

## A Comparative Study of Character Education Models in Japan and Indonesia: Implications for Strengthening Islamic Education

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Article info	Abstract
<p><b>Article History</b>  <b>Received:</b>                      04/03/2026  <b>Revised:</b>                      26/03/2026  <b>Accepted:</b>                      28/04/2026</p>	<p><i>This study aims to analyze the comparison of character education models in Japan and Indonesia and their implications for strengthening Islamic education. Character education has become a central focus in global education systems as it plays a crucial role in developing students' moral values and social responsibility beyond cognitive intelligence. This study employed a qualitative approach with a comparative method. Data were collected through documentation studies of books, scientific journals, and relevant policy documents and analyzed using content analysis. The findings reveal that both Japan and Indonesia place moral development as an essential component of their national education systems. However, each country demonstrates distinctive characteristics and approaches shaped by their philosophical, social, and cultural foundations. The comparison indicates that the effectiveness of character education is determined not merely by the number of instructional hours but by the consistency of implementation, the strength of supportive cultural environments, and the synergy among schools, families, and communities in fostering students' character development. These character education models also have implications for strengthening Islamic education through curricular integration and the development of moderate, tolerant, and globally minded character.</i></p>
<p>✉                      Corresponding author</p>	<p><i>Keywords: Comparative Study, Character Education, Islamic Education, Japan, Indonesian</i></p>
	<p><b>Abstrak</b></p> <p>Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbandingan model pendidikan karakter di Jepang dan Indonesia serta implikasinya terhadap penguatan pendidikan Islam. Pendidikan karakter menjadi fokus penting dalam sistem pendidikan global karena berperan dalam membentuk peserta didik yang tidak hanya cerdas secara kognitif, tetapi juga memiliki nilai moral dan tanggung jawab sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode komparatif. Data diperoleh melalui studi dokumentasi terhadap buku, jurnal ilmiah, dan dokumen kebijakan yang relevan, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis isi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan karakter di Jepang dan Indonesia sama-sama menempatkan pembentukan moral sebagai bagian penting dalam sistem pendidikan nasional. Namun, keduanya memiliki corak dan pendekatan yang berbeda sesuai dengan landasan filosofis, sosial, dan budaya masing-masing negara. Perbandingan ini menunjukkan bahwa efektivitas pendidikan karakter tidak hanya ditentukan oleh jumlah jam pembelajaran, tetapi oleh konsistensi implementasi, kekuatan budaya pendukung, serta sinergi antara sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat dalam membangun karakter peserta didik secara berkelanjutan. Model pendidikan karakter tersebut berimplikasi pada penguatan pendidikan Islam melalui integrasi dalam kurikulum serta pembentukan karakter yang moderat, toleran, dan berwawasan global.</p> <p><b>Kata Kunci:</b> Studi Komparatif, Pendidikan Karakter, Pendidikan Islam, Jepang, Indonesia</p>

## **INTRODUCTION**

The meaning of education is clearly stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas), which states that: “National education functions to develop capabilities and shape the character and dignified civilization of the nation in order to educate the life of the nation, aiming to develop the potential of students so that they become human beings who believe in and fear God Almighty, possess noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens” (Law No. 20 of 2003). Education is not merely intended to improve students’ knowledge but is also closely related to the formation of children's character (Manalu, 2024). In a global context, education is currently facing ethical decline as a consequence of technological advancement and globalization (M. I. Yunita et al., 2025). UNESCO emphasizes that education should not only focus on cognitive aspects but also develop students’ competencies, values, ethics, and habits (UNESCO, 2021). This perspective aligns with the definition of education stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Therefore, character education becomes an essential component in shaping a generation that possesses integrity and responsibility.

From an Islamic perspective, character education constitutes the core of the educational process itself. Islamic education views character formation as a process of cultivating noble morals through the transfer and internalization of Qur’anic values with an emphasis on both value dimensions and behavioral practices (Sauqy & Permana, 2022). Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad as a role model for Muslims emphasized that his primary mission in educating humanity was to perfect human morals (Anwar, 2022). This indicates that character education is a fundamental objective of Islamic education. Consequently, Islamic education plays a crucial role in instilling religious values that contribute to the formation of students’ character (Syahrudin et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, character education has become a central issue and a national priority in efforts to improve the quality of human resources, as mandated in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Amalita et al., 2024). Character education has been integrated into the national education system and incorporated into various subjects, particularly Islamic Religious Education and Character Education. The Strengthening Character Education Program (Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter/PPK) aims to instill moral deepening, spirituality, faith and devotion to God, active citizenship participation, and academic excellence (Kemendikbud, 2017). However, challenges remain in the process of internalizing character values among students. Many educators have not fully understood the comprehensive concept of character education, and learning practices still emphasize academic and cognitive achievement, while the affective aspect of values tends to be treated as secondary (Nurhayati & Sumarni, 2025). Therefore, a more effective and contextual model for character education development in Indonesia is needed, particularly within the framework of Islamic education.

Meanwhile, Japan is widely recognized as a country that has successfully developed the character of its younger generation through a consistent and integrated educational system. Moral education in Japan is not merely positioned as a formal subject but is deeply embedded in all aspects of school life. Since the 1970s, the Japanese government has systematically designed character education through a holistic and experience-based approach (Nurhayati & Sumarni, 2025). This model emphasizes character formation through habituation and direct practice, which aligns with the concepts of character education in Islam, such as *adab* (proper conduct) and exemplary behavior (*uswah*) (Anwar, 2022). The success of character education in Japan has not only produced individuals who are academically competent but also individuals who possess strong moral character and well-developed social skills (Aulia & Saputro, 2024).

Through this study, the author is interested in conducting a comparative analysis of character education models in Japan and Indonesia. Although numerous studies have examined this topic, a more comprehensive analysis is still needed that not only compares the models but also examines their implications for the formation of students' character within Islamic education. Comparative studies can reveal the uniqueness and variations of character-related issues along with the solutions implemented in different countries, thereby generating new insights that may be effective in the implementation of character education, particularly in Indonesia (Amalita et al., 2024). By examining the character education models of Japan and Indonesia, this research is expected to contribute to the development of character education based on Islamic values that is more effective and contextually relevant.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine and compare character education models implemented in Japan and Indonesia and to explore their implications for strengthening Islamic education. A comparative perspective was applied in order to analyze the characteristics of character education systems in different national contexts. Comparative education research enables scholars to identify similarities, differences, strengths, and limitations within educational systems, thereby providing insights that can inform educational development and reform (Bray et al., 2014). In this study, the comparison focuses on several key aspects, including the conceptual foundations, objectives, implementation strategies, and value orientations of character education in both countries, as well as their relevance to the principles of Islamic education.

### **Data Sources**

The data used in this research were derived from various academic and policy-related sources discussing character education in Japan and Indonesia. These sources

include scholarly journal articles, books, policy documents, and official reports that examine educational practices, character education frameworks, and the integration of moral values within educational systems. Such sources provide a comprehensive perspective on how character education is conceptualized and implemented within each national context. By examining a range of credible and scholarly materials, the study seeks to obtain a holistic understanding of the philosophical foundations and practical applications of character education in both countries.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through systematic documentation techniques by identifying and compiling relevant academic literature and educational policy documents related to character education in Japan and Indonesia. The selection of sources was guided by their relevance to the themes of character education, moral education policies, and the integration of values within educational practices. Through this process, various perspectives and findings from previous studies were gathered to support the comparative analysis conducted in this research.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data was conducted using content analysis, which involves identifying, categorizing, and interpreting relevant information from the selected sources in a systematic manner. This analytical process enables the researcher to extract key themes related to the conceptual framework, implementation strategies, and educational values embedded in character education practices in both countries. The findings were then compared to identify patterns, similarities, and differences between the two educational contexts. Through this analytical approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how character education models in Japan and Indonesia can contribute to the strengthening of Islamic education values.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Character Education Models in Japan and Indonesia**

Etymologically, character refers to disposition, temperament, personality, and morals. Terminologically, character is understood as the fundamental nature of human beings that is formed and influenced by various factors throughout their lives. Character represents a set of values related to the relationship with God Almighty, oneself, fellow human beings, the environment, and the nation, which are manifested in patterns of thought, attitudes, feelings, speech, and actions based on religious, legal, social, and cultural norms (Syamsyurijal, 2021). Character education is a systematic, comprehensive, and structured effort to instill moral principles that include integrity, justice, empathy, responsibility, and respect for oneself and others (Irmayati et al., 2025). Character education aims to strengthen students' morality and virtuous traits, because without strong morals and character, the knowledge obtained in school may be

misused (Alimron et al., 2023). Ki Hajar Dewantara viewed character as temperament or moral conduct (*budi pekerti*), therefore individuals who possess character are regarded as civilized human beings. The success of education is not merely measured by cognitive intelligence but also by the ability to produce civilized individuals (Y. Yunita & Mujib, 2021). Thus, character education can be interpreted as a comprehensive effort to instill moral and ethical values so that students become individuals with good personalities and civilized behavior toward themselves, toward God, toward fellow human beings, and toward the environment.

Each country has its own model of character education. This is because curricula, perspectives, environments, and cultural traditions that form the background of education differ from one society to another. Educational models are therefore adjusted according to the characteristics of the society in which they are implemented. In this context, education cannot be separated from cultural values and social systems that shape it. One country widely recognized for its strong character and moral values is Japan. Mulyadi (2014) explains that the Japanese people believe that humans possess the potential to improve and develop themselves through personal effort as well as interaction with others. They do not fully accept the notion that human conditions and character are fixed or cannot be changed. In Japan, moral education is known as *doutoku-kyouiku*, which literally means moral education. *Doutoku-kyouiku* refers to moral instruction conducted in schools from elementary school to senior high school (Nurfadhilah et al., 2024).

The Japanese school system follows a 6–3–3–4 structure, consisting of six years of elementary school (*shougakkou*), three years of junior high school (*chuugakkou*), three years of senior high school (*koutougakkou*), and four years or more of higher education (*daigaku*). Within this structured learning period, students study general subjects that are not significantly different from those in other countries. However, a distinctive feature of the Japanese system is the presence of moral training at every educational level aimed at cultivating strong work ethics, loyalty, perseverance, patience, and responsibility. The Japanese education program includes three major components: specialized academic subjects, moral education, and special activities. Moral education is allocated approximately 34–35 instructional hours per year, equivalent to about 3.3–4.0% of the total instructional hours at each level, with a weekly one-hour guidance session (Nadila & Alam, 2024).

Mulyadi (2014) explains that students in Japan learn through a system known as learning by doing. In Japanese, this approach is referred to as *kakari*, through which students are guided to take responsibility for duties they determine themselves. The Japanese educational model known as *tokkatsu* guides students to actively participate in collaboratively designed activities with clear task distribution for each group member. Therefore, the implementation of character education in Japan is carried out through various activities such as school cleaning duties, shared lunchtime activities, sports,

organizing personal belongings, and fulfilling responsibilities through daily routines within the school environment (Irmayati et al., 2025).

In addition to schools, moral education is also considered the responsibility of families and communities. Japan establishes strong collaboration between schools, families, and society in shaping students' character. Parents in Japan not only support their children's learning activities at home but also actively participate in parent meetings, school events, and even joint school cleaning activities. Japanese communities are also actively involved in supporting programs aimed at instilling social and moral behavior in students (Harahap et al., 2024).

In practice, according to Mulyadi as cited in Syamsyurijal (2021), several methods are used to instill character education in Japan. One example is Arigatou Pasuto Itto, which refers to gratitude stickers displayed to express appreciation to friends for their help. This activity teaches children to express gratitude to others who assist them. Another practice is Chiiki Anzen Mappu, or community safety maps, implemented in Japanese schools to develop students' awareness and concern for their surrounding environment. Cooperative education is also emphasized, highlighting the importance of cleanliness and responsibility for assigned tasks. Students are also trained to always set personal goals, starting from simple objectives such as arriving at school on time or waking up early. Another activity includes handwritten newspapers (Tegaki Shinbun) created by students with attractive designs. Additionally, empathy is developed through concise and communicative messages that prevent students from experiencing boredom during learning activities.

The integration of moral education within the Japanese curriculum from the earliest educational levels demonstrates that the Japanese education system places character formation, morality, and ethics as the primary foundation before strengthening students' cognitive aspects. The implementation of *doutoku-kyouiku*, which internalizes values through daily activities, habituates students to develop discipline, responsibility, respect for others, and collective awareness within society. The involvement of families and communities in supporting students' moral education further strengthens the internalization of values. Consequently, each component plays an important role in shaping the moral character of Japanese society. This phenomenon demonstrates that the moral character of Japanese society is the result of a systematic and continuous educational process rather than an instant outcome. The moral quality and personality of Japanese citizens can therefore be understood as a consequence of the strong integration of character education within both the educational system and social life.

While Japan integrates moral education strongly through *doutoku-kyouiku* and school culture, character education in Indonesia is developed through national curriculum policies grounded in the values of Pancasila and religious education. Similar to Japan, character education in Indonesia also begins at the elementary school level. Subjects used to teach morals and character in Indonesia include Islamic Religious Education, Ethics Education, and Civic Education. Indonesia allocates four hours per

week for character education and approximately 150 hours of learning per year. This indicates that Indonesia spends more instructional time on character education than Japan (Nadila & Alam, 2024).

The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture has established eighteen core character values implemented in every learning activity. These include religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, nationalism, peace-loving attitudes, love of reading, social and environmental responsibility, and appreciation of achievement (Wulandari et al., 2025). The curriculum currently implemented in Indonesia is the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. In the process of character formation, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum incorporates learning activities known as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project is formulated through student characteristics such as faith in God Almighty, noble character, cooperation, critical thinking, global diversity awareness, independence, and creativity (Aulia & Saputro, 2024). Character education within the Pancasila Student Profile involves the development of moral values, ethics, and attitudes aligned with the principles of Pancasila and requires practical implementation in students' daily lives (Amalita et al., 2024).

Character education in Indonesia is also inseparable from the contribution of parents and the community. As the closest environment to children, families or parents play an important role in raising awareness, instilling, and developing children's character (Suarningsih et al., 2024). However, in practice, character education in Indonesia tends to be centered primarily in schools, with schools functioning as facilitators of character development programs. Families contribute separately by educating children at home through the development of personal attitudes and moral behavior. Some schools in Indonesia have attempted to strengthen parental involvement, yet many parents face difficulties participating directly due to time constraints and work priorities (Harahap et al., 2024). The community also plays an important role in shaping students' character, as community-based education requires active participation from society in fostering students' moral development (Suarningsih et al., 2024).

Character education in Indonesia essentially follows cultural values embedded within the nation's ideological foundation. The integration of character education into the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project represents an effort to build students' moral development based on religious values and Pancasila as the national ideology. This implementation indicates that character education in Indonesia is not only oriented toward the development of individual moral character but also toward strengthening national identity and social responsibility in civic life. Therefore, character education in Indonesia reflects a religious-nationalist orientation that places faith and nationalism as the primary foundations for shaping students' holistic personalities.

## **Comparison of Character Education Models in Japan and Indonesia**

Based on the character education models in Japan and Indonesia described above, both countries demonstrate distinctive approaches in implementing character education, which makes comparative analysis necessary to identify similarities and differences. Character education models in both countries position moral formation as an essential component within their national education systems. However, each country reflects different orientations and approaches in accordance with their philosophical, social, and cultural foundations.

Japan develops character education through a humanistic-communal orientation that emphasizes social harmony and collective awareness. Moral education through *doutoku-kyouiku* is not merely a formal subject but is internalized within school culture through consistent and systematic habituation. Strong synergy among schools, families, and communities ensures that value formation occurs continuously in students' daily lives. In contrast, character education in Indonesia reflects a religious-nationalist orientation grounded in religious values and Pancasila. Its implementation is structured within the national curriculum, including the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project as well as subjects such as Religious Education and Civic Education. However, in practice, character education in Indonesia remains largely centered within educational institutions, while the involvement of families and communities has not yet been fully integrated consistently.

Another difference can be observed in the orientation of values emphasized in each country. Japan places greater emphasis on discipline, collective responsibility, and adherence to social norms as the foundation for societal harmony. Meanwhile, Indonesia prioritizes the development of religious identity, nationalism, and the value of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) as distinctive characteristics of national character. Nevertheless, both countries share a common perspective in viewing education as the primary means of moral formation implemented from early educational levels and structured systematically within their respective national education systems.

Thus, this comparison demonstrates that the effectiveness of character education is not solely determined by the number of instructional hours but rather by the consistency of implementation, the strength of supporting cultural values, and the synergy between schools, families, and communities in shaping students' character continuously. Considering the significant similarities in the objectives of moral development in both countries, Indonesia can adopt several practical approaches from Japan, particularly in terms of consistent value habituation through school culture and strengthening the synergy between schools, families, and communities.

## **Implications of Character Education Models for Strengthening Islamic Education**

The comparison of character education models shows that the success of moral formation largely depends on the consistent and sustainable internalization of values. In the context of Islamic education, character education cannot be implemented solely

through cognitive learning but requires the cultivation of akhlaq al-karimah, namely the transformation of Qur'anic values into children's lives with an emphasis on affective dimensions and the manifestation of values in daily practices (Sauqy & Permana, 2022). Such development is carried out through habituation and exemplary behavior (uswatun hasanah). Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and empathy must be integrated into students' daily practices so that they become individuals with noble character (Sodikin et al., 2025).

Strengthening Islamic education also requires the integration of curriculum and school culture. Islamic Religious Education cannot stand alone but must be reinforced through complementary learning practices such as discipline culture, school regulations, religious activities, and co-curricular programs such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. Through this approach, Islamic education is not merely understood theoretically but can be applied in real-life situations and become part of students' everyday experiences within the educational environment. By integrating character education values into Islamic education and implementing them in daily life, students are expected to develop both religious and nationalistic character.

Furthermore, synergy between schools, families, and communities is essential in Islamic education to ensure the effectiveness of value internalization. Parents hold responsibility for providing foundational education, particularly in moral, ethical, and social domains that shape children's character development (Putri et al., 2025). Likewise, the surrounding social environment influences students' character formation. When the social environment supports positive character development, the strengthening of Islamic education becomes more effective. Therefore, continuous collaboration among these three components is an essential prerequisite for developing consistent and sustainable Islamic character.

Finally, strengthening Islamic education must also be directed toward developing moderate, tolerant, and contextually responsive character in accordance with contemporary societal developments. Islamic education does not merely aim to produce individuals who perform religious rituals but also individuals who can coexist harmoniously within pluralistic societies. Through learning processes that integrate religious teachings with national insights, students can understand that being a devout Muslim does not negate their identity as citizens of a nation (Amiruddin, 2025). By maintaining a balanced approach between religiosity and social responsibility, Islamic education can serve as a fundamental foundation for building generations who possess noble character and strong national awareness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Character education is a comprehensive effort to instill moral and ethical values so that students develop good personalities and demonstrate civilized behavior toward themselves, God, others, and the environment. The implementation of character education exists in every country and is integrated into national education systems. In

Japan, character education has successfully produced generations characterized by strong moral principles, diligence, discipline, and cooperation. It is introduced from the elementary level and consistently practiced in daily school life through simple activities that significantly influence moral development. In Indonesia, character education is integrated into the national curriculum through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which aims to cultivate students who possess religious character and strong national awareness.

The implications of character education models for strengthening Islamic education can be seen in the integration of complementary learning activities that reinforce Islamic Religious Education in developing religious and nationalistic character. Sustainable collaboration among schools, teachers, families, and communities is essential in fostering consistent Islamic character development. Furthermore, Islamic education should be directed toward shaping generations who are moderate, tolerant, and responsive to contemporary developments, so that Islam is not merely viewed as an identity but as a fundamental foundation for nurturing morally upright and nationally conscious individuals.

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