



The Role of The School Environment in Shaping Students' Character Through School Culture

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Abstract

Character formation has become an increasingly important concern in contemporary education due to rapid social and technological changes that influence students' behavior and values. This study examines the role of the school environment in shaping students' character through school culture using a qualitative literature review approach. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and academic publications related to character education, school culture, and school environmental factors. The findings indicate that character development is influenced by the interaction of several school environmental components, including teacher role modeling, school culture and climate, habituation practices, extracurricular activities, and social interactions. These components function as an integrated educational ecosystem that supports the internalization of values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and respect. The review further reveals that character education is most effective when institutional values are consistently reflected in daily school practices and reinforced through meaningful participation in school activities. Strengthening school culture is therefore essential for fostering sustainable character development and supporting students' holistic growth.

Keywords: Character Development, Extracurricular Activities, School Culture, School Environment, Social Interaction.



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INTRODUCTION

Character formation remains one of the fundamental objectives of contemporary education systems, particularly as schools are increasingly expected to cultivate ethical values, social responsibility, and civic awareness alongside academic achievement. Education is no longer understood merely as a mechanism for transmitting knowledge but as a transformative process through which learners develop attitudes, behaviors, and moral dispositions that enable meaningful participation in society (Nirra, 2018). The accelerating expansion of digital technologies, global connectivity, and social media ecosystems has substantially altered the socialization patterns of young people, creating unprecedented opportunities for access to information while simultaneously exposing students to influences that may undermine discipline, responsibility, empathy, and moral judgment (Tamaulina Br. Sembiring et al., 2024). Within this context, educational institutions face growing pressure to establish environments capable of counterbalancing these external influences through structured value transmission and character development processes. International discussions on educational quality increasingly recognize that the effectiveness of schooling should be evaluated not only through cognitive outcomes but also through its capacity to nurture positive character traits that support sustainable social development and responsible citizenship (Putri & Wiranata, 2025).

The centrality of the school environment in shaping student character has been widely documented across educational studies, although scholars have approached this relationship from diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological traditions. Research demonstrates that school environments characterized by supportive social interactions, positive learning climates, and value-oriented educational practices contribute significantly to students' behavioral development and moral growth (Farhan Saefudin Wahid, 2020). Empirical evidence further indicates that school culture functions as a collective mechanism through which institutional values are internalized and translated into daily behavioral practices among students (Rahayu et al., 2024). The influence of school culture

extends beyond formal instruction because shared norms, routines, and institutional expectations continuously shape students' perceptions of acceptable behavior and social responsibility (Saryanto et al., 2023). Similar findings reveal that character education becomes more effective when embedded within cultural practices and habitual activities that are consistently reinforced throughout the school environment rather than delivered solely through curricular content (Indrianingrum et al., 2024). Such observations suggest that character formation is not an isolated educational intervention but rather a multidimensional process emerging from the interaction between institutional culture, social relationships, and educational practices (Insani & Basuki, 2024).

Despite this growing body of evidence, existing scholarship reveals important conceptual and empirical inconsistencies regarding the mechanisms through which school environments influence character development. Several studies emphasize the role of leadership and organizational management in establishing value-oriented school cultures, arguing that institutional transformation begins with strategic governance and cultural stewardship (Khasanah et al., 2022). Other investigations prioritize teacher modeling as the primary determinant of students' moral learning because daily interactions with educators provide concrete examples of expected behaviors and attitudes (Kurniati & Muhdar, 2024). Additional research highlights extracurricular participation as a crucial arena where students acquire responsibility, cooperation, and self-discipline through experiential learning processes (Masnawati et al., 2019). Leadership-oriented perspectives further contend that sustainable school culture depends heavily on the vision and influence of educational leaders who shape organizational norms and collective expectations (Plaku & Leka, 2025). These divergent emphases indicate that while the importance of school environments is widely acknowledged, scholarly consensus remains limited regarding the relative significance of specific environmental dimensions and their interconnected influence on character formation.

The fragmented nature of previous findings becomes even more apparent when examining studies that focus on social interaction patterns, disciplinary culture, and contextual educational values. Research on social dynamics in schools demonstrates that student interactions play a crucial role in shaping behavioral norms and identity formation, suggesting that peer relationships may be equally influential as formal educational interventions (Yasin et al., 2024). Similar evidence from elementary educational settings illustrates how school environments contribute directly to the development of discipline and politeness, although the strength and sustainability of these effects vary considerably across institutional contexts (Rahmawati & Utomo, 2024). Investigations of social interaction within primary Islamic educational institutions reveal that character development is strongly influenced by everyday communicative practices and social experiences rather than solely by structured programs (Ixfina, 2024). Contemporary systematic reviews also identify significant variation in how schools implement disciplinary cultures and character-strengthening strategies, creating challenges for establishing generalized conclusions regarding effectiveness (Nasution et al., 2025). The persistence of contextual differences suggests a continuing need to examine character formation through integrative frameworks capable of accounting for multiple environmental influences operating simultaneously within educational settings.

The necessity of addressing these unresolved issues becomes increasingly urgent as educational institutions seek culturally relevant approaches to character development in rapidly changing social environments. Emerging literature argues that the integration of local wisdom and cultural values into educational practices offers a promising pathway for strengthening students' moral identity and social responsibility amid globalization pressures (Rohman, 2024). Similar perspectives advocate for curriculum models that systematically incorporate local cultural values as foundational components of character education rather than treating them as supplementary content (Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025). Studies examining school culture and student character consistently demonstrate positive relationships between institutional values and behavioral outcomes, yet many investigations remain limited by their tendency to isolate specific variables without examining broader environmental interactions (Wanti & Darmawan, 2024). Evidence from elementary educational contexts further suggests that the quality of the school environment significantly influences students' character formation, although the pathways through which this influence occurs remain insufficiently theorized and empirically validated (Shoumi & Yuris, 2024). Scholarly attention has also highlighted the broader contribution of school environments to character development, emphasizing the need for more comprehensive analyses

capable of integrating cultural, social, and institutional dimensions within a unified explanatory framework (Abdullah & Lasri, 2024).

This study positions itself within the ongoing scholarly debate concerning the role of educational environments in character formation by examining the influence of the school environment as an integrated ecosystem encompassing cultural practices, social interactions, institutional norms, and educational experiences. Rather than treating these dimensions as separate determinants, the research conceptualizes character development as an outcome emerging from their dynamic interrelationship within the school context. The study aims to analyze how the school environment contributes to the formation of students' character and to identify the environmental factors that most significantly shape behavioral and moral development. The anticipated contribution lies in extending existing theoretical understandings of character education through a holistic environmental perspective while providing methodological evidence that may inform the design of more effective character-building strategies in contemporary educational institutions..

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative literature review design to examine the role of the school environment in shaping students' character through school culture. As a non-empirical study, the research relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from scholarly publications relevant to character education, school culture, and school environmental factors. Data sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and academic publications published in national and international journals. The selection of literature was conducted purposively based on three criteria: (1) the studies addressed issues related to school environment, school culture, or character formation; (2) the publications provided empirical or theoretical discussions relevant to educational settings; and (3) the sources were accessible in full text and published within a reasonable timeframe to ensure contemporary relevance. The analytical framework was guided by the assumption that students' character development is influenced by the interaction between institutional culture, social relationships, educational practices, and environmental conditions within schools (Rahayu et al., 2024).

The collected literature was analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and conceptual relationships concerning the influence of the school environment on character development. The analysis involved several stages, including literature identification, data reduction, thematic categorization, interpretation of findings, and synthesis of evidence across studies. To enhance analytical rigor, data were examined through source triangulation by comparing findings from multiple studies and theoretical perspectives, allowing the identification of both convergent and divergent viewpoints within the literature (Insani & Basuki, 2024). The trustworthiness of the study was maintained through systematic documentation of the review process, transparent application of inclusion criteria, and critical evaluation of the credibility and relevance of each selected source. Since the study utilized publicly available academic publications and did not involve human participants, ethical concerns related to informed consent were not applicable; however, all sources were appropriately acknowledged and cited in accordance with academic integrity standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

School Environment as a Foundation for Character Development Through School Culture

The literature review indicates that the school environment functions as a strategic context for character development because students continuously interact with values, norms, and behavioral expectations embedded within school culture. Character formation is not merely produced through classroom instruction but also through the social and cultural experiences that students encounter in their daily school lives. Recent studies emphasize that schools with positive cultural climates tend to foster discipline, responsibility, and prosocial behavior more effectively than schools where values are not systematically integrated into everyday practices (Rahayu et al., 2024). This finding suggests that school culture serves as an important medium through which character values are transformed into observable behaviors.

School culture operates through a set of shared norms, routines, and institutional expectations that guide students' actions over time. The literature highlights that the effectiveness of character education depends largely on the consistency between the values promoted by the school and the behaviors practiced within the educational environment (Insani & Basuki, 2024). Students are more

likely to internalize positive values when they repeatedly observe and experience them in authentic situations. Character development consequently becomes a process of habituation in which desirable behaviors gradually evolve into stable personal dispositions.

The reviewed studies further reveal that social interaction constitutes a critical mechanism linking school culture to character formation. Relationships among students, teachers, and other school members provide opportunities for learners to practice cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect within structured social settings. Evidence from educational contexts shows that positive interaction patterns contribute significantly to students' moral and social development because values are learned through participation as well as observation (Yasin et al., 2024). The quality of interpersonal relationships therefore influences the extent to which school culture can shape students' character.

Table 1. School Culture Dimensions and Character Outcomes

School Culture Dimension	Character Outcomes
Institutional discipline	Responsibility and self-control
Cultural habituation	Consistency and commitment
Positive social interaction	Respect and empathy
Teacher guidance	Integrity and honesty
Shared school values	Cooperation and accountability

The patterns presented in Table 1 demonstrate that character formation emerges from the interaction of multiple cultural dimensions rather than from a single educational intervention. Schools that successfully integrate these dimensions create environments where values are reinforced through daily experiences and social participation. Educational leadership also contributes to this process by ensuring that institutional practices remain aligned with the school's moral objectives (Plaku & Leka, 2025). Character education consequently becomes more sustainable when school culture is supported by coherent organizational structures and collective commitment.

The literature synthesis ultimately suggests that school culture represents the primary mechanism through which the school environment influences students' character development. Positive cultural environments provide repeated opportunities for students to internalize values and apply them in meaningful social contexts. Research on character education management confirms that schools with strong cultural foundations are more effective in cultivating responsible and disciplined behavior among learners (Khasanah et al., 2022). Character formation can therefore be understood as a continuous process that develops through the interaction between institutional culture, social relationships, and everyday educational experiences.

The Role of Teachers and Social Interactions in Strengthening School Culture

The literature review identifies teachers as key actors in the process of character formation because they serve not only as facilitators of learning but also as role models whose behaviors are continuously observed by students. Character values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, and respect are more effectively internalized when students witness their consistent application in everyday school activities. Research emphasizes that exemplary teacher behavior contributes significantly to the creation of a positive school culture that supports students' moral development (Kurniati & Muhdar, 2024). The influence of teachers therefore extends beyond academic instruction and becomes an integral component of character education.

Teacher effectiveness in character formation is closely related to the quality of relationships established with students. Positive interactions characterized by trust, fairness, and mutual respect create a supportive environment in which students feel encouraged to adopt desirable behaviors. Studies on school culture indicate that character education becomes more meaningful when teachers actively engage in fostering value-based interactions rather than relying solely on formal teaching strategies (Wanti & Darmawan, 2024). Educational values are consequently strengthened through continuous interpersonal engagement within the school community.

Social interaction among members of the school community also plays a critical role in reinforcing school culture and character development. Students acquire social and moral competencies

through daily interactions with peers, teachers, and other school personnel, allowing them to practice cooperation, empathy, and tolerance in real situations. Research on social dynamics within educational settings demonstrates that positive interaction patterns contribute to the development of prosocial behaviors and strengthen students' sense of belonging within the school environment (Ixfina, 2024). Character formation therefore emerges through active participation in social relationships that reflect shared cultural values.

Table 2. Contributions of Teachers and Social Interactions to Character Development

School Component	Character Values Developed
Teacher role modeling	Honesty, discipline, responsibility
Teacher-student relationships	Respect, trust, empathy
Peer interactions	Cooperation, tolerance
Collaborative activities	Teamwork, accountability
Positive communication	Courtesy, social awareness

The patterns shown in Table 2 indicate that character development is supported by both instructional and relational dimensions of school life. Teachers provide behavioral guidance and value reinforcement, while social interactions offer practical contexts in which students apply and strengthen those values. Studies on school culture suggest that students are more likely to internalize positive character traits when they experience consistency between institutional expectations and everyday social experiences (Nasution et al., 2025). The alignment between cultural norms and interpersonal relationships consequently enhances the effectiveness of character education.

The literature synthesis suggests that teachers and social interactions function as interconnected mechanisms through which school culture influences students' character. Positive teacher behavior establishes standards of conduct, while constructive social relationships provide opportunities for students to practice and internalize those standards. Research further highlights that supportive educational leadership contributes to sustaining these processes by fostering a school climate centered on shared values and collective responsibility (Plaku & Leka, 2025). Character development can therefore be understood as the product of continuous interaction between role modeling, social engagement, and the broader cultural environment of the school.

School Habituation Practices and Extracurricular Activities as Character-Building Mechanisms

The literature review indicates that character development becomes more effective when values are reinforced through habituation practices that are systematically integrated into students' daily routines. School culture gains practical meaning when moral principles are translated into repetitive activities that encourage students to consistently demonstrate positive behaviors. Studies on character education implementation reveal that routine practices such as maintaining discipline, observing school regulations, and participating in collective activities contribute significantly to the internalization of character values (Indrianingrum et al., 2024). Habituation therefore functions as a bridge between abstract educational ideals and observable student behavior.

Character-building practices are most effective when they become part of the everyday experiences of students rather than isolated educational programs. Activities such as classroom responsibilities, environmental cleanliness programs, religious observances, and ceremonial events provide opportunities for students to develop responsibility, discipline, and social awareness through direct participation. Research conducted in elementary school settings demonstrates that regular involvement in such activities strengthens students' commitment to positive behavioral norms and reinforces the values promoted within the school environment (Abdullah & Lasri, 2024). Repeated engagement in value-oriented practices gradually transforms expected behaviors into enduring personal habits.

Extracurricular activities constitute another important mechanism through which school culture contributes to character formation. These activities extend learning beyond the classroom by providing students with opportunities to apply values in authentic social situations that require cooperation, leadership, perseverance, and accountability. Evidence from previous studies suggests that participation

in extracurricular programs facilitates the development of resilience and interpersonal competence because students encounter practical challenges that demand responsible decision-making and teamwork (Masnawati et al., 2019). Character education consequently becomes more comprehensive when formal learning is complemented by experiential activities outside regular academic instruction.

Table 3. Character Outcomes of Habituation and Extracurricular Activities

Educational Activity	Character Values Developed
Daily school routines	Discipline and responsibility
Religious activities	Integrity and self-control
Environmental programs	Care and accountability
Student organizations	Leadership and cooperation
Extracurricular participation	Perseverance and teamwork

The patterns summarized in Table 3 indicate that habituation practices and extracurricular activities contribute to character development through complementary pathways. Daily routines strengthen consistency and self-regulation, while extracurricular experiences encourage students to apply values in diverse social contexts. Research on character education management highlights that sustainable character formation depends on the integration of these activities within a broader school culture that consistently reinforces shared values and behavioral expectations (Khasanah et al., 2022). Educational outcomes become stronger when character-building initiatives are embedded within the institutional culture rather than implemented as separate programs.

Recent scholarship also emphasizes the importance of incorporating cultural values and local wisdom into character-building activities. Educational practices that connect school culture with community values provide students with a stronger sense of identity and moral responsibility while preserving cultural relevance in an era of globalization. Studies on local wisdom-based education demonstrate that integrating cultural values into school activities enriches character education by linking moral development with students' social and cultural contexts (Rohman, 2024). Similar findings suggest that culturally responsive educational approaches strengthen students' appreciation of collective values and social responsibility through meaningful engagement with local traditions (Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025). The literature synthesis therefore positions habituation practices and extracurricular activities as strategic instruments for transforming school culture into a lived experience that supports the holistic development of students' character.

Integration of School Environmental Components in Character Formation

The literature synthesis demonstrates that character formation cannot be attributed to a single element of the school environment but instead emerges from the interaction of multiple educational components operating within a shared cultural framework. Teacher role modeling, school culture, habituation practices, extracurricular activities, and social interactions collectively create conditions that shape students' moral and behavioral development. Research on school culture emphasizes that character education becomes more effective when institutional values are consistently reflected across various aspects of school life rather than confined to specific programs or learning activities (Insani & Basuki, 2024). Character development therefore represents a systemic process that depends on the coherence of the entire educational environment.

The relationship among these components is characterized by mutual reinforcement. Teachers function as role models who demonstrate desired behaviors, while school culture provides the norms and expectations that guide everyday conduct. Habituation activities strengthen the internalization of values through repeated practice, and social interactions offer opportunities for students to apply those values in authentic situations. Studies on school culture management indicate that sustainable character development requires alignment between institutional values, educational practices, and interpersonal relationships within the school community (Khasanah et al., 2022). Educational effectiveness is consequently influenced by the degree of integration among these interconnected dimensions.

The reviewed literature further suggests that students are more likely to internalize character values when they encounter consistency across different educational experiences. Values promoted in

the classroom become more meaningful when reinforced through school routines, extracurricular participation, and positive social relationships. Research examining the influence of school culture on student behavior shows that consistent exposure to shared norms strengthens the formation of disciplined, responsible, and socially aware individuals (Rahayu et al., 2024). Character education therefore depends not only on the transmission of values but also on the consistency with which those values are practiced throughout the educational environment.

Table 4. Integration of School Environmental Components in Character Formation

School Environmental Component	Primary Function in Character Formation
Teacher role modeling	Demonstrates and reinforces values
School culture and climate	Establishes shared norms and expectations
Habituation practices	Strengthens value internalization
Extracurricular activities	Provides experiential character learning
Social interactions	Facilitates the application of values in daily life

The patterns presented in Table 4 indicate that each component contributes a distinct yet complementary function within the character formation process. The absence of one component may weaken the effectiveness of the others because character development relies on continuous reinforcement across multiple educational contexts. Studies on school-based character education highlight that positive behavioral outcomes are more likely to emerge when values are communicated through diverse and interconnected learning experiences (Nasution et al., 2025). The school environment consequently operates as an integrated ecosystem rather than a collection of isolated educational practices.

Another important insight emerging from the literature concerns the relevance of cultural values in strengthening the integration of school environmental components. Character education becomes more meaningful when institutional values are connected to local cultural traditions and community expectations. Research on local wisdom-based education demonstrates that the incorporation of cultural values into school activities enriches students' moral understanding while strengthening their sense of social responsibility and identity (Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025). Similar findings indicate that culturally grounded educational practices provide a stronger foundation for long-term character development because students perceive the values as relevant to their lived experiences (Rohman, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this literature review indicate that the school environment plays a significant role in shaping students' character through the development and implementation of a positive school culture. Character formation is influenced not only by formal learning activities but also by the interaction of various environmental components, including teacher role modeling, school culture and climate, habituation practices, extracurricular activities, and social relationships within the school community. These components function in a complementary manner, creating continuous opportunities for students to internalize values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and respect. Character development therefore emerges as a dynamic process that is strengthened through consistent exposure to value-based experiences embedded in everyday school life.

The review further reveals that effective character education requires an integrated educational ecosystem in which institutional values are consistently reflected in policies, routines, interpersonal interactions, and student activities. The sustainability of character formation depends on the coherence between what is taught, what is practiced, and what is experienced by students throughout their educational journey. A school environment characterized by supportive relationships, positive cultural norms, and meaningful participation enables students to transform moral values into enduring behavioral dispositions. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening school culture as a strategic foundation for fostering holistic student development and preparing learners to become responsible members of society.

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