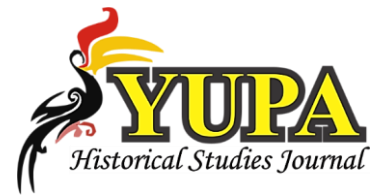


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Comparative Study on the Role of Character Education in Shaping Social Studies Curricula in Japan and Indonesia

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Abstract This study explores the character values as the foundation for Social Studies curriculum development through a comparative analysis between Indonesia and Japan. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with content analysis of official curriculum documents, the research reveals that both nations place strong emphasis on character formation, though shaped by distinct historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts. Japan's approach is deeply rooted in a consistent and centralized education system that blends constitutional nationalism, cultural collectivism, and Bushidō ethics into daily school life. Meanwhile, Indonesia has experienced a dynamic transformation from ideological and centralized models to more flexible, contextual, and culturally responsive curricula, particularly under the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings underscore the need for localized pedagogical strategies and enhanced teacher competencies to effectively translate character education into practice, enabling the development of socially responsible, globally aware citizens grounded in national values.

Keywords: character values, Social Studies, curriculum reform, Indonesia, Japan.

Abstrak Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana nilai-nilai karakter dijadikan dasar dalam pengembangan kurikulum Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (IPS), melalui perbandingan antara Indonesia dan Jepang. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dan analisis isi terhadap dokumen kurikulum resmi, ditemukan bahwa kedua negara sama-sama menempatkan pendidikan karakter sebagai elemen penting, namun melalui pendekatan dan latar belakang yang berbeda. Jepang membangun sistem yang terintegrasi antara kurikulum, budaya sekolah, dan nilai tradisional seperti nasionalisme konstitusional, kolektivisme budaya, dan etika Bushidō. Sementara itu, Indonesia menunjukkan perubahan dari pendekatan yang bersifat normatif dan ideologis menjadi lebih fleksibel dan kontekstual, terutama melalui Kurikulum Merdeka. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan pentingnya penguatan kapasitas guru dan pendekatan pedagogi yang responsif terhadap budaya lokal untuk membentuk karakter pelajar yang berdaya saing global namun tetap berakar pada nilai kemanusiaan dan kebangsaan.

Kata kunci : nilai karakter, Pendidikan IPS, reformasi kurikulum, Indonesia, Jepang.



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INTRODUCTION

Entering the 21st century, the paradigm of education has undergone a profound transformation. The dynamic nature of the global world, marked by social complexity and technological disruption, demands an education system that not only emphasizes academic content mastery but also integrates character values as the foundation for students' personal development (Nadilla et al., 2024). Core competencies of the 21st century critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (4Cs) can only be fully developed when supported by moral intelligence and personal integrity (Indraswati et al., 2020). In this context, Lickona (1991) defines character education as a deliberate and systematic effort to instill moral virtues that underpin an individual's life and contributions to society (Loloagin et al., 2023). This perspective underscores the importance of character education as a central element in educational policy and practice.

Social Studies holds a particularly strategic role in grounding character values within real-life social contexts (Nadilla et al., 2024; Syaharuddin et al., 2025). As a discipline that explores society, social interactions, history, culture, and civic values, Social Studies becomes a dialogical space where academic and moral dimensions intersect (Adawiyah et al., 2017). Sapriya (2017) argues that Social Studies serves as a medium for cultivating critical and responsible citizenship. Therefore, Social Studies should not be viewed solely as a cognitive subject but also as a culturally reflective and contextually grounded platform for character education (Hidayat, 2020).

In response to the demands of the times, Indonesia has introduced the Merdeka Curriculum, which positions character development as a key pillar of national education (Syaharuddin et al., 2025). The implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile is designed to nurture holistic learners students who are faithful, globally minded, independent, collaborative, critical, and creative (Pangkey & Wongkar, 2024). However, its implementation at the school level still faces considerable challenges note a significant gap between centrally formulated policies and their execution in the field. Teachers continue to struggle in contextualizing character values within subject matter and in designing learning that meaningfully engages local communities and cultures (Nadilla et al., 2023, 2024).

In comparison, Japan has developed an integrated character education system through moral education (*dōtoku*) since the post-World War II era. The moral foundation of Japanese education is strongly influenced by Bushidō ethics a moral code of the samurai that emphasizes seven virtues: *gi* (integrity), *yu* (courage), *jin* (compassion), *rei* (respect), *makoto* (sincerity), *meiyo* (honor), and *chūgi* (loyalty) (Fouladi, 2018). These values are reflected not only in the formal curriculum but also in school culture, which emphasizes discipline, responsibility, mutual respect, and collective action. Moral education is not treated as a separate subject, but rather internalized through daily classroom interactions, school activities, and consistent teacher role

modeling (Hardi et al., 2023; Mulyadi, 2014). Japan's character education system is thus built on the continuity between curriculum, school environment, and traditional values contextualized in modern educational settings (Kawaguchi & Kim, 2020).

Nevertheless, both Indonesia and Japan face transformative challenges. In Indonesia, the primary challenge lies in integrating character values into localized, authentic pedagogical practices. Meanwhile, in Japan, the issue is how to maintain the relevance of traditional values in an increasingly pluralistic, liberal, and globalized society. These challenges underscore the need for character education to remain responsive and adaptive to ongoing socio-cultural dynamics (Nadila & Alam, 2024).

Against this backdrop, it is essential to conduct a comparative study that not only investigates how character values are embedded within the Social Studies curriculum but also examines the distinct approaches taken by Indonesia and Japan. This research aims to analyze the character foundations underlying Social Studies curriculum development in both countries and to identify best practices that could inform the construction of a more contextual and transformative national curriculum. Employing a comparative approach, the study seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to the design of Social Studies curricula that emphasize not only knowledge acquisition but also the formation of national character rooted in humanistic and cultural values.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using content analysis design focused on examining relevant scholarly articles. The primary aim was to explore and compare how character values are represented within the Social Studies curriculum in Indonesia and Japan, based on findings reported in peer-reviewed academic publications.

The subjects of this study were scholarly articles published in nationally and internationally accredited journals that specifically discuss the integration of character education within the Social Studies curriculum of both countries. These articles were retrieved through online databases.

Data collection was conducted through document analysis of selected articles. Inclusion criteria involved articles that addressed curriculum studies, character values, and educational contexts in Indonesia and Japan. Thematic analysis was applied through the following steps: (1) identifying recurring character values, (2) classifying these values based on national character dimensions and the Pancasila Student Profile (for Indonesia) and traditional Japanese moral frameworks such as *dōtoku* and *Bushidō*, and (3) comparing the representation of character values across both national contexts.

To ensure data validity, theoretical triangulation was applied by cross-checking findings across multiple sources and aligning them with established theories of character education. This methodological approach is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how character education is constructed in the Social Studies curriculum from a comparative perspective.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Japan has undergone a long and complex historical development, which has significantly influenced the foundation of its social studies curriculum. Consequently, the curriculum is deeply rooted in historical events and cultural values that have shaped the nation's identity. Likewise, Indonesia's curriculum has also evolved based on its own historical and sociocultural context. Based on these similarities, a comparative analysis of character values in the foundations of the social studies curricula in Japan and Indonesia is presented in the following section.

Philosophical and Historical Transformations of the Social Studies Curriculum in Japan and Indonesia

The development of Social Studies curricula in both Japan and Indonesia reflects each nation's unique historical journey in shaping national identity, values, and responses to global changes. In these countries, education has been designed not only to deliver academic knowledge but also to instill civic responsibility, democratic ideals, and moral character in alignment with the evolving challenges of both local and global society (Hanifa et al., 2024; Wahyudin, 2004).

In Japan, the roots of the Social Studies curriculum, known as *Shakaika*, can be traced to the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education, which emphasized the formation of well-rounded individuals capable of living in a democratic society. This curriculum aimed to foster justice, social responsibility, cooperation, and environmental awareness (Badawi, 2024; Beauchamp & Vardaman Jr, 2015; Rayhan, 2023). A major reform in 2006 further incorporated themes of national identity, patriotism, and peace, blending traditional values with modern expectations (NCEE, 2023).

Historically, Japan's approach to Social Studies has evolved significantly. During the Meiji era (1868–1912), Western education was adopted to modernize the country, but by the time of World War II, schools became tools of extreme nationalism. The moral subject *Shūshin* was used to embed Confucian and Bushidō ethics, stressing loyalty, courage, and discipline (Wahyudin, 2004). Students were taught loyalty to the Emperor and values such as *Chikoku* (defending the homeland) and *Heitenka* (eternal reverence for the Emperor), which aligned with samurai ideals (Nadilla et al., 2023; Nishigori et al., 2014; Suseno, 2017).

After Japan's defeat in 1945, major reforms took place under Allied occupation. The General Headquarters (GHQ) immediately removed militaristic content and ultra-nationalist

ideology from the education system (Badawi, 2024; Ong, 2020) *Shūshin* was eliminated and replaced by *Shakaika* a new subject aimed at preparing students for democratic life (Ikeno, 2012). This marked a shift from indoctrination to integrated, humanistic education. Simultaneously, the school system was restructured, introducing a 6-3-3-4 format with nine years of compulsory education (Nadila & Alam, 2024).

By the 1950s, as Japan regained sovereignty, educational governance shifted toward decentralization while curriculum control remained with the Ministry of Education (MEXT). Moral education (*Dōtoku*) was reintroduced, not as a vehicle for ideology, but as a space to cultivate values like social responsibility and respect. Since then, revisions to the curriculum have been made regularly to address contemporary needs globalization, technology, and climate change—while staying rooted in postwar values of peace and participation (Wahyuni, 2018).

In Indonesia, the Social Studies curriculum is grounded in the values of Pancasila, the country's ideological foundation. In the early years of independence through the 1970s, social subjects like history and geography were taught separately, often relying on rote learning. The 1975 Curriculum marked a major shift by integrating these disciplines into a single subject: Social Studies. The Ministry of Education at the time emphasized that the aim was to foster national character and civic consciousness (Fauziah et al., 2022; Suastika, 2021).

During the New Order era, Social Studies was used to promote state loyalty and ideology (Hidayat, 2020; Nebras, 2025). This began to shift with the 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum, which emphasized critical thinking, social skills, and democratic values. The 2006 School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) allowed greater local adaptation, and the 2013 Curriculum introduced inquiry-based approaches to strengthen student engagement and character formation. The 2022 Merdeka Curriculum places greater emphasis on flexibility, student choice, and real-world projects aligned with the values of the Pancasila Student (Fauziah et al., 2022; Indriani & Maknun, 2024; Rahma et al., 2022).

Based on the preceding explanation, the philosophical foundations and historical trajectories of the Social Studies curricula in Japan and Indonesia can be summarized and compared in Table 1 below.

Tabel 1. Comparative Analysis of the Philosophical and Historical Trajectories of the Social Studies Curriculum in Japan and Indonesia

Aspect	Japan	Indonesia
Philosophical Foundation of the Curriculum	<i>Fundamental Law of Education</i> (1947): development of holistic personality and democratic life	Pancasila as the moral, ideological foundation and direction of national education

Name of the Subject	<i>Shakaika</i> (Social Studies), <i>Dōtoku</i> (Moral Education)	Integrated Social Studies (<i>Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial / IPS</i>) at elementary and secondary levels
Early Period	Meiji Era (1868–1912): adoption of Western education system for modernizationPre-1945: domination of <i>Shūshin</i> (moral education) rooted in Confucian and <i>Bushidō</i> values	Early post-independence period (1945–1970s): social subjects were separated (history, geography, economics, civics)
Militaristic/Nationalistic Era	1930–1945: curriculum used as a tool of extreme nationalism and militarism propaganda	New Order Era (1975–1998): Social Studies used to shape loyalty to the state through normative and indoctrinative approaches
Post–World War II Period	1947: Curriculum reform under Allied occupation; <i>Shūshin</i> was abolished; <i>Shakaika</i> introduced to promote democratic citizenship	1975: Integrated Social Studies introduced in the 1975 Curriculum, aimed at fostering national awareness and civic responsibility
Curriculum Structure	6-3-3-4 structure (Elementary–Junior High– Senior High–University), with 9 years of compulsory basic education	Also adopts 6-3-3-4 structure; curriculum transitioned from a centralized-national format to a school-based curriculum (KTSP), and now to the <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i>
Educational Reform	1950s: <i>Dōtoku</i> reintroduced with universal valuesCurriculum revised every decade: 1958, 1968, 1977, 1989, 1998, 2008	2004: Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) emphasizes critical thinking2006: KTSP emphasizes local wisdom2013: scientific approach2022: <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i> introduced
Role of the State in the Curriculum	Centralized control by MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology); curriculum revised through long-term policy review	Initially centralized; since 2006 KTSP became more decentralized; <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i> provides greater autonomy to individual schools

Based on the table 1 the comparative table above, it can be concluded that both Japan and Indonesia use social studies curricula as tools for character development and the promotion of national values. However, differences emerge in the historical context and philosophical foundations underpinning each country's educational system. Japan's curriculum was restructured after World War II to emphasize democracy, peace, and a balance between

traditional and modern values. Militaristic subjects such as *Shūshin* were abolished and replaced by *Shakaika*, which integrates social values into a unified subject. Japan's curriculum undergoes systematic revision every decade to adapt to contemporary challenges such as digitalization and climate change (Halawa et al., 2023).

In contrast, Indonesia's social studies curriculum emerged from post-independence nationalism, rooted in Pancasila values. Initially fragmented into separate disciplines history, geography, and economics, the curriculum was heavily influenced by colonial legacy and rote learning. It was only in the 1975 Curriculum that the government integrated these disciplines into a unified Social Studies (IPS) subject aimed at instilling nationalist character during the New Order, using normative and ideological approaches (Harahap et al., 2024).

Following the reform era, the curriculum shifted toward greater decentralization. The 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum and the 2006 School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) introduced space for local content and school autonomy. These changes were reinforced in the 2013 Curriculum and the most recent *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasize scientific approaches, project-based learning, and the reinforcement of the Pancasila Student Profile. Indonesia's social studies curriculum has become more flexible, contextual, and geared toward fostering critical thinking and character development in response to evolving societal demands ((Alhamuddin, 2014; Febriyenti et al., 2023; Manurung, 2019).

In summary, Japan's social studies curriculum is more centralized and stable, while Indonesia's is more dynamic and adaptive. Despite differing approaches, both countries share a common goal: to develop intelligent, socially aware citizens capable of navigating an ever-changing world.

Character Values Analysis in the Social Studies Curriculum of Japan and Indonesia

The Social Studies curriculum in Japan clearly reflects a systematic effort by both the government and society to cultivate a young generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally and socially mature. Character education in Japanese Social Studies is not treated as a separate subject; rather, it is deeply and holistically integrated into the content, teaching methods, and school culture. In this context, Social Studies serves not merely as an academic tool for transferring social knowledge, but also as a strategic medium for developing civic character one that is rooted in cultural tradition while remaining responsive to global dynamics. Three core character values underpinning the Social Studies curriculum in Japan are constitutional nationalism, cultural collectivism, and the Bushidō ethos (Fouladi, 2018; Suseno, 2017; Watahiki et al., 2020).

One of the most significant transformations in Japan's education system occurred after World War II, particularly in the teaching of Social Studies. Historically, prior to 1945, Social Studies especially history and civics were used as ideological tools to reinforce imperial authority

and justify military expansion through narratives of Japanese cultural supremacy. However, Japan's defeat in World War II led to the enactment of the Fundamental Law of Education in 1947, which marked a major shift in the national education system. Previously exclusive and dominant forms of nationalism were restructured into constitutional nationalism defined by a love of the nation grounded in democratic values, human rights, and a commitment to global peace. The 2006 revision of the education law further emphasized the importance of respecting national culture and fostering pride in citizenship within a framework of openness and equality (MEXT, 2006). Within this framework, Social Studies not only introduces national identity, but also encourages students to reflect critically and responsibly on historical narratives (Badawi, 2024; Putri et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Japanese culture has historically prioritized the values of social harmony and communal coexistence. Concepts such as *wa* (harmony) and *omoiyari* (empathy for others) are deeply embedded in the national education system, including in the teaching of Social Studies. Social learning is not designed to produce individually competitive students, but rather to cultivate individuals capable of coexisting peacefully, cooperating with others, and prioritizing collective well-being (Rini, 2017; Sudarsih, 2019).

In Japanese schools, practices such as classroom cleaning (*souji*), communal lunch (*kyūshoku*), and shared responsibilities are not merely routine activities, but meaningful vehicles for the internalization of social values. Within Social Studies, instruction is delivered through cooperative learning, group discussions, and community-based projects that engage students in real-world problem-solving from multiple perspectives. These approaches transform Social Studies into a dynamic arena of social learning, rather than a passive channel for the transmission of information (Sinakou et al., 2019; Zhou & Colomer, 2024) (Sinakou et al., 2019; Zhou & Colomer, 2024).

In addition, the Bushidō ethic Japan's traditional moral code inherited from the samurai continues to play a significant role in shaping character education through the Social Studies curriculum. Values such as courage, honor, integrity, discipline, and public service are maintained in forms that have been adapted to the modern context (Nadilla et al., 2023). Although militaristic moral education has not been explicitly taught since the end of World War II, many principles of Bushidō remain embedded in character education. Within Social Studies, these values are integrated into civics and history classes through the introduction of national figures who exemplify moral courage and social responsibility. Since 2015, the Japanese government has issued *dōtoku* textbooks for use in moral education, reinforcing the teaching of values such as *meiyo* (honor) and *makoto* (sincerity) (Fouladi, 2018; Ikeno, 2012). Thus, character education within the Social Studies curriculum not only reinforces cultural identity but also aims to produce morally upright, disciplined citizens with strong resilience in the face of social challenges.

Thus, the Social Studies curriculum in Japan reflects a synthesis of educational modernization and the preservation of deeply rooted cultural values. The postwar transformation of nationalism, the strengthening of collectivism as a social foundation, and the preservation of Bushidō ethics through character education have positioned Social Studies not merely as an academic subject, but as a vital instrument for shaping socially responsible citizens who remain grounded in the noble values of their nation.

In contrast, the development of the Social Studies curriculum in Indonesia not only mirrors shifts in pedagogical approaches, but also reveals how the state has historically shaped and instilled character values in students. Since the New Order era, character education within Social Studies has been strongly influenced by state ideological values. The 1975 curriculum, for instance, was primarily designed to develop "Indonesian individuals with a Pancasila spirit, responsible to society and the state" (Depdikbud, 1975). The character values emphasized during this period included nationalism, loyalty to the government, social obedience, and discipline closely aligned with the political stability agenda of the New Order regime (Hidayat, 2020; Indriani & Maknun, 2024).

During the 1984 and 1994 curriculum periods, character education remained normative and collective in nature. Social Studies was utilized as a vehicle for strengthening national identity and ideological resilience. Values such as order, stability, and anti-communism became dominant within instructional materials and pedagogical approaches. Student character was molded to be obedient, uniform, and unquestioning. Scholars such as Tilaar (2002) criticized that "education during that time prioritized indoctrination over the cultivation of critical thinking (Hidayat, 2020). Significant change occurred in the early reform era with the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi or KBK) in 2004. This curriculum promoted more contextual and humanistic character values, such as curiosity, social responsibility, and critical thinking skills. Social Studies was no longer solely focused on delivering social knowledge, but reoriented toward developing learners' personal and social competencies through thematic and contextual learning. As Mulyasa (2005) noted, "character education in the KBK was directed at shaping individuals who are independent and adaptable to their social environments."

Subsequently, the 2006 School-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan or KTSP) provided greater space for the development of character education based on local contexts. Character values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), intercultural tolerance, and patriotism were adapted to suit regional needs and cultural specificities. KTSP opened opportunities for the integration of local wisdom into Social Studies, thereby shifting character education from a nationally uniform approach to one that is contextual and community-based.

This aligns with Suyanto's (2009) assertion that "local wisdom is a fundamental foundation in the nation's character education."

A more systematic transformation was evident in the 2013 Curriculum, which explicitly introduced 18 national character values developed through a scientific approach. These values include religiosity, honesty, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, tolerance, environmental and social awareness, as well as national spirit. Under this curriculum, Social Studies was designed to reinforce character by integrating interdisciplinary social themes that are closely related to students' everyday lives. The government, through the Research and Development Agency, stated that "character education is no longer a standalone subject but has become the substance of the entire learning process" (Kusnoto, 2017).

The most progressive shift occurred with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022. This curriculum embodies the philosophy of "freedom to learn" (*merdeka belajar*), which emphasizes differentiated, student-centered, and contextual learning (Putra & Wanda, 2023). Character education is framed within the Pancasila Student Profile, which comprises six core dimensions: faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, independence, mutual cooperation, critical thinking, and creativity. Social Studies serves as a key vehicle for instilling these values through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Projects (P5), which explore social issues in an interdisciplinary and reflective manner (Fauzi et al., 2023). Furthermore, character education in the Merdeka Curriculum aims to shape students who are capable of critical thinking, collaborative action, and a commitment to social well-being (Pangkey & Wongkar, 2024).

Thus, the evolution of the Social Studies curriculum in Indonesia illustrates a transformation of character values from those that were once normative and state-centered to those that are contextual, reflective, and grounded in students' social experiences. This transformation demonstrates that character education cannot be separated from a nation's socio-political dynamics, but must continually adapt to the changing times and the needs of society.

The values of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, regarded as the Father of Indonesian National Education, provide a strong philosophical foundation for every curriculum, including Social Studies. His concept of *Tri-Nga*, *Ngerti* (understanding), *Ngrasa* (feeling/internalizing), and *Nglakoni* (practicing) serves as an approach that aligns with the reinforcement of character values in social learning. Social Studies does not merely focus on the comprehension of social facts (*ngerti*), but also on nurturing empathy and concern for society (*ngrasa*), as well as promoting real and contextual social action (*nglakoni*). Moreover, his principle of "among" educating with compassion while respecting children's nature and their temporal context provides a pedagogical framework for inclusive and humanistic Social Studies instruction. Rooted in national culture, the Social Studies curriculum also reflects Ki Hadjar Dewantara's vision of education as a liberating,

cultivating, and empowering process that shapes learners into noble, character-driven individuals with an Indonesian identity (Sulistyaningrum et al., 2023).

Based on the discussion above, an analysis of character values as the philosophical foundation of the curriculum in Japan and Indonesia can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2 A Comparative Character Education in Social Studies in Japan and Indonesia

Aspect	Indonesia	Japan
Philosophical Foundation	Ki Hadjar Dewantara: Tri-Nga (Ngerti – to understand, Ngrasa – to internalize, Nglakoni – to act) and the among system (education based on compassion and respect for the child's nature)	Bushidō ethics, Wa (harmony), Omoiyari (empathy), and postwar constitutional nationalism
Core Values in the Curriculum	Nationalism, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), tolerance, patriotism, religiosity, discipline, critical thinking, creativity (18 national character values)	Constitutional nationalism, social harmony, empathy, integrity, honor, social responsibility
Approach to Character Education	Integrated across all learning processes, thematic and contextual; Pancasila Student Profile Projects (P5) as the platform for character implementation	Fully integrated across curriculum content, cooperative learning methods, and school culture practices such as souji (classroom cleaning) and kyūshoku (communal lunch)
Specific Curricula	- 1975–1994 Curriculum: focused on order and state ideology - 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK): contextual and humanist values - 2006 School-Based Curriculum (KTSP): local wisdom and community-based learning - 2013 Curriculum: 18 character values - Merdeka Curriculum: Pancasila Student Profile	- Post-WWII 1947: shift to constitutional nationalism - 2006 Education Law Revision: emphasis on cultural respect and human rights - Dōtoku textbook (2015): reinforcement of national moral values
Character Orientation	Transitioned from a state-centric to a contextual and reflective approach; strengthening national identity through local perspectives	Shifted from ideological/militaristic to democratic and humanist; emphasis on universal social and moral character
Instructional Methods	Contextual, thematic, project-based (P5), collaborative learning	Cooperative, reflective, based on social projects and embedded in school culture

Sources of Values	Pancasila, local wisdom, teachings of Ki Hadjar Dewantara	Japanese cultural values, Bushidō principles, modern democracy
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The comparison table highlights that both Indonesia and Japan, despite their distinct historical and cultural backgrounds, share a strong commitment to integrating character education within their Social Studies curriculum. In Indonesia, the evolution of character values can be traced from a state-centric approach during the New Order era to a more reflective and contextual model in the current *Merdeka Curriculum*. This transition reflects a deeper emphasis on local wisdom, national identity, and the educational philosophy of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, embodied through stages of curriculum development.

Japan, on the other hand, has shaped its Social Studies curriculum by harmonizing traditional values with modern democratic ideals. Ethical principles such as *Bushidō*, *wa* (harmony), and *omoiyari* (empathy) remain deeply embedded within educational practices. Rather than being taught as a separate subject, character education in Japan is seamlessly woven into classroom instruction, collaborative learning methods, school routines like cleaning time (*souji*) and communal lunch (*kyūshoku*), and even in moral textbooks like *dōtoku*.

Both countries demonstrate that building students' character cannot be separated from their cultural roots and national visions. Social Studies, in this sense, functions not only as a vehicle for delivering social knowledge but also as a meaningful platform to nurture socially aware, responsible, and culturally grounded citizens who are also prepared to face the challenges of a globalized world.

The comparative perspective between Indonesia and Japan underscores that effective character education requires more than just policy it demands cultural relevance, philosophical depth, and pedagogical innovation. When Social Studies is thoughtfully designed, it becomes more than an academic subject; it becomes a formative experience that shapes learners into thoughtful individuals who uphold values, respect diversity, and contribute positively to society. By grounding education in local philosophy while remaining open to global dynamics, both nations exemplify how character-building in schools can become a foundation for a more humane and resilient future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the comparative analysis of Social Studies curricula in Japan and Indonesia, it can be concluded that both countries emphasize character education as a core foundation in shaping students' personal and social development. The Japanese curriculum highlights values such as collectivism, social responsibility, and harmony, which are cultivated through *dōtoku* (moral education) and an interdisciplinary instructional approach. In contrast, the Indonesian

curriculum is rooted in Pancasila, local wisdom, and national identity, reflecting the country's commitment to nurturing civic values in a culturally diverse society. While the two systems differ in design and implementation, they share a common goal: to foster students with integrity, empathy, and global awareness. However, in practice, the Indonesian system still faces challenges in integrating character values consistently across subjects and classroom practices.

Given these findings, it is recommended that Social Studies education in Indonesia further develop cross-disciplinary approaches that integrate character formation not only in curriculum documents but also in classroom pedagogy. Drawing inspiration from Japan's holistic model, policymakers should support teachers through continuous professional development that focuses on value-based instruction and authentic assessment. Additionally, ongoing comparative research is crucial to inform adaptive and contextually relevant education policies ones that nurture globally competent learners while remaining grounded in local values and cultural identity.

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