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CHARACTER EDUCATION COMPARISON OF PRIMARY SCHOOL  
STUDENTS IN INDONESIA AND JAPAN

*Ellyana Hinta<sup>1</sup>, Dakia Djou<sup>2</sup>, Asna Ntelo<sup>3</sup>, Mira Mirnawati<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>State University of Gorontalo, Jl. Jend. Sudirman No.6, Dabulowo Tim., Kota Tengah, Kota  
Gorontalo, Gorontalo 96128, Indonesia  
Co-author: [ellyana.hinta@yahoo.com](mailto:ellyana.hinta@yahoo.com)

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**ABSTRACT**  
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**INTRODUCTION**  
The rapid development of information technology gives rise to character deterioration of Indonesian children as both positive and negative information are easily accessible either in conventional or digital media. As it appears more burdensome to sift information form digital medias than that in conventional medias, we need to impart our children more knowledge, capability, and manners before allowing them to access that information for their learning media sources.

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<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>State University of Gorontalo, Jl. Jend. Sudirman No.6, Dulalowo Tim., Kota Tengah, Kota  
Gorontalo, Gorontalo 96128, Indonesia  
Co-author: [ellyana.hinta@yahoo.com](mailto:ellyana.hinta@yahoo.com)

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#### ABSTRACT

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#### INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information technology gives rise to character deterioration of Indonesian children as both positive and negative information are easily accessible either in conventional or digital media. As it appears more burdensome to sift information from digital medias than that in conventional medias, we need to impart our children more knowledge, capability, and manners before allowing them to access that information for their learning media sources.

The rising number of youth violence such as bullying, drugs, pornography, and other social issues indicate the failure of the education system. Sin (2015, pp. 626-627) argued that Indonesian students are deficient in confidence, such as to

involve in an internship program of a company, indicating its weak character education. This illustrates the value of character education, retrieved from positive local cultures, to improve the quality of human resources. Thus, it is worth persisting both in informal and informal sectors, such as in family and society.

Japan and Indonesia are economically and culturally bonded as in 1942 to 1945 Japan expanded its military and occupation in Indonesia. After Indonesian independence their relationship has created acculturation and enculturation in the country. Acculturation is the adaptation of cultural traits and social patterns; enculturation is the process whereby individuals learn the group's culture (Berry, 1999, p. 35). Japan has shown remarkable development in its education. Its accomplishment as being a country that has been near the top of international rankings on education through character education becomes captivating topic to discuss. Furthermore, how these two countries build their character education is another interesting matter to explore.

The aim of this research is to widen the current knowledge of Japan character education for primary school students. Since no previous research were conducted on this topic, this paper offers its own notable contribution towards character education development in Indonesia. This paper investigated how Japan achieved that rapid excellent progress after the drudging condition of Nagasaki and Hiroshima atomic bombing. The study provides constructive suggestions for the implementation of character education in Indonesia. The research aims to encourage the Indonesian government to build better learning system by highly upholding its culture as the comparison of these two countries' character education is the main focus in this study.

Character education is a substantial systematic attempt projected to institute noble values as a core of nation character to build its identity. The noble values, such as responsiveness and hospitality, have existed in Indonesia for many years. As time goes on, these values fade into the background due to personalism and egoism. Both values should be implemented as the nation's superior character (Junaedi & Syukur, 2017, p. 23-39). According to Kosim (2011, p. 86), character refers to moral strength, and unbiased positive meaning. Etymologically, character is derived from *charakter* (Greece) which means carving. This term symbolizes an identity, a characteristic, or a sign to distinguish one person from another (Ratna, 2014, p. 128). Sibarani (2012, p. 35) defines character as a personal attitude reflecting intelligence, interpersonal skills, politeness, responsibility in a family, a school, a society, and a country. Indonesia government has established eighteen pillars of the character education to create excellent characters within families, schools, and societies (see **Table 1**). These pillars are highly essential to be implemented since the early childhood education in Indonesia.

**Table 1. Pillars of Character Education**

Descriptions and Pillars of Character Education in Indonesia		
(1) <b>Religious</b> (an attitude of obedience to religion)	(7) <b>Independent</b> (not controlled by others in many matters)	(13) <b>Friendly/ Communicative</b> (sociable, cooperative, responsive)

<b>(2) Honest</b> (honorable in principles, intentions, and actions)	<b>(8) Democratic</b> (characterized by the principle of social equality for all )	<b>(14) Sense of Peace</b> (an attitude of mutual harmony between people)
<b>(3) Tolerance</b> (respect to different interests)	<b>(9) Curiosity</b> (the desire to learn or know about anything)	<b>(15) Reading Addict</b> (interest to read in any occasions)
<b>(4) Discipline</b> (acting in accordance with appropriate regulations)	<b>(10) Nationalist</b> (devote to nationalism)	<b>(16) Environmental Care</b> (an attitude to keep and maintain the environment)
<b>(5) Hardworking</b> (an industrious attitude for all activities)	<b>(11) Patriotism</b> (devoted love, support, and defense of one’s country)	<b>(17) Caring</b> (providing aid or assistance)
<b>(6) Creative</b> (having the power of creating)	<b>(12) Perseverance</b> (to bring to a successful end)	<b>(18) Responsible</b> (having a capacity for moral decisions and accountable)

Ministry of national Education classified these eighteen pillars into four elements based on psychosocial and sociocultural contexts to facilitate its implementation (Sibarani, 2012, p. 146). **Table 2** presents the elements with their core elements.

**Table 2. Core Elements of Characters**

<b>Intrapersonal Intelligence</b>	<b>Naturalist Intelligence</b>	<b>Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence</b>	<b>Interpersonal Intelligence</b>
- Religious - Honest - Sociable - Environmental care	- Intelligent - Creative - Reading addict - Curious	- Healthy - Clean	- Caring - Responsible

By these eighteen pillars, the government expects students to be religious, honest, tolerant, discipline, independent, sociable, patriotic, nationalist, persevere, loyal, assertive, environmental aware, caring, and responsible. In short, the character education may conceive kind-hearted, intelligent, good bodily kinesthetic, and good interpersonal students.

As the society acquire these characters, poverty will vanish due to their tenacity. Furthermore, mass and family conflicts occur if tolerance and a sense of peace are non-existent along with corruption occurring due to dishonesty and irreligiousness (Sibarani, 2012, p. 147). The implementation of character education strongly relates to culture and social habits. This implies the significance of character education as a part of the culture as it is easy to implement in formal or informal education.

Husserl in Frondizi (2001, p. 5) stated that value belongs to all dependent objects without independent existence. Frondizi (2001) added value is amusement, desire, and a target of attention. Cultural values are related to religious values as it occupies a determining role in the society (Hasibuan, 2002, p. 135). Therefore individual value, attitude, and behavior could be influenced by culture since humans are cultural actors (Liliweri, 2003, p. 7). Some of them are tangible and intangible. Cultural objects could be both household appliances and research instruments, the value of which is highly beneficial to support human daily activities. Intangible objects are social behaviors and attitudes as the reference of people to live; thus, we call them norms, beliefs, and languages (Liliweri, 2003, p 48-49).

### **METHODS**

This study applied a qualitative descriptive analysis with historical approach. This approach directs the research to the elements of symbolic behavior in Indonesia and Japan. The qualitative descriptive analysis describes the comparison results of character education applied in primary schools in Indonesia and Japan. The data were collected from scientific or popular articles of character education.

The data were collected through literary reviews of scientific and popular journals. The data about attitudes of character education in Indonesia and Japan were classified and clarified. After the analysis, the data interpretation was made to comprehend the research ideas and to recognize the illustration of actual implementation. Research results of several aspects were combined using deductive logic to find synthesis as a conclusion to answer the research questions.

### **RESULT**

This research centralizes on the review of character education at Primary Schools by comparing the Indonesian and Japanese cultural values. The results are presented as follow:

#### **The Character Education in Indonesia**

As character education in Indonesia is distressing, it creates the low quality of recent education. Even though the program has been gradually promoted, it does not give satisfying results. Siswoyo (2018) underlined several factors behind the failure of character education in Indonesia, including lack of parents' intervention, bad precedent, and weak legal system. Thus, in the last two decades, it becomes a wide-ranging discussion since numerous apprehensive issues, such as corruption, commotion, and race conflict, arises (Mulyadi, 2014, p. 69).

According to Kosim (2011, p. 88), this condition indicates the failure of character education at schools since both religious and civic subjects have not been implemented in daily life. Additionally, students simply focus on cognitive aspects and ignore affective and psychomotor aspects as the core of education. Indonesia has the same purposes of education as Japan, however, achieve different results. Though, as Warsono *et al* argued, teachers are one of the main factors contributing to the result of students' achievement or character.

Numerous researches described various observable phenomena emerging during the character education in Indonesia. TM (2016) found that students'

confidence is more valuable than the process. They could be a competitive individual with the best viewpoint to determine their social status. To achieve higher scores, they used every possible means regardless of honesty, responsibility, and discipline. He added that apparently Indonesian students, even higher education students, tended to be disobedience due to a lack of individual discipline.

Fadhilatul (2017) emphasized the fragility of character education as students' bad habits, such as clothes scribbling while celebrating their graduation, and corruption cases keep on increasing. These were due to the impact of weak attitudes of an individual from early childhood. In addition to their brains yet poor character (Handoyo, 2012), students' poor attitudes could lead them to online prostitution (Republika, 2020)

Thus, the studies contended that education in Indonesia is lack of discipline, corruption and weak attitudes. Additionally, the results supported the demand for the Indonesia character education improvement.

#### Character Education in Japan

Japan has an outstanding outcome in building individuals with a strong character. After Meji reformation, in a short time, Japan could be a modern country and catch up with the progress of the western nations (Mulyadi, 2014, p. 70). Surnani (2017, p. 86) added *wakon yousai* (和魂洋才), the Japanese spirit with Western learning by adopting foreign cultures while valuing their culture. Additionally, they applied Chinese culture as the basis of their culture (*wakon kansai* (和魂漢才)) although, before the reformation, Japan was such a closed nation. Their open-mindedness started after the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They learnt to Americans to adopt their knowledge without ever losing their old culture.

Japan recovered from the devastation and they rebuilt the ruins. In Showa year or around 1948, Japan made an American-based national education curriculum (Dyah, 2019). In 1970, they evaluated the curriculum, and decided to prioritize character than technology as they were assured that the advancement could only be reached by character education (Dyah, 2019). From that moment on, Japan changed its curriculum to design a character education. For them, it was a way more important to apply at the early stage of informal education, such as family and society, as well as at the formal education, such as kindergarten-primary school. By their strong determination, they successfully built nationalist and cooperative communities.

Japaneses are creative individuals since they get used to being creative from their early ages. At the early stage of primary school, first to third grade, students are not burdened by memorization and mathematical calculation. They concern about deductive games by observing plants and animals. Children get the freedom to brainstorm and to summarize using so many favorable medias that they become creative, productive, and diligent. They are taught to have mutual benefits with others and not harm others. Therefore, in their curriculum of primary schools, students are taught to build interpersonal skills, to recognize people's emotions, to suppress their egos, and to be disciplined and cooperative (Jesica, 2017).

According to Dyah (2019), cognitively, Japanese is not genius. They are simply advanced in nationalism, discipline, teamwork, independence, and respecting

others. Their unique characters called *bushido* (discipline, honest, tough, hardworking) distinguishes them from other nations. It is the basis of their attitudes possibly serving as a good model for Indonesians. They have three systems of learning based on their local cultures. They are *gakkou kyouiku* (formal education at school), *katei kyouiku* (informal education or education at home), and *shakai kyouiku* (education in community). Japanese moral education is based on the principle of *kanzen chouaku* (勸善懲惡). It means encouraging kindness and avoiding badness. It requires them to be kind and to leave bad attitudes (Surnani, 2017, p. 87).

Their character education for students in primary schools to senior high schools is made by moral education (*doutokui*). It is integrated with the curriculum and as a part of school subjects. It directs them to have strong characters (strong, hardworking, persistent, honest, respectful, and loyal).

Ramli in Mulyadi (2014, p. 72) classified moral education into four scopes. They are:

1. Self-Respect (independent, diligent, positive, sincere, disciplined, self-introspection, righteous);
2. Interpersonal Ability (politeness, kindness, friendship, respect, affability);
3. Environmental Care (respect for nature, respect for life, sociability, confidence); and
4. Social Relationship
  - a. Public Duty (keeping promises and carrying out obligations)
  - b. Justice (honesty, trustworthy, prejudice, and fairness)
  - c. Group Participation and Responsibility (desires to participate in a group, to play a role, to perform tasks, and to enforce teamwork)
  - d. Industry (understanding the meaning of hardworking)
  - e. Respect for Family Members (love, and respect for teachers at school to create better atmosphere)
  - f. Contribution to Society (realizing the position in society, respecting senior citizens)
  - g. Respect for Tradition and Love of Nation (interested in culture and tradition)
  - h. Respect for other Culture (respect for foreign cultures and nations, nation awareness, and international friendship).

Good attitudes are all parties' responsibility, especially a mother who grows the children. In Japan, the value of a mother to educate and grow children leads was inspired by the proverb *onna wah aha desu*, meaning a woman is a mother. In their traditions, being a mother is a privileged status, and women will not be appreciated if they are not willing to have a baby and educate children (*kyouiku mama*). *Kyouiku mama* (教育ママ) consists of two words; *kyouiku* (教育) and *mama* (ママ). *Kyouiku* (教育) comprises two Kanji letters of 教 (*kyou*: read: *oshieru* "teaching"), and 育 (*iku*: read: *sodateru, sodachi, sodatsu, hagukumu* "rising and grooming" or "rising and developing"). Thus, *kyouiku* means an educating mother.

*Kyouiku mama* is a modern Japanese concept signifying that mothers must be tough and disciplined to support their children to possess the best education both formal and informal in their social, emotional, and physical aspects. Japanese women are married to highly educated men and leave their carrier to be *kyouiku mama*. The background of this idea is a local culture which reflects on a proverb *onna wa kuni no taira ge* (women are the foundation of the strong



nation). This proverb is similar with Indonesian proverb *perempuan sebagai tiang negara* (women are pillars of the state).

#### Comparison of Pillars of Character Education in Indonesia and Japan Primary Schools

##### Curriculum

In 2013, Indonesian curriculum was modified. It began to implement curriculum 2013 based on competence and character. It suggests cooperation between parents and schools to achieve its educational purposes. Despite its incomplete and unsatisfactory implementation, this character-education-based curriculum has strongly strived to implement the eighteen pillars.

Indonesia classifies eighteen pillars into four scopes, including intrapersonal intelligence, naturalist intelligence, bodily kinesthetic intelligence, and interpersonal intelligence. Compared with Japan character education with its twenty-four pillars, Sibarani (2012, p. 146) and Ramli (2019) proposed the following description (see **Table 3**).

**Table 3. A Comparison of Indonesia and Japan Pillars of Character Education**

Indonesia		Japan	
1.	Intrapersonal Intelligence	1.	Self-Respect
2.	Naturalist Intelligence	2.	Interpersonal Relationship
3.	Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence	3.	Relationship with Nature and Beauty
4.	Interpersonal Intelligence	4.	Social Relationship

Indonesia and Japan have different curriculums. Although both nations shared same categories of education pillars, their systems are obviously distinctive. In contrast to Indonesia's character building developed through religious and civic education, Japan sets its curriculum based on moral education. It starts with everyone's *kanzen chouaku* (勸善懲惡) under the spirit of *bushido*, outlined in the four scopes (see **Table 3**).

The character mapping in Japan adjusts the logical behaviors of individuals since everything starts within themselves. For example, before they have interaction with others such as nature, people, society, they must possess their self-quality. This highly will make everyone easily interact with the environment and the community.

##### Education System

Indonesia government regulates the level of the education system comprising primary (grade 1-6), junior secondary (grade 7-9), senior secondary (10-12), and higher education (4 years). Primary to junior secondary is its nine years of compulsory education to complete for students' character building. Each level provides a curriculum and the character education incorporated within all subjects and does not require moral education subjects.

Japan applies the same system as Indonesia does. Japanese students must spend six years for primary (*Shougakkou*), three years for junior secondary (*Chuugakkou*), three years for senior secondary (*Koutougakkou*), and four years for higher education (*Daigaku*). Their education is compulsory at the primary

and junior secondary since students have to learn the basics of character, personality, and attitude (Mulyadi, 2014, p. 71).

Character education in Japan is associated with the so-called *doutoku*, a moral education taught in the primary schools, junior and senior secondary schools. Moral education is a bridge of their nation to instill courage, hardworking, persistence, honesty, and high sense of tolerance. Education is a part of their curriculum inseparable from other subjects.

Ramli (2009) stated that Japan moral education takes thirty four hours for the early level, thirty five hours for the second level and up to nine years (second grade of primary schools to third grade of junior secondary schools). It represents 3.3-4.0% of total hours each year for every level. In addition, students must attend a moral education class for at least one hour (45 minutes for primary, and 30 minutes for junior secondary) every week. Compared to Indonesia, Japan curriculum provides character education in a moral education subject with a particular schedule. However, Indonesia curriculum provides it in both religion and civic education, and enclosures it in other subjects.

#### School Culture

Indonesian teachers introduce character education at kindergartens and primary schools; however, students can merely obtain it in a formal schools since it is included in other subjects. At the low-level class of primary schools, students learn thematic science, Indonesian language, civic, mathematics, and arts. They mostly learn about mutual assistance, disciplines, leadership, responsibility, teamwork, and reading, all of which are parts of Indonesian culture.

Japanese primary students of the first to third grade do not learn calculation and memorization. They observe plants and animals through educative games. They are self-determining to brainstorm and express themselves in any particular medias. Their imagination produces creativity to build a productive attitude. Besides, they recognize culture since they were childhood. In the primary school curriculum, character education requires them to learn how to interact with others, to identify people's emotions, to suppress their ego, and to understand teamwork and discipline (Jesica, 2017).

This comparison indicates different cultures of Indonesia and Japan. Indonesia curriculum simply provides a formal medium to teach character education at the primary school level since character values attached to school subjects. Japan curriculum provides character education in the first to the third grade of primary schools through formal and informal learning.

#### Family Culture

Indonesia parents tend to place their children character education in teachers or other persons such as baby sitters, daycares, and even government as they are not mindful of their responsibility to build children character. They tend to merely focus on their business so greatly that they become less aware of their children's attitudes. Therefore, some children are closely involved in social issues. Tatang (2012, p. 4) stated that Indonesia is country with the highest rank of social deviation, including group fighting, and village clashes. Ironically, parents only focus more on giving their children with presents rather than giving attention and affection for their children.

Japanese mothers educate their children as in the Japanese proverb *onna wa haha desu*. In traditional culture, a mother is precious as in its *kyouiku mama*

spirit. *Kyouiku mama* is a concept of modern Japanese as a broad-minded mother to support children to attend formal, informal, physical, social, and emotional educations. Japanese women leave their careers after they get married to be *kyouiku mama* their embodiment of *onna wa kuni no taira ge*.

It is obvious that both countries have different perspective of view about the role of a family in children's education from the aspect of manners, attitudes, and intelligence.

#### Social Cultures

In Indonesia, a frequent series of events in the community written in online medias indicate that character education in Indonesia has not complied with its objectives. An instant way of thinking is popular among teenagers since they sometimes focus on competition. Disobedience, corruption, delinquency, online prostitution, and other bad characters are several cases might happen in society both among teenagers and adults. This is in line with Aneta and Turtono (2019, p. 7) arguing that environment creates significant and positive impacts on individuals.

Japan three systems of learning for formal education (*gakkou kyouiku*), informal education or education at home (*katei kyouiku*), and education in community (*shakai kyouiku*) are based on their local cultures. The principle of *kanzen chouaku* (勸善懲惡) underlies their moral education as it encourages kindness and avoids badness, and educates the society to be kind and to leave bad attitudes (Surnani, 2017).

This shows a prominent difference between these two countries. As Indonesia fails to comply the character education with its nation philosophy (Pancasila), Japan believes character education based on local wisdom is invaluable to implement at school, home, and society, in accordance of their motto "Possessing kindness and avoiding disrepute".

#### Governance Culture

Government must provide excellent examples for the society. Good governance signifies national identity. Indonesia government should be in control of the character building by possessing and implementing its pillars of character education around government circles with the devotion to God and rule-obedience (Indonesian Ministry of National Education, 2010, p. 38). Government willing to implement the pillars is not fully implemented and is apt to be rhetorical.

Old Japan was quite restricted. Their openmindedness after the atomic bombing makes them embrace foreign cultures yet protecting and maintaining local wisdoms as Emperor Hirohito did. He was a great leader with a strong character, fearless in any occasions. On behalf of the nation, he confessed that America was a powerful state. Therefore, he asked his people to learn from Americans to defeat them one day in the future (Widuseno, 2018, p. 58). This was not an immediate attitude since it underwent a series of processes, and he managed to learn an excellent character since childhood.

Japan's emperor and his society have strong characters. Tsunami disaster in 2011, bringing them a big disaster and starvation, did not make them to do harmful reactions such as pillage and fighting over food. All victims were neatly queueing to pick up donations yet not showing up their distress. They

kept being patient and showed tolerance. Their mental attitude represents the slogan of *ganbaru* "doing one's best" (Widiuseno, 2018, p. 58).

The culture of character education in Japan has existed for ages as a foundation of national advancement. In Indonesia, the application of character education remains an outlook and a solicitation; in Japan, it is real in everyday life. It is evident that each government plays substantial part to achieve the goals.

Indonesia can draw on Japan examples of successful strong character education. For example, Japan technology could rapidly develops by following western knowledge without underrating its local culture. It is the best instance from Japan to sort out what is acceptable as open-mindedness do not do harm to them.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The comparison of character education pillars between Indonesia and Japan concludes that Indonesia imposes first grade primary school students to third grade students to study thematic subjects such as science, Indonesian language, civic, mathematics, and arts. Japan government disengage students from memorization and calculation. They restrain them to study the surrounding environment through educative games and brainstorming. While character education in Indonesia is enforced in formal education since the pillars of the characters are instilled through school subjects, in Japan it goes inside the formal and informal learnings such as schools, homes, and societies. Character education in Indonesia refers to eighteen pillars of characters, while Japan points to the twenty-four elements.

These all indicate that character education in Indonesia remains unsteady. It requires government to revise the contemporary system. The character pillars in primary schools should be implemented both formally and informally, such as in family and society. Reorganizing school curriculum is beneficial to avoid some burden for students, such as memorization and calculation. At last, assigning Japan as a model country for the advancement of Indonesia through character education provides constructive alternative as it succeeds to build its society's character, so in the end, the ideal of powerful and prominent Indonesia will be realized.

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