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Citation: Pangalila, T., & Sakura, H. (2025). Implementation of character education at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano. *Jurnal Kependidikan: Penelitian Inovasi Pembelajaran*, 9(2), 176–185.
<https://doi.org/10.21831/jk.v9i2.88482>

Received : 15 July 2025

Accepted : 1 October 2025

Published : 1 November 2025

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Implementation of character education at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano

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Abstract: Character education is a crucial element in the formation of students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also morally upright, empathetic, and socially responsible. This study aims to describe the character of students and the implementation of student character education at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through direct observation and in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and school staff. Three days of observation revealed that character values, such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and social care, have been fostered through daily habits, social interactions, extracurricular activities, and the school's management environment. The Smile, Greet, Salute (3S) culture and events such as National Education Day celebrations are effective means for character building. The interview results support these findings by emphasising the consistency with which character values are applied in both the school environment and students' daily lives. Teachers serve as role models and guide students in character development, while programs such as the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) systematically strengthen the character learning process. This research suggests that character education at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano is implemented effectively, thanks to the school's commitment, the support of its teachers, and the social environment. The findings are expected to serve as a reference in developing optimal character education strategies in senior high schools.

Keywords: character education; character values; student character development; teacher's role

Introduction

Character education is a crucial component in a national education system that aims to form students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess noble character, empathy, responsibility, and high moral integrity (Hakim, 2023). The importance of character education has escalated in the face of globalisation and rapid technological advances, which present both positive and negative consequences for youth development. The role of character education is increasingly crucial amid globalisation and the rapid development of information technology (Nurhayati, 2020; Shields, 2011; Singh, 2019), which brings both positive and negative impacts on the development of the younger generation (Sagala et al., 2024). In this situation, good character values become an important foundation for students to live with dignity within their community and country (Pangalila et al., 2022).

The role of schools in this context is pivotal. Beyond knowledge transfer, schools serve as social environments where students' personalities are shaped through direct interactions, the example set by educators, and a wide array of activities designed to foster character development (Nurhayati, 2020). According to grand theories of education, such as those posited by Dewey (1997) and Freire (1970), education's role extends beyond intellectual training to the cultivation of a participatory democratic ethos, which can be developed through curriculum and extracurricular activities. This aligns with educational theory, which emphasises the importance of engaging students in real-life problem-solving and reflective practice, both of which foster active citizenship and social responsibility (Zhou et al., 2025).

However, challenges persist in the practical implementation of character education. One major barrier is the proliferation of social media and external environmental influences (Arafah et al., 2025), which often promote values that contradict prevailing cultural norms (Chen & Xiao, 2022). Meso-level factors such as teacher training, school culture, and community support further complicate the integration of character education into daily teaching practices. Effective methods of communication and the avoidance of overly didactic approaches are essential to ensure that moral messages resonate with students (Incio et al., 2021; Solihat, 2024; Vannoy & Palvia, 2010).

Schools, as one of the formal education institutions, have a great responsibility in instilling character values in students (Dalyono & Lestariningsih, 2017). Apart from being a place to transfer knowledge, schools also function as a social environment that shapes students' personalities through interactions, exemplary educators, and various activities that support character development (Lestari, 2020). Character education in schools aims to instil positive values that can shape students' personalities into individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also have good social, emotional, and moral abilities. These values include honesty, discipline, cooperation, respect, and responsibility (Maisaroh & Untari, 2024).

However, the implementation of character education in schools faces various challenges. One of these is the development of social media and the influence of the environment outside the school, which often introduces values that are contrary to the prevailing culture and social norms (Fauzi & Irawan, 2025). In addition, conveying moral values to students requires appropriate methods and approaches so that character messages can be effectively conveyed without sounding patronising (Utomo, 2016). Schools need to innovate in developing character education strategies, both through the integration of character values in subjects and value-based learning, as well as through extracurricular activities that actively involve students in activities that embody these values (Koesoema, 2015).

At the macro level, character education theories draw from social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that behaviour is influenced by environmental interactions and role models. For instance, the role of teachers and peers in shaping

student behaviour has been widely documented. At the meso level, school culture and community influence the shaping of moral values and actions, aligning with sociocultural theories by Vygotsky & Cole (1978), which stress the importance of social interactions in cognitive and ethical development. Applied theories, such as Mezirow (2003) transformative learning, emphasise the need for deep, reflective learning that challenges assumptions and encourages students to act based on newfound values.

In the contemporary educational landscape, the need for character education becomes even more pressing as societal shifts, digital transformation, and the pursuit of social justice necessitate a reevaluation of the values we teach students. The integration of digital literacy in character education becomes essential, as students are exposed to vast amounts of information online, often without the necessary ethical framework to evaluate it. Educational theories on digital citizenship and information ethics, as suggested by scholars such as Rheingold (2012), argue that students must develop a sense of responsibility not only in the physical world but also in the digital spaces they inhabit. These digital skills, when integrated with traditional character education, can help students navigate the complexities of modern society with integrity and confidence.

Future challenges in character education are closely linked to ongoing societal developments, including the expansion of online learning platforms, the growing influence of artificial intelligence, and the transformation of traditional learning environments. Educators and policymakers must carefully consider how these innovations can enhance or detract from the goals of character education. As grand theories of technology in education highlight (Selwyn, 2021), there is both potential and risk in incorporating technology into educational systems. Therefore, future studies should aim to develop frameworks that align technology with character education in ways that promote ethical decision-making, critical thinking, and civic responsibility among students, particularly in high schools.

This study aims to fill the existing gap by exploring the implementation of character education in SMA Negeri 3 Tondano, using both theoretical insights and empirical data. The research will not only enrich theoretical discussions but also provide practical recommendations for enhancing character education strategies in high schools, particularly in adapting them to the needs of the digital age.

Method

In addition to its primary methodology, the study also employed document analysis as a complementary approach to gain a deeper understanding of how character education is implemented. This process involved examining pertinent school policies, curriculum-related papers, and lesson plans that contributed to the development of students' character. The researchers would be able to compare the theoretical frameworks of character education with the real-world practices observed at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano through an analysis of these materials. The subject matter underwent a more thorough study because of the triangulation of data sources, which included the combination of documentary evidence, observational data, and interview data.

To select the participants for the interviews, it was essential to employ purposive sampling. The researchers selected key informants based on their direct participation in the conception, implementation, or evaluation of character education programs offered at the school. As a result of this method, the gathered information was both pertinent and extensive, providing a thorough understanding of the functions of the various parties involved in the process. To pick participants, the researchers took into consideration both the participants' skills and experience. This resulted in the selection of senior teachers who had been teaching character education for a considerable period, as well as students who had actively participated in character education activities.

Additionally, to analyse the data collected from the interviews, the researchers employed a method of analysis known as thematic analysis. To achieve this, it was necessary to identify, analyse, and report on patterns (themes) present in the data, to draw significant conclusions. The investigators focused their attention on recurring issues, including the effectiveness of tactics for teaching children about character, the obstacles that students and educators encounter, and the impact of the school's social and cultural environment on character formation. By utilising this approach, the objective of the study was to achieve a more nuanced understanding of how character education is implemented and experienced in authentic school environments.

The purpose of this research was to contribute to the broader conversation on character education. This was accomplished using a qualitative approach that is descriptive in nature, and the study provided actionable suggestions for enhancing the implementation of character education in schools. The results will also provide guidance to those in positions of authority, educators, and researchers regarding the obstacles and opportunities presented by programs for character education, especially in educational institutions in Indonesia.

Finding and Discussion

Findings

The research results were obtained using two primary methods: direct observation in the field and in-depth interviews with students and teachers. The data collected were analysed descriptively and qualitatively. The findings are presented as follows.

The researchers conducted observations for three consecutive days, from Wednesday, April 23, 2025, to Friday, April 25, 2025, at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano. On the first day, the observation process was less optimal because the school leader was unavailable, and the researcher had not yet been officially accepted. Nevertheless, the researcher utilised the opportunity to capture visual documentation that provided an initial overview of character education implementation at the school.

From the documentation captured on the first day, the researchers obtained eight photographs depicting various conditions and activities within the school environment. Some images showed teachers explaining school activities and the process of handing over permits. These visuals illustrated character values such as social care, responsibility, and communicativeness. Additionally, documentation of the school's Vision and Mission highlighted how the Ministry of Education's character values, including religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, and responsibility, are embedded in the school's guiding statements. Observations of the physical environment, such as the parking areas and waste disposal sites, further reflected the application of discipline, environmental care, social responsibility, and accountability.

The second day of observation proved more effective. The researcher noted that the culture of Smile, Greet, and Salute (3S) had become a well-established habit at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano. Students consistently greeted the researcher with phrases such as "Good morning, Sir" or "Good afternoon, Sir," reflecting the internalisation of discipline, tolerance, social care, and communicative values. Additionally, the researcher witnessed a teacher discovering a cell phone left on a motorcycle dashboard in the dormitory parking area. The teacher promptly secured the item, demonstrating honesty and responsibility within the school community.

On the same day, Grade X students participated in the Leadership Project, themed "Exploring the History of Islamic Kingdoms in Indonesia Through a Gallery Walk Competition." This activity allowed students to demonstrate character values such as tolerance, hard work, creativity, curiosity, national spirit, patriotism, communication, and responsibility. Students' enthusiasm was evident in their preparation of chairs, materials, and group tasks before the activity, reflecting discipline, diligence,

independence, effective communication, love for the country, and a strong sense of responsibility.

On the third day, the observations further reinforced the understanding of character education implementation at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano. From the morning, students greeted the picket teachers with handshakes before heading to their respective classes. This habit reflects the internalisation of discipline and responsibility in students' daily routines. For tardy students, the school has established a grouping system based on arrival times: students arriving between 7:00 and 7:05 line up near the office, while those arriving after 7:05 line up in front of the school gate. This arrangement not only maintains order but also reinforces discipline and responsibility.

The researcher also observed a healthy walk activity in commemoration of National Education Day. Before the activity, all students gathered on the ceremonial field, received instructions from the student council coach and the Deputy Head of Student Affairs, and participated in a prayer led by one of the students. This activity embodies religious values, discipline, and responsibility. During the walk, students were organised neatly by class in two lines to avoid disturbing public road users, demonstrating a strong habit of discipline, peace, and responsibility values within the school environment.

During their free time, students engaged in sports such as volleyball and basketball, illustrating the values of discipline, hard work, independence, and responsibility. On the sidelines, the principal provided guidance to four students who were selected to represent the school in a line dance competition at Citra Kasih School in Manado. This activity further reinforced the development of hard work, independence, and responsibility among the participating students.

In general, the results of three days of observations at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano indicate that the school implements character education not only through classroom learning but also through various student activities, daily habits, management of the physical environment, and special events such as leadership projects and national holiday commemorations. These activities serve as effective means to instil and reinforce character values prescribed by the Ministry of National Education.

Following the observations, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews over two days, Thursday, April 24, and Friday, April 25, 2025. The interviews aimed to gather data on the implementation of character education from both students' and teachers' perspectives. The participants included five students from different grade levels and four teachers, including the principal.

Interviews with the students revealed that character values are consistently applied within the school. For instance, *D*, a Grade X.A student, explained that in the school environment, particularly for dormitory students, character values are reinforced through strict rules regarding bedtime, waking up, and morning worship. Additionally, daily routines teach students discipline and time management, which contribute significantly to the development of personal responsibility and self-discipline. These findings highlight the role of structured routines and school regulations in shaping students' character, complementing the lessons delivered in formal classroom settings.

Meanwhile, *G*, a student of class XI.F who also serves as treasurer of the student council, revealed that discipline is one of the main values applied at school. According to her, the routine worship every Friday, which must be followed by all students according to their respective religions, is a form of religious character building and tolerance in the school environment.

E, a Grade XII.E student, added that simple character values, such as disposing of garbage properly and refraining from taking items that do not belong to them, are consistently reinforced. Students are required to hand over any found items to a teacher or the school, which fosters honesty and responsibility.

GA, a Grade XII student, emphasised that discipline is the primary value promoted at the school. Students are accustomed to arriving on time, dressing neatly, and adhering to school and dormitory rules, which cultivate responsibility, independence, and self-discipline.

W, a Grade XI.B student and chairperson of the student council for the 2025–2026 period, stated that the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) program has enhanced character development at the school. The program offers students opportunities to develop their creativity and character through various activities, including history gallery competitions, regional dance performances, art exhibitions, and social projects conducted outside of class hours.

The five student informants further explained how they apply character values in daily life. *D* reported that participating in school and student council activities helped him develop discipline, punctuality, and responsibility. *G* stated that character education at school helped establish positive habits within his family and community, such as smiling, greeting, and exchanging polite gestures (3S). He mentioned that he consistently practices honesty, discipline, and punctuality in daily routines. *GA* noted that he applies character values by obeying teachers, cooperating with peers, and assisting parents at home. Meanwhile, *W* explained that habits of maintaining cleanliness and order at school have cultivated his environmental awareness in his residential surroundings.

Interviews with teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano highlighted the crucial role of character education. *ER*, a Mathematics teacher and homeroom teacher of class XI.G, emphasised that character education is more important than academic knowledge. She explained that students with strong character find it easier to develop intellectual abilities, and teachers themselves serve as role models by demonstrating discipline, honesty, and responsibility.

NA, an Indonesian language teacher and student council advisor, stated that intellectual development and character must go hand in hand. She added that the school's implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum explicitly integrates Pancasila values into learning outcomes. Additionally, the P5 program effectively shapes students' character through creative projects and cultural activities.

IT, the counselling teacher, expressed concern about highly intelligent students who lack moral grounding. She emphasised that character education is essential to developing individuals with excellence and integrity. She routinely fosters character values through counselling guidance, habituation, and reinforcement during extracurricular activities.

The Principal, *NS*, explained that the primary purpose of education at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano is to shape students' character. She stated that a well-developed character determines students' future behaviour and success. The school implements various programs to support this goal, including routine worship, the 3S culture (Smile, Greet, Salute), environmental cleanliness initiatives, and motivational slogans displayed throughout the school. Moreover, the P5 program serves as the central strategy for cultivating adaptive, critical, religious, and cultured student characters.

Overall, interviews with both students and teachers indicate that SMA Negeri 3 Tondano consistently incorporates character education into its learning activities, student council programs, dormitory routines, and student projects. The P5 program and Merdeka Curriculum play pivotal roles in strengthening character education. Values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and religiosity are instilled daily through teacher exemplars, school regulations, and structured extracurricular activities, demonstrating the school's holistic approach to character development.

Discussions

An Overview of Student Character at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano

Based on three days of observations and interviews conducted from April 23 to 25, 2025, the researchers found that students at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano generally exhibit positive character traits. These traits align with the 18-character values identified by the Ministry of National Education (Rahayu, 2017), which include religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, patriotism, respect for achievement, communication, peace-loving, reading habits, environmental awareness, social care, and responsibility. Students at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano not only possess these values but also apply them in their daily lives.

Based on observations and interviews, the researchers identified two primary factors that contribute to students' development of positive character traits. *First*, the school emphasises character education, as reflected in its Vision and Mission. *Second*, the P5 program (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project), implemented within the independent curriculum, promotes character development by reinforcing Pancasila values through project-based learning (Putra, 2024). These factors complement each other: the integration of a dedicated program in the curriculum facilitates the school's efforts to instil character values, while the school's strong commitment to character education reinforces the program's effectiveness (Indriani et al., 2024; Jones & Stoodley, 1999).

Although SMA Negeri 3 Tondano students generally exhibit positive character traits, some aspects still require attention, particularly in terms of punctuality. The researchers observed on April 24 and 25, 2025, that dozens of students arrived late. On April 25, approximately 35 students were late, with 20 in Group A (arriving between 7:00 and 7:05) and 15 in Group B (arriving after 7:05). This conclusion is supported by evidence from these observations, indicating that time discipline remains an area for improvement.

Implementation of Character Education in SMA Negeri 3 Tondano

In general, SMA Negeri 3 Tondano implements character education effectively, as reflected in the students demonstrated character traits. Students exhibit all 18-character values identified by the Ministry of Education, although certain values, such as punctuality, still require improvement. The alignment between the school's Vision—Noble, Superior, Competitive, Cultured, and Environmentally Sound—and the independent curriculum's objective of fostering Pancasila-based character facilitates and strengthens the school's efforts to instil these values consistently and systematically (Lonto et al., 2018). This alignment enables teachers and administrators to integrate character development into daily school activities, structured programs, and project-based learning initiatives, reinforcing both theoretical understanding and practical application of character values.

Students' religious values are evident in daily behaviours and routines (Pangalila, 2017). Before and after lessons, students greet and pray according to their respective beliefs. The school organises regular worship activities every Friday to accommodate different religions. Observations on April 24, 2025, revealed students' honesty when a teacher discovered a smartphone left in a dormitory parking area; students did not take the item. Interviews conducted on April 25 confirmed this behaviour, as a Grade XII.E student stated, "If we find money or valuables in the school environment, we cannot take it but must report to the teacher." These observations and interviews indicate that students consistently uphold honesty and integrate this value into their daily routines.

The value of tolerance is also evident in school practices. During the Leadership Project on April 24, students explored the history of Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia through a gallery walk competition. Although most students are Christian, the school chose this theme to promote tolerance and cultural understanding. Furthermore, the

student council chairperson for the 2023–2024 period is Muslim, demonstrating that leadership opportunities are equally accessible to students of different faiths. These factors collectively indicate that SMA Negeri 3 Tondano successfully fosters tolerance among its students.

Nevertheless, punctuality remains an area requiring improvement. Observations on April 25, 2025, revealed that approximately 35 students arrived late to school, with 20 arriving between 07:00 and 07:05 and 15 arriving after 07:05. This finding suggests that while students generally demonstrate positive character traits, time discipline has not yet been fully internalised. Addressing this gap will further strengthen the overall implementation of character education at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano, ensuring that students not only possess strong moral values but also consistently practice them in all aspects of school life.

Conclusion

The students at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano generally demonstrate positive character traits. They consistently exhibit all 18-character values identified by the Ministry of National Education, including religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, patriotism, respect for achievement, communication, peace-loving, reading habits, environmental awareness, social care, and responsibility. Two main factors contribute to these strong character values. First, the school emphasises character education, as reflected in its Vision and Mission. Second, the P5 program (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project), integrated into the independent curriculum, promotes character development through project-based learning that reinforces Pancasila values. These factors work together to effectively cultivate students' moral and social competencies.

The implementation of character education at SMA Negeri 3 Tondano is highly effective, as evident from the students' demonstrated character traits. While students possess all 18 character values, certain aspects, such as punctuality, still require further attention. Positive habits among school members, such as smiling, greeting, and exchanging polite gestures (3S), support the implementation of character education by embedding these values into daily school routines. Furthermore, the alignment between the school's Vision—which emphasises noble character, excellence, competitiveness, cultural awareness, and environmental consciousness—and the independent curriculum's goal of developing Pancasila-based character facilitates and accelerates the instillation of these values. Consequently, the school successfully integrates both structured programs and everyday practices to reinforce students' understanding and application of character values.

Disclosure Statement

The author(s) do(es) not have any potential conflict of interest to disclose.

Funding Statement

This work does not receive funding.

Ethics Approval

There is no ethics approval needed.

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