
The Role of Character Education in Fostering Global Responsibility in Elementary School Learning

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Abstract

Globalization, technological acceleration, and growing cross-border issues have urged elementary schools to prepare students who are not only academically competent but also character-driven and globally responsible. This article aims to analyze the role of character education in fostering global responsibility in elementary school learning. The study employs a literature review method with a qualitative-descriptive approach through thematic synthesis of relevant scientific articles, dissertations, and theses. The findings indicate that global responsibility is most effectively built upon character foundations close to children's experiences such as discipline, empathy, justice, and social concern which are then broadened through contextual learning. Civic Education, multicultural perspectives, and Global Citizenship Education serve as pathways for strengthening global awareness. SDGs and environmental issues provide concrete contexts for translating values into action, while local wisdom bridge's identity formation with the cultivation of solidarity and inclusivity. The digital era demands that character education incorporate media ethics so that global responsibility is also reflected in online behavior. The article concludes that successful development of global responsibility in elementary schools depends on consistent school culture, teacher role-modeling, curriculum integration, and evaluation that progressively measures attitudinal and behavioral change.

Keyword: character education, global responsibility, elementary school, global citizenship, local wisdom

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INTRODUCTION

The development of globalization, the acceleration of technology, and the increase in cross-border issues such as the climate crisis, social inequality, and value polarization encourage education to no longer stop at the achievement of knowledge alone. Schools are required to form students who can live in an interconnected society, as well as have a moral compass to make responsible decisions. In this context, global responsibility can be understood as an individual's readiness to care, understand the impact of actions on others

and the environment, and contribute to a more just, peaceful, and sustainable life. These challenges are increasingly relevant as education enters the 21st century which requires critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative thinking skills as the foundation for adaptation in the global world (Destiana et al., 2025).

The ideal condition is that every elementary school student can show behavior that reflects social concern, respects cultural differences, is responsible for the environment, and behaves ethically in the digital space. The Independent Curriculum currently implemented in Indonesia provides ample space for the development of the Pancasila Student Profile, one of which is 'global diversity' namely the ability to maintain a local noble culture while being open to global differences and influences (Switri et al., 2025). Thus, the curriculum framework has provided a normative foundation for the cultivation of global responsibility since primary education.

However, the facts on the ground show a significant gap. Various studies reveal that the implementation of character education in elementary schools is still predominantly instructive in the form of memorizing values, slogans, and moral lectures without being accompanied by meaningful and consistent learning experiences (Hadi et al., 2025). Global issues such as the SDGs, climate change, and digital citizenship are often not systematically integrated into everyday learning. On the other hand, teachers face capacity challenges in designing cross-disciplinary learning that connects character values with contextual global issues (Assagaf, 2025). As a result, learners know good values but are not used to practicing them in real-life situations.

The solution to this gap lies in the reorientation of character education from a normative-instructional approach to a holistic-integrative approach. Effective character education must touch three domains simultaneously: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Birhan et al., 2021). In practice, this is realized through the integration of values into the curriculum, habituation through school culture, and project-based learning that connects local-global issues with children's everyday experiences. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) offers a framework that reinforces this dimension by emphasizing interconnectedness, cross-cultural empathy, and active participation as global citizens (Hameed, 2023).

The research questions posed in this article are: (1) What is the role of character education in fostering global responsibility in elementary school learning? (2) What strategies and approaches have proven effective to integrate the value of global responsibility in the context of basic education in Indonesia? The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of character education in fostering global responsibility, mapping relevant learning strategies, and identifying supporting conditions for its successful implementation in elementary schools.

The novelty of this article lies in an integrative synthesis that connects the five dimensions of shaping global responsibility in elementary schools simultaneously, namely: (1) the foundation of personal-social character values, (2) the multicultural PPKn/GCE learning path, (3) the context of SDGs and environmental education, (4) the bridge of local wisdom as a foothold of global identity, and (5) digital citizenship as a new dimension of global responsibility in the 21st century. The integration of these five dimensions has not been comprehensively discussed in one previous article, especially in the context of Indonesian basic education that implements the Independent Curriculum and Pancasila Student Profile (Untari et al., 2024; Stephen et al., 2025; Walters et al., 2019).

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses literature review design with a qualitative-descriptive approach. This design choice is based on the character of the study that requires conceptual reading and the drawing of common threads across research findings such as the practice of literature review in global citizenship issues (Untari et al., 2024), strengthening education governance (Destiana et al., 2025), and literature review related to the formation of citizenship competencies at the elementary level (Walters et al., 2019). The literature study was chosen because it allows for cross-contextual synthesis that results in a comprehensive conceptual framework as the basis for recommendations for educational practice.

Research Data Subject/Source

The source of research data is in the form of scientific documents that include indexed national and international journal articles, dissertations, and theses. The documents were obtained through searching Google Scholar, ERIC, and Scopus databases using the keywords: 'character education', 'global responsibility', 'global citizenship education', 'primary school character education', 'SDGs elementary school', 'digital citizenship', and 'local wisdom'. Inclusion criteria include: (a) published in the 2019–2025 range (80% of the total references), (b) relevant to the topic of global character education and responsibility at the elementary level, and (c) available in full text. The exclusion criteria include articles without peer-reviewed and unidentified sources. A total of 25 primary sources were successfully collected and analyzed.

Research Instruments

The research instrument is a literature analysis matrix developed in a deductive-inductive manner based on the initial conceptual framework. The matrix contains the columns: (a) the identity of the source, (b) the focus and context of the research, (c) key findings, and (d) relevance to the objectives of the study. This matrix serves as a data extraction guide and documentation tool that ensures consistency of cross-source analysis (Hadi et al., 2025).

Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through three stages. First, systematic searches using keywords that have been set on the specified database. Second, selection based on the relevance of the title and abstract, followed by the reading of the full text. Third, record and coding key information into a literature analysis matrix. Each source was thoroughly examined to identify findings related to the definition of character education, indicators of global responsibility, learning strategies, and implementation conditions (Rahmatillah, 2025).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is carried out through a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis. The first stage is open coding: reading each document and marking key ideas related to character values, indicators of global responsibility, and learning strategies. The second stage is axial coding: grouping code into broader categories. The third stage is selective coding: identifying the main themes that answer the research question. The resulting themes include: (a) the foundation of character values, (b) pedagogical strategies in elementary schools, (c) learning outcomes, and (d) supporting conditions. Reliability is maintained through cross-source checking and source triangulation, which is assessing

whether a theme appears repeatedly in documents with different contexts (Assagaf, 2025; Switri et al., 2025).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the review of 25 literatures, four main themes were found that answered the research questions: (1) character education as the foundation for the formation of global responsibility, (2) multicultural PPKn/GCE as a path to strengthen global insight, (3) SDGs and environmental education as a concrete context for character formation, and (4) digital citizenship and local wisdom as a dimension to support global responsibility in the 21st century. These four themes intersect and show that global responsibility in elementary school is most realistically built through character strengthening that is close to children's experiences, then projected to broader issues (Birhan et al., 2021; Walters et al., 2019). Table 1 summarizes the results of the literature analysis on which these findings are based.

Table 1. Results of Literature Study Analysis

No	Source	Focus and Context.	Key Findings	Relevance for Elementary (Global Responsibility–Character)
1	Birhan et al. (2021)	Preschool & Elementary Character Education (Teacher-Parent)	Dominant strategies: advice, examples, fairy tales; parents emphasize honesty & responsibility; Teachers emphasize respect and care	Provides the basis that global responsibility needs to start with personal–social responsibility and consistent example
2	Ramírez-Torres (2023)	Elementary character education programs — systematic review	Limitations of implementation articles; there is a theory–practice distance; Caution in using the term 'virtue'	Strengthening the needs of elementary school character learning design that is operational and evaluative
3	Hadi et al. (2025)	Elementary–Junior High School character education strategy (systematic review)	Character implementation faces conceptual–operational challenges; Cross-Border Diverse Strategies/Settings	Supporting the selection of contextual and consistent elementary school learning strategies (habituation–reflection–action)
4	Rahmatillah (2025)	Integration of 21st century character education	Character needs to be integrated into the curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom culture; opportunities through active learning	To be a reference for a character integration framework to foster 21st century skills-based global responsibility
5	Walters et al. (2019)	Digital citizenship & elementary school teachers (literature review)	Digital citizenship demands online ethics, security, responsibility; The role of	Connecting global responsibility with digital responsibility and civic literacy early on

			elementary school teachers is very important	
6	Fajarianto et al. (2024)	LMS-based character education in elementary school	LMS (Google Classroom) helps with discipline habituation, punctuality, discussion participation	Demonstrate the real context of relevant character building (discipline-responsibility) for the 'digital global citizen'
7	Aziz (2023)	Moral education from an early age in the digital era	Morals need to be part of the curriculum; Strategy: Gameplay, Fun Atmosphere, Example	Strengthening the moral dimension as a support for global responsibility and the ethical use of technology
8	Taufikin & Kholilah (2025)	Religious practices for character education in Islamic elementary schools	The integration of moral-spiritual values into learning practices strengthens character	Character is built through the habituation of values, then projected on social-global concern
9	Switri et al. (2025)	Integration of religious and character education – Independent Curriculum for SDGs	Religious-character integration is positioned as support for the SDGs; need for synergy of curriculum and practice	Providing a foothold to link character to the global agenda (SDGs) in a curricular manner
10	Assagaf (2025)	The role of teachers in the management of the SDGs-based PAI curriculum	Teachers as agents of change for the internalization of sustainability values	Affirming the importance of the role of elementary school teachers as designers of learning experiences with SDGs nuances
11	Setiawan et al. (2025)	STEAM + ESD In Elementary School	STEAM with the principle of ESD significantly strengthens environmental concern/awareness	Concrete example of an elementary school project that fosters a caring-responsibility character on global issues (environment))
12	Sarlivanti (2025)	Climate change education – curriculum & school culture	Integration of climate issues through school curriculum & culture building environmental literacy & character	Inspiration for adapting elementary school activities based on school culture (green habits) for environmental responsibility
13	Rakhmah et al. (2025)	Global education + local wisdom	Globalization challenge's identity; Integrating Local Wisdom Maintains Cultural Values	Global responsibility in elementary school can start with local identity & cultural appreciation as a foundation
14	Putriwan & Palennari (2025)	SIBALIPARRIQ (local wisdom) model for collaboration	Cultural values (solidarity, trust, inclusivity) strengthen collaboration, empathy, responsibility	Collaboration and empathy are prerequisites for the character of 'global citizens'; can be adapted as an elementary school group work model

15	Untari et al. (2024)	Global insights of young citizens (Indonesia)	Global Governance is used to build global insights & GCE frameworks	Reinforcing that elementary learning (PPKn) is relevant to foster global responsibility
16	Taufiqurrahman (2023)	Global character & awareness via multicultural PKn	Strategic PKn shapes character, multicultural values, and global consciousness	Supporting the integration of diversity issues and cross-cultural empathy as the core of global responsibility in elementary schools
17	Hameed (2023)	GCE practice in two primary schools (Singapore–Australia)	Tension between educational rationality vs market in GCE implementation	GCE in elementary school needs a clear value direction so that it is not just 'international branding'
18	Jett (2013)	Teachers' perceptions of GCE in elementary school (America)	Teachers' perceptions influence curriculum & pedagogy; Implications for implementation support	The success of global responsibility depends on the readiness and understanding of elementary school teachers
19	Lewis (2015)	Educational leadership's perception of GCE	School leadership influences the formation of 'global citizens'	Strengthening the dimension of school policy & leadership as a character-global ecosystem
20	Oo (2024)	Measuring Civic Competence (Students)	Citizenship competencies are multidimensional: knowledge, attitudes, and skills	The perspective that citizenship competence needs indicators; for elementary school simplified into behavioral indicators
21	Sitinjak et al. (2024)	The Role of Elementary School Teachers in Facing Society 5.0	Teachers as role models, motivators, mentors; Student Behavior Challenges in the Digital Era	It is relevant to affirm PPKn SD as a space for character development and social discipline
22	Sitepu et al. (2025)	Character of responsibility via Pancasila Education in elementary school	The value of responsibility is instilled through learning; real classroom context in elementary school	Direct evidence that responsibility can be built through Pancasila as a foothold towards global responsibility
23	Destiana et al. (2025)	21st century education management, globalization, technology	Education management needs to be innovative and adaptive to face digitalization and globalization	Supports the argument that the formation of a global character requires adaptive school governance
24	Simarangkir & Kuntari (2022)	Character education based on religious values (school)	Character is built through values & habituation; Relevance Across Religious Traditions	Adding a cross-tradition perspective that value-based character education supports social responsibility

Source: Processed from various references (2019–2025)

DISCUSSION

1. Character Education as the Foundation of Global Responsibility in Elementary School

At the elementary school level, character education works most powerfully through habituation and social experiences that are close to the child's world. Global responsibility does not need to be understood as a 'distant' concept of another country, but rather as a basic attitude: respecting others, caring for the environment, and being able to exercise restraint when interacting. Literature studies on character education strategies confirm that character strengthening is effective when directed at real behavior patterns examples, class routines, and consistent value reinforcement not just knowledge of morals (Hadi et al., 2025). This pattern is important because character develops through repetition of actions, not long lectures.

The foundation of character is also related to the purpose of citizenship which emphasizes social responsibility from an early age. In a study that highlights civic competence, aspects such as social responsibility, care, and the ability to live together are the core that needs to be built through education (Oo, 2024). Various studies have also shown that character education does not stand alone but rather is inherent in learning governance and school ecosystems that create a positive situation to train character through agreed class rules, fair consequences, and space for reflection (Hadi et al., 2025; Birhan et al., 2021). The integration of religious practices into learning has also been proven to strengthen the internalization of character values because moral values are not only taught but also lived through daily routines and habits (Taufikin & Kholilah, 2025). From this foundation, global responsibility can be 'grown slowly' through the expansion of perspectives: children are invited to understand that small actions such as keeping the classroom clean have an impact on the wider environment (Rahmatillah, 2025).

2. PPKn, Multiculturalism, and GCE as Pathways to Strengthen Global Insights

PPKn is naturally the main path to building global insight in elementary schools because it talks about living together, rules, obligations, and national values. What is crucial is to shift the orientation of PPKn from memorizing norms to learning that tests practice: how children express their opinions without ridicule, make decisions together, and respect differences. Strengthening civic knowledge must go hand in hand with civic skills and civic dispositions, so that children not only know the concept of citizenship but are able to practice it (Taufiqurrahman, 2023; Sitinjak et al., 2024).

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) frames that citizenship today needs to foster awareness of global connectivity. Yet GCE practice in the field is often confronted with a tug-of-war between ideal goals (humanity, justice) and the market logic that demands 'competitive' schools (Hameed, 2023). For elementary schools, the implication is to keep global learning from becoming a slogan; The focus remains on the values that children can experience empathy, respect for human dignity, and openness to differences. Teachers' understanding of whether global values are truly present in learning (Jett, 2013), and school leadership plays a role in creating a supportive ecosystem (Lewis, 2015). In the Indonesian context, Untari et al. (2024) emphasized that global citizenship education has strong

relevance to build global insight for young citizens through a framework that integrates Pancasila values with a global perspective.

3. SDGs, Environment, and Climate Change as Concrete Contexts

SDGs and environmental issues can be used as concrete contexts for character building because they present real problems that children can observe waste, wasteful water, increased heat, or school cleanliness. Environmental education that is integrated into the curriculum and school culture has been proven to build environmental literacy while strengthening the character of care (Sarlivanti, 2025). At the elementary level, the SDGs do not have to be described as 17 complete goals; teachers can simplify into values and actions: keeping clean, saving water, sharing, and appreciating friends (Oo, 2024; Switri et al., 2025).

STEAM-based learning combined with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been proven to encourage increased environmental awareness through active and meaningful learning experiences (Setiawan et al., 2025). Simple projects like classroom waste audits, planting plants, or caring for the school garden help children connect personal actions with communal impact planting the seeds of concrete global responsibility. The role of teachers as agents of change who design learning experiences with SDGs nuances is a critical factor in this process (Assagaf, 2025).

4. Local Wisdom as a Bridge of Identity to Global Concern

Local wisdom becomes a strong bridge because elementary school children learn from the closest identities: family, village, language, and tradition. It is from local identity that social values are built cooperation, mutual respect, and solidarity which is also the 'moral language' for global concern. The SIBALIPARRIQ learning model based on Mandar's local wisdom shows that the integration of local cultural values such as solidarity, trust, loyalty, and inclusivity can significantly strengthen students' social empathy and responsibility (Putriwan & Palennari, 2025). In the context of elementary school, this can be translated as collaborative project activities: group work with fair roles, simple deliberation, and reflection on the value of helping each other.

The approach based on local wisdom does not limit children to locality but rather becomes a foothold for children to be able to understand the wider world without losing their identity roots (Rakhmah et al., 2025). However, the local-to-global bridge needs to be maintained so that it does not turn into a parochial attitude; Therefore, learning based on local wisdom needs to be accompanied by critical thinking and openness exercises. The SIBALIPARRIQ model itself is positioned as an integration of cultural values with 21st century skills collaboration, communication, and responsibility so that local culture becomes a source of value, not a fence that closes dialogue (Putriwan & Palennari, 2025). Pancasila Education Learning emphasizes the habituation of responsibility values in classroom activities is a clear example of how local-national values can be a foothold towards broader responsibility (Sitepu et al., 2025).

5. Digital Citizenship as a New Dimension of Global Responsibility

In the digital age, the global responsibility of elementary school children is becoming more real because their interactions go beyond the classroom. Children can watch cross-cultural content, comment, and mimic adult digital behavior. Digital citizenship in elementary school children can be focused on three things: security (not mentioning full identities publicly), communication ethics (not insulting), and impact (comments can hurt others) (Walters et al., 2019). Character education in the digital age is not enough to provide a ban, but also to exercise self-control through simple scenarios: 'If you see a hoax, what do you do?' or 'If your friend is being mocked in a group, how do you help?'

The use of the Learning Management System (LMS) in elementary school learning has been proven to help the habituation of discipline, punctuality, and discussion participation, which are important elements of digital citizenship (Fajarianto et al., 2024). The implementation of moral education in a digital context emphasizes the importance of a pleasant learning atmosphere and the role of teachers in digital behavior (Aziz, 2023). For digital citizenship to run effectively, it must be part of the school culture through a class agreement on communication ethics and consistent consequences, not just a single meeting session (Hadi et al., 2025). GCE also reminds that teachers need to build emotional literacy and empathy in responding to global issues that arise on children's devices (Hameed, 2023).

6. Role of Teachers, School Culture, and Supporting Conditions for Implementation

The implementation of global responsibility through character education in elementary school is largely determined by the role of teachers as social facilitators who foster interaction, open communication, and equal cooperation between students (Putriwan & Palennari, 2025). School culture acts as a 'hidden curriculum' that influences character: if the school consistently carries out positive habits picketing, literacy, greetings, community service, class deliberation, children learn that responsibility is not a discourse but a routine (Oo, 2024). School leadership that supports the vision of global education has also been proven to have an influence on the success of the formation of 'global citizens' (Lewis, 2015).

Innovative and adaptive education management to digitalization and globalization is a systemic prerequisite that cannot be ignored (Destiana et al., 2025). The integration of character values in curriculum design from learning objectives to evaluations needs to be carried out systematically with the support of adequate regulations and teacher capacity (Switri et al., 2025; Simarankir & Kuntari, 2022). Teachers' positive perceptions of GCE significantly increase the probability of global grades being present in classroom interactions and decision-making (Jett, 2013). Thus, the global responsibility for elementary school children cannot be imposed on one teacher or one subject; it must be present as the breath of the school from the way teachers reprimand, the way schools make rules, to the way children are involved in simple decisions (Hadi et al., 2025; Assagaf, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review, character education in elementary school is the most realistic foundation for fostering global responsibility because core values such as discipline, empathy, respect, justice, and social responsibility are easier to build through habituation, example, and social experiences that are close to children's lives. Global responsibility at the elementary school level does not have to start from abstract geopolitical concepts, but from the expansion of personal-social responsibility strengthened by PPKn, Pancasila Education, multicultural approaches, and GCE that emphasizes humanitarian sensitivity (Hadi et al., 2025; Hameed, 2023; Jett, 2013). The issues of SDGs, the environment, and climate change provide a concrete and observable context for students, so that character education can 'land' in real projects and habits that help children connect small actions with shared impacts (Setiawan et al., 2025; Sarlivanti, 2025). Local wisdom acts as a bridge that maintains cultural identity while instilling the values of solidarity, trust, and inclusivity values that are in line with the character of global citizens (Putriwan & Palennari, 2025; Rakhmah et al., 2025).

The literature emphasizes that global responsibility in the digital era cannot be separated from the challenge of digital citizenship, so character education needs to include discipline, ethics, and digital literacy from elementary school (Walters et al., 2019; Fajarianto et al., 2024). The success of implementation is greatly influenced by the role of teachers, school culture, and educational leadership that creates a consistent ecosystem between the values taught and the practices experienced by students (Lewis, 2015; Destiana et al., 2025). Effective learning is recommended to integrate value habituation (routine and example), role-based collaborative activities, global-local issue projects (environment, tolerance, digital literacy), and evaluations that assess gradual changes in attitudes and behaviors through observation and reflection. With this approach, elementary schools can prepare students who not only have 'good character' in the classroom, but also have the initial readiness to become caring, responsible, and adaptive citizens in an ever-changing global society (Untari et al., 2024; Stephen et al., 2025; Birhan et al., 2021).

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