program evaluation.

Geographically and socially, the three schools are located in environments with heterogeneous student backgrounds. Students come from families with diverse social, economic, and cultural conditions, so schools face challenges in building uniform and sustainable character. This condition makes character education a strategic necessity in shaping positive student behavior and attitudes.

1. Context (Character Education Context)

The implementation of character education in Sekolah Penggerak is strongly influenced by the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasizes not only academic achievement but also the cultivation of student character to prepare learners for global challenges. Recent studies indicate that effective character education in the 21st century must be closely integrated with key competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication to ensure that students remain adaptive and socially responsible in rapidly changing environments (Zaenudin et al., 2023). The school principal highlighted that character education is an urgent priority for developing students who demonstrate integrity, adaptability, and the ability to compete on a global scale.



Figure 1. Interview with the Principal

The diverse social backgrounds of students, including variations in family environment and cultural norms, play a significant role in character education planning. Schools recognize that without structured interventions, such diversity may lead to behavioral challenges and gaps in attitudes, making the systematic implementation of character education a fundamental component of learning.

At the national level, policies such as the Sekolah Penggerak Program and the Merdeka Curriculum provide a robust framework for schools to develop character education initiatives. The Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility that allows educators to embed character values directly into learning activities, promoting contextualized and student-centered approaches (Putri et al., 2023; Slamet et al., 2024). This curricular flexibility has been found to strengthen the internalization of character values in ways that are responsive to both local needs and broader educational goals.

Community support within the school is another key contextual factor. Teachers, school staff, and parents increasingly share the understanding that character education is a responsibility of all educators, not limited to those teaching religious or civic subjects. This shared perspective contributes to a school environment that nurtures character development.

Finally, the rapid development of digital technology also shapes the context for character education. Schools recognize both opportunities and challenges arising from students' engagement with digital media. As a result, digital literacy and ethical use of technology have become essential components of character education, as these skills are critical for global competitiveness and responsible participation in digital society (Slamet et al., 2024).

2. Input (Character Education Resources)

Regarding input, schools demonstrated that significant resources were available and well-prepared to support the implementation of character education. Teachers at the selected Sekolah Penggerak schools had participated in professional development related to the Merdeka Curriculum, differentiated instruction, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which are foundational for character-based learning innovation. This human resource readiness aligns with research indicating that systematic planning and competent teaching capacity are essential components of successful character education implementation (Rambe, Marpaung, & Nasution, 2024).



Figure 2. Teacher Training Documentation

Character education planning was documented in formal school curriculum documents, lesson plans, and P5 modules, which clearly articulated character values as part of learning objectives and instructional activities. By integrating character values explicitly into these documents, schools ensured that character education was embedded in both curriculum structure and daily practice, reflecting the broader trend in Indonesia that character planning should be deliberate and structured rather than incidental.

In addition to human resources and planning documentation, school facilities and infrastructure contributed to the supportive environment for character education. Worship spaces, open areas for student interaction, and a clean, well-maintained school environment were used intentionally as learning media to reinforce character values through real-world experience and daily routines.



Figure 3. Facilities and Infrastructure Documentation

From an internal policy perspective, school leaders provided active support through institutional regulations and efforts to nurture a positive school culture that encouraged character development. Principals allocated dedicated time for habit-forming activities and

P5 projects, demonstrating that managerial and policy inputs were implemented effectively to back character education initiatives.

3. Process (Character Education Implementation Process)

The process of implementing character education at Sekolah Penggerak involved a deliberate integration of learning across intracurricular, cocurricular, and habituation activities. Within the intracurricular setting, teachers actively embedded character values into classroom instruction by using discussion, group work, and reflective practice as part of everyday learning. These strategies enabled students to engage with character values contextually, encouraging them to relate ethical principles to real learning tasks. Research on character education shows that integrating values through project-based learning and collaborative class activities can support the development of character alongside academic skills (Wulandari et al., 2025).

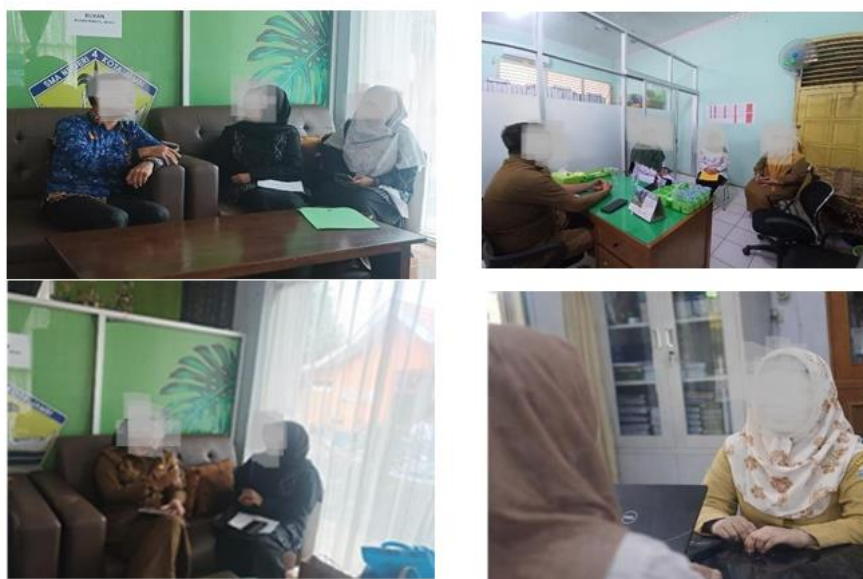


Figure 4. Interview with Teachers

In cocurricular activities, the school implemented the P5 program with themes that directly related to character building and global competitiveness. Students participated in collaborative projects that required cooperation, responsibility, and creativity, fostering their sense of ownership, teamwork, and social responsibility. Project-based learning approaches like these have been identified as effective means of developing 21st-century competencies, including character, critical thinking, and communication, when thoughtfully integrated into school programs (Arianda, Y.D. et al., 2024).

Daily habituation practices were also key components of the process. Routine activities such as maintaining time discipline, keeping the school environment clean, and participating in school-led social routines served as practical expressions of character education. Habituation reinforces character values by embedding them into students' daily experiences, making them lived practices rather than abstract concepts. Studies on habituation in character education highlight that consistent practice helps students internalize positive behaviors and social norms that contribute to moral development (Safitri, L.N. et al., 2025).

Throughout this process, teachers played a central role as role models, demonstrating attitudes and behaviors that students could observe and emulate. The significance of role modelling in character education has been underscored in recent research, which notes that teachers demonstrated values often shape students' understanding and enactment of character traits (Sukarni, 2025).

4. Product (Character Education Results Based on Questionnaires)

The analysis of questionnaire results revealed that students at the three Sekolah Penggerak senior high schools demonstrated relatively high levels of character achievement across multiple indicators. Most character indicators received an approval rate above 80 percent, with some reaching near or full agreement, suggesting strong internalization of character values. Table 1. summarizes these results according to the character indicators assessed.

For example, indicators related to honesty and integrity showed very high averages, suggesting that students were able to acknowledge mistakes and uphold ethical behavior. Research on school culture and character development confirms that when character education is implemented consistently within school environments, it can significantly contribute to students' moral and ethical development (Sumarno, E. et. al., 2025).

Indicators of responsibility and independent learning were also high, indicating that most students could complete tasks on time and work autonomously. Studies have found that character education, when integrated with supportive policies and learning structures, enhances student autonomy and responsibility (Maulana et al., 2024).

Collaboration, tolerance, and diversity indicators were similarly strong, pointing to students' ability to work together and appreciate differences. This aligns with findings that structured character education practices support the development of tolerance, empathy, and cooperation—competencies essential for positive social engagement (Carsiwan, 2024).

Table 1. Summary of Character Education Questionnaire Results.

No	Character Education Indicators	SMA A (%)	SMA B (%)	SMA B (%)	Rata-rata (%)
1	Honesty and integrity of students	80,5	95,5	96,0	90,7
2	Responsibility in learning	84,0	90,5	92,0	88,8
3	Independence in learning	84,0	87,0	89,0	86,7
4	Cooperation and collaboration	85,5	90,3	96,5	90,8
5	Global tolerance and diversity	94,0	98,0	98,0	96,7
6	Discipline and compliance with rules	90,5	97,0	98,5	95,3
7	Social responsibility and environmental awareness	97,0	99,0	99,0	98,3
8	Critical thinking skills	90,5	99,5	98,5	96,2
9	Ethics and responsibility in the use of digital technology	100,0	98,0	100,0	99,3

Furthermore, the discipline and social responsibility indicators reflected high agreement, indicating that students exhibited disciplined behavior and concern for their school environment. Research literature underscores that a positive school culture combined with character education contributes to students' disciplined conduct and social responsibility (Sumarno, E. et. al., 2025).

Finally, digital literacy and ethical technology use indicators were among the highest, suggesting students' strong awareness of responsible behavior in digital contexts. Recent studies highlight that character education integrated with digital literacy initiatives can shape students' ethical use of technology and digital competencies.

Overall, the questionnaire results demonstrate that character education at the Sekolah Penggerak schools has been implemented effectively, yielding positive outcomes in students' attitudes, values, and behaviors that extend beyond academic achievement.

5. Outcome (Impact on Global Competitiveness)

The outcomes of character education were further supported by both questionnaire and interview data. Across the three schools, the majority of character indicators consistently received high approval rates, reflecting students' development in areas such as integrity, discipline, collaboration, critical thinking, and digital responsibility (Hanafiah et al., 2024; Maulana et al., 2024). These outcomes resonate with research showing that character education plays a significant role in shaping personality traits and preparing

students to engage constructively in diverse and complex social environments (Carsiwan, 2024).

Digital literacy and ethical use of technology were among the strongest outcomes observed. Interviews revealed that students regularly used digital tools to support learning while demonstrating awareness of verifying information before sharing it online (Nurazizah & Junaidi, 2025). The positive relationship between character education and responsible digital behavior is supported by literature on education in the digital era, which emphasizes the need for integrating moral values with technological competencies.

Students also displayed high levels of critical thinking, with questionnaire data showing above-average percentages for indicators related to reflective and analytical skills (Maulana et al., 2024). Teachers noted that instructional practices centered on discussion, problem solving, and reflection encouraged students to question information critically—an important component of 21st-century competencies and global readiness (Putri et al., 2023).

Indicators of collaboration, tolerance, and respect for diversity were also significantly high, with interview responses confirming that students were accustomed to working collaboratively and respecting differences of opinion (Carsiwan, 2024). These findings reflect the role of character education in reinforcing social competencies that are essential in multicultural societies and the global workforce, as documented in recent literature (Astuti et al., 2023).

Overall, the combined evidence from questionnaires and interviews indicates that consistent and integrated character education contributed positively to students' global competitiveness by fostering strengths in integrity, social responsibility, digital ethics, and interpersonal skills (Hanafiah et al., 2024; Nurazizah & Junaidi, 2025).

Conclusion and Suggestion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of character education within the Sekolah Penggerak program has been effective in nurturing students' personal, social, and cognitive competencies. The success of the program is supported by strong institutional policies, active engagement from teachers and parents, and the deliberate integration of character values into intracurricular, co-curricular, and daily habituation activities. Students consistently exhibit integrity, responsibility, collaboration, critical thinking, and ethical digital behavior, reflecting the positive impact of a holistic and well-coordinated approach to character development.

To sustain and enhance these outcomes, it is recommended that schools continue to strengthen teacher capacity, integrate character education explicitly within the curriculum, and actively involve the broader school community. Emphasizing regular evaluation and promoting digital literacy with ethical awareness are crucial for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of character education. Such efforts will equip students not only with academic skills but also with the character and competencies needed to navigate global challenges and contribute meaningfully to society.

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