

# Critical Paradigm for the Implementation of Character Education in Schools: A Study of the Sociology of Education

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## Abstract

This study critically examines the implementation of character education in schools through the perspective of educational sociology with a critical perspective. Using a qualitative research design with a literature study approach, this study analyzes the mechanisms of symbolic violence, the reproduction of social inequality, and power relations in the practice of character education. The results of the study revealed that the implementation of character education operates as an arena of meaning contestation where the values of the dominant group are hegemonized through curriculum and school practices. The mechanism of symbolic violence works through habituation that reproduces the habitus of the dominant class, while the power relations between teachers, students, and institutions shape conformist subjectivity through disciplinary and normalization technologies. Structural challenges such as limited resources, lack of teacher training, and low parental participation indicate that the problem of character education is political-paradigmatic. This research offers an alternative perspective that emphasizes an emancipatory approach through critical awareness, reflective pedagogy, and a commitment to social justice to transform character education from an instrument of social reproduction into a medium of liberation.

**Keywords:** symbolic violence; character education; sociology of critical education

## Introduction

The transformation of the Indonesian education system faces complex challenges in realizing the formation of holistic and dignified student characters. Character education has been a national priority agenda since the launch of strengthening character education (PPK) as an integral part of the national curriculum, but its implementation at the education unit level still faces various structural problems that require in-depth critical analysis. This phenomenon becomes even more urgent when various studies show that there is a gap between the ideals of character education policies and the reality of practice in the field, where schools still dwell on cognitive orientation and memorization that do not provide space for the authentic internalization of character values (Anisa Amalia Maisaroh & Sri Untari, 2024). This condition indicates the need for an analytical perspective that is able to dismantle the hidden structures in the process of character education, especially through the lens of educational sociology with a critical perspective that can reveal power relations, symbolic dominance, and the reproduction of social inequality in the educational arena.

The study of the sociology of education with a critical paradigm offers a theoretical framework that is different from conventional approaches that tend to be functionalist and normative. The critical paradigm in the sociology of education, as developed by thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, views education not merely as a neutral process of transmission of knowledge and values, but as an arena of power contestation that perpetuates the dominant social structure (Shawn O'Neill, 2023). In the context of the implementation of character education, this paradigm questions whose character values are actually transmitted? How do the mechanisms of symbolic violence operate in the process of character formation? To what extent does the practice of character education reproduce or transform existing social inequality? These fundamental questions have not been adequately answered in the Indonesian character education literature, most of which are still trapped in normative-prescriptive discourses without a critical analysis of the sociological and political dimensions of education. This theoretical vacuum becomes even more apparent when observing that character education in schools is often an instrument of reproduction of the habitus of the dominant class, in which certain cultural capitals are privileged while others are discriminated against, as described in Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence in the education system (Ni'mawati et al., 2020).

Previous research on character education in Indonesia has generally focused on the implementive-pragmatic dimension, such as the strategy for implementing character values, the role of teachers in character education, and the evaluation of the PPK program in schools. Although the contribution of these studies is important in providing a practical

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picture, there is a significant research gap related to structural and critical analysis of the mechanisms of power in the implementation of character education (Fatkhurrahman et al., 2020). Most studies still adopt a functionalist perspective that views character education as a linear and deterministic process, without considering the complexity of social relations, contestation of meaning, and power dynamics inherent in educational practice. This theoretical gap results in a lack of critical understanding of how character education can be a medium for reproducing social injustice when it is not implemented emancipatively. In addition, the novelty of this research lies in the use of the critical paradigm of the sociology of education, especially the concept of habitus, capital, and realm from Pierre Bourdieu, to deeply dissect the hidden mechanisms in the implementation of character education in schools. In contrast to previous studies that tended to be normative-prescriptive, this research offers three main novelties: first, the comprehensive integration between Bourdieu's theory of habitus and Foucault's concept of power-discipline in analyzing character education in the Indonesian context that has never been done before; second, the dismantling of symbolic violence mechanisms in hidden curricula that are not visible in conventional analysis; Third, the formulation of an emancipatory perspective as a concrete paradigmatic alternative for the transformation of character education from an instrument of social reproduction to a medium of liberation. This research fills the literary gap by analyzing character education not limited to pedagogical phenomena, but as a social practice that is loaded with structural and political implications of education.

Based on the problems and research gaps that have been described, this study formulates several fundamental questions: (1) how can the critical paradigm of sociology of education be used to analyze the implementation of character education in schools? (2) How do the mechanisms of symbolic violence and the reproduction of social inequality operate in the practice of character education? (3) Which character values from the perspective of social groups become hegemonic in school curriculum and practice? (4) How does the power relationship between teachers, students, and school institutions shape the process of internalizing character values? This problem formulation is designed to dismantle the taken-for-granted assumptions in character education discourse and uncover hidden dimensions that have gone unnoticed.

The purpose of this research is to construct a critical understanding of the implementation of character education in schools through the lens of the sociology of education with a critical perspective. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) critically analyze the structure and mechanism of the implementation of character education in schools using the theoretical framework of the sociology of critical education, (2) identify and analyze forms of symbolic violence and the reproduction of inequality in the practice of character education, (3) uncover the relationship of power and contestation of meaning in the process of transmitting character values, and (4) formulate an alternative perspective for implementation character education that is more emancipatory and socially just. The theoretical benefit of this research is to enrich the treasure of the study of the sociology of Indonesian education with a critical perspective that has been limited so far, and to contribute to the development of a more contextual and reflective theory of character education. The urgency of this critical study is even more prominent when considering the complexity of the challenges of character education in the context of the rapid social and cultural transformation in Indonesia. The implementation of character education cannot be understood in isolation from the dynamics of changes in social structure, including economic transformation, shifts in cultural values, and the restructuring of power relations in contemporary society. In the perspective of the sociology of critical education, schools are not only institutions that reflect societal values, but also arenas in which those values are contested, negotiated, and transformed through complex interactions between various actors and interests (Nugraha & Hasanah, 2021). Therefore, an analysis of the implementation of character education requires a deep understanding of how power structures operate in shaping the discourse, practice, and outcomes of character education at the level of educational units.

The void of critical analysis in the Indonesian character education literature becomes even more problematic when observing that most studies are still trapped in an instrumentalist paradigm that views character education as a social technology to achieve normative goals that have been determined a priori. This instrumentalist paradigm ignores the fact that character values themselves are not neutral social constructions, but rather loaded with ideological content and certain political interests. (M Mahbubi, 2024) emphasizing that the sociology of education has a fundamental role in dismantling the hidden mechanisms of character formation that operate through various institutional practices in schools. Without critical sociological analysis, the discourse of character education will continue to revolve around the normative-prescriptive level without being able to reach the root of the structural problems that actually hinder the achievement of the goal of holistic and emancipatory character formation.

Furthermore, this research gap is also manifested in the lack of studies that analyze character education as a social practice embedded in power relations and contestation of interests. (Ma'zumi, Sujai Saleh, 2023) revealed that the implementation of character education in the digital era faces increasingly complex challenges, but the available analysis is still inadequate in examining the structural and political dimensions of these challenges. When character education is understood only as the transfer of values from the older generation to the younger generation, without considering that these values themselves are the result of historical contestation and reflection of power relations in society, then its implementation will tend to be a reproduction of the status quo rather than a progressive social transformation. Critical pedagogy asserts that uncritical education will perpetuate existing structural injustices, even though it rhetorically claims to develop good character.

The importance of this research also lies in its contribution to the development of paradigmatic alternatives in understanding and implementing character education. Instead of adopting a deterministic and top-down approach, this research offers a more dialogical and emancipatory perspective, where character education is understood as a co-

construction process between various actors with diverse backgrounds and interests. (Diputera et al., 2022) emphasizing that the formation of students' character in schools cannot be separated from the broader socio-cultural context, including the influence of family, community, and the media that carry values that are often contrary to the values transmitted in schools. This complexity requires an approach that considers not only the pedagogical aspects, but also the sociological, anthropological, and political-economic aspects that make up the character education landscape.

Thus, this study seeks to fill the theoretical and empirical gaps in the Indonesian character education literature by offering a more comprehensive, critical, and contextual analysis. Through the use of the critical paradigm of the sociology of education, this research is expected to open up new insights into the mechanisms of power, symbolic domination, and reproduction of inequality that operate in the implementation of character education, as well as formulate a more emancipatory and socially just alternative to transform the practice of character education in the future. Practically, this research is expected to provide insight for policy makers, education practitioners, and academics to design and implement character education that is not only normative-indoctrinative, but also transformative-emancipatory, so as to be able to contribute to the creation of a more just and humane education system.

## Research methods

This study uses a qualitative design with a library research approach focused on critical analysis of the implementation of character education in schools through the lens of educational sociology (Dahliyana et al., 2020). Literature studies were chosen as a research strategy because it provides the possibility to systematically study and explore various sources of literature in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The characteristics of this method allow researchers to identify, analyze, and synthesize a wide range of theoretical perspectives as well as empirical findings relevant to critical paradigms in the context of character education. The suitability of literature studies with the objectives of this research lies in three methodological aspects: first, to analyze the structure and mechanism of implementation of character education (goal 1), this method allows a systematic search of various theoretical literature of Bourdieu and Foucault and their application in the context of Indonesian education; second, to identify symbolic violence and reproduction inequality (Objective 2), critical analysis of policy documents and empirical research results allows for the deconstruction of hidden assumptions that are not visible in direct observation; Third, in order to uncover power relations and formulate alternative perspectives (objectives 3 and 4), interpretive synthesis across literature facilitates the construction of a new theoretical framework that is emancipatory. Thus, literature studies are not just a compilation of literature, but an adequate method of critical analysis to unravel the structural and political dimensions of character education.

Research data sources are categorized into two main types: primary sources in the form of accredited journal articles, theoretical books on the sociology of critical education (especially by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault), and character education policy documents in Indonesia; and secondary sources include the results of previous research, evaluation reports of the PPK program, and scientific publications that discuss the implementation of character education from various perspectives (Dahliyana et al., 2020). The literature selection criteria include publications in the 2020-2025 time frame to ensure the actuality of the data, the credibility of academic sources, and substantial relevance to the focus of the study of the critical paradigm of the sociology of education. The selection of literature as a research subject is based on the consideration that a critical study of the implementation of character education requires an analysis of discourses, policies, and practices documented in various academic sources. Inclusion criteria include: (1) articles of reputable national (Sinta 1-4) and internationally accredited journals that discuss character education in Indonesia from a sociological perspective; (2) fundamental theoretical books on the sociology of critical education, especially the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault that are relevant to the analysis of symbolic violence and power relations; (3) official government policy documents on Strengthening Character Education (PPK) and Pancasila Student Profiles as representations of dominant discourses; (4) the results of empirical research on the implementation of character education for the period 2020-2025 to capture contemporary post-pandemic dynamics and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Exclusion criteria include publications that are popular non-academic, literature that only discusses technical-practical aspects without an analytical-critical dimension, and publications outside the Indonesian context that are not relevant to the local socio-cultural structure. The 2020-2025 period was chosen because it reflects the transformative phase of Indonesian education with the implementation of new policies and the challenges of the digital-pandemic era that require contemporary critical analysis. The data collection technique is carried out through systematic documentation of various literature that has been identified (Ahmadi et al., 2020). This process involves searching for literature through academic databases such as google scholar, eric, and sinta-accredited national journal portals, using the keywords "character education", "sociology of critical education", "symbolic violence", "habitus bourdieu", and "social reproduction in education". Each selected literature is then examined in depth to extract theoretical concepts, empirical findings, and critical arguments related to the research question.

Data analysis uses critical content analysis techniques with a hermeneutic approach, where researchers conduct in-depth interpretation of the collected texts to identify hidden patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships. The analysis process is carried out systematically through the stages of data organization, codification of main themes, conceptual synthesis across the literature, and drawing theoretical conclusions relevant to the research objectives. The validity of the

data is maintained through triangulation of sources by comparing various theoretical perspectives and findings from diverse literature, as well as through member checking by discussing data interpretation with academics who are competent in the field of sociology of education. The entire analysis process is carried out by maintaining a reflexive-critical attitude to ensure that the resulting interpretation is unbiased and able to reveal the structural and political dimensions of the implementation of character education in schools.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Critical Paradigm of Educational Sociology in Analyzing the Implementation of Character Education in Schools***

A critical analysis of the implementation of character education in schools using the framework of educational sociology reveals the complexity of power relations and structural mechanisms that operate in the process of character formation of students. Sociology of education as a branch of science that studies social facts, norms, and social deviations becomes a fundamental analytical instrument in dismantling the hidden dimensions of character education practice (Parwati & Suastra, 2024). The critical paradigm in the sociology of education does not view character education as a neutral and objective transmission of values, but rather as an arena of meaning contestation in which various social, political, and cultural interests interact and compete to define legitimate values. In this context, the implementation of character education in schools cannot be understood in isolation from the broader social structure, but must be examined as part of the process of social reproduction and the formation of habitus desired by the dominant group in society.

The conceptual framework of the sociology of Islamic education offers a rich perspective in understanding the multicultural educational paradigm that integrates spiritual and social values through a holistic approach in character formation (Rifan, 2025). This paradigm recognizes that character formation involves not only the individual-psychological dimension, but also the social-structural dimension that includes the interaction between the individual and his or her social environment, including family, school, and the wider community. From a critical perspective, effective character education must be able to overcome the dichotomy between universal values and local contexts, between the demands of globalization and the preservation of cultural identity, and between individual interests and collective interests. The synergy between local culture and educational values shows great potential in forming a strong national character, but at the same time it also contains the risk of cultural hegemony when certain values are imposed without considering existing social and cultural diversity.

The implementation of character education in the context of the Pancasila Student Profile provides a comprehensive normative framework, but its implementation in the field still faces various structural obstacles that require serious attention. The Pancasila Student Profile provides opportunities for students to experience knowledge as a process of strengthening character as well as an opportunity to learn from the surrounding environment, but its implementation in schools is still not optimal and requires continuous training and mentoring (Santika Viridi & Husnul Khotimah, 2023). The gap between policy ideals and the reality of implementation indicates that there are structural problems that cannot be solved solely through technical-pedagogical interventions, but require a paradigmatic transformation in understanding the essence and purpose of character education itself.

### ***Mechanisms of Symbolic Violence and Reproduction of Social Inequality in Character Education Practice***

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence became very relevant for dissecting the hidden mechanisms in the implementation of character education in schools. Symbolic violence refers to the process of domination that occurs subtly and unconsciously, in which the values, norms, and cultural practices of the dominant group are internalized by the dominated group as something natural and legitimate. In the context of character education, symbolic violence operates through a hidden curriculum that privileges certain cultural capital while discriminating against others. The process of habituation of character values carried out in schools, although it appears to be an attempt at universal moral formation, is in reality often a process of imposing the habitus of the urban middle class that is constructed as a moral standard that must be followed by all students, regardless of the diversity of their social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

Character education habituation in the new paradigm of the independent curriculum through various strategies such as the application of differentiated learning, weekly routine projects, extracurricular activities, and character habituation shows a systematic effort to form a certain habitus in students (Prayoga et al., 2024). But from a critical perspective, it is necessary to ask: what kind of habitus does it really want to be formed? Does this habitus reflect the cultural diversity of Indonesian society or does it reproduce the habits of the dominant class? The process of character habituation that is carried out in a routine and structured manner can be understood as a mechanism of internalizing dispositions and perception schemes desired by the dominant structure, in which learners unconsciously adopt a way of thinking, feeling, and acting in accordance with the expectations of the existing social structure (Wahyu Putri Bunda et al., 2024). In the long run, this process can perpetuate social reproduction and maintain the status quo of cultural capital distribution in society.

The implementation of character education through subjects such as Civic Education and Social Sciences shows how values such as responsibility, honesty, justice, cooperation, integrity, and social care are transmitted through various learning activities and methods. Project-based learning strategies, group discussions, case studies, and value-based and moral learning methods are the medium for transmitting character values that are considered important (Wahyu Putri Bunda et al., 2024). But the critical question is: who defines these values? How are these values chosen and prioritized? Does the process of selecting grades involve the democratic participation of various social groups or is it a unilateral decision of the group that has authority in the education system? The limited time and lack of understanding of educators regarding effective strategies in implementing character education show that the implementation challenges are not only technical, but also structural and paradigmatic.

In the era of digitalization 4.0, the implications and implementation of character education face new complexities that require paradigmatic adaptation. Eighteen character values derived from religion, Pancasila, culture, and national education goals—including religious, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creative, independent, democratic, curious, nationalism, love of the homeland, appreciation of achievements, friendship, love of peace, love of reading, environmental care, social care, and responsibility—are internalized and habituated through the learning strategies of moral knowing, moral loving, and moral doing. But from a critical perspective, it is questionable whether such values can be universally applied without considering specific social contexts. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the family became the starting line for internalization and habituation of character values, which shows that character education cannot be separated from the socio-economic context of the family (Mala et al., 2025). This implies that socio-economic disparities between families can result in disparities in the cultural capital that learners have, which in turn will affect their success in the formal education system.

### ***Hegemony of Character Values and the Dominance of Certain Social Group Perspectives in the Curriculum***

An analysis of the curriculum and practice of character education in schools reveals the hegemony of certain values that reflect the perspectives and interests of dominant social groups. Hegemony in the Gramscian sense refers to domination achieved not through physical coercion, but through consensus built through intellectual and moral leadership. In the context of character education, hegemony operates through the naturalization of certain values as universal values that must be embraced by everyone, even though these values actually reflect the worldview and the interests of certain groups. Values such as discipline, punctuality, competition, and academic achievement emphasized in the formal education system are often a reflection of the urban middle-class ethos and culture of capitalism, which does not necessarily correspond to the values of local communities or marginalized social groups.

The integration of character values in learning cannot be seen as a neutral and value-free process, but rather as a political process that involves the selection, interpretation, and legitimacy of certain values while excluding or subordinating other values. The implementation of character education through various subjects shows a systematic effort to inculcate values that are considered important by the education authorities, but often ignore the diversity of values that live in society (Mala et al., 2025). When values such as honesty, responsibility, and cooperation are taught without contextualization with complex social realities—where systemic corruption, nepotism, and structural injustice are still rampant phenomena—then character education can become an exercise in moral rhetoric separate from authentic social praxis.

In the context of inclusive education that accommodates students with special needs, the implementation of character education faces additional challenges that require a more sensitive and adaptive approach. The framework for planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating character education for students with special needs shows that inclusive management strategies and adaptation to local contexts can effectively support character education (Mala et al., 2025). The integration of eighteen character values adapted according to the local context into all learning modules and daily routines, implemented through modeling, habituation, and reinforcement with the support of the dual homeroom teacher model and differentiated instruction demonstrates a comprehensive effort to accommodate diversity. However, from a critical perspective, it is questionable whether the adaptation is truly transformative or just a technical modification that does not change the fundamental structure of an ableist and normative education system.

The experience of teachers in building character education in inclusive classrooms inhabited by students with diverse learning needs shows the pedagogical complexity faced in the implementation of character education. Teachers act as value facilitators and moral agents who shape the character of students through contextual approaches, local culture, habituation, and collaborative projects. Successful implementation is strongly influenced by structural support, conducive school culture, and educational community involvement, while limited resources, lack of teacher training, and low parental involvement are major barriers (Rifan, 2025). These findings confirm that character education is not just an individual pedagogical problem, but a structural problem that requires systemic transformation in policies, resource allocation, and organizational culture of education. The importance of reflective pedagogical practices, adaptive internal policies, and cross-sectoral collaboration as the foundation of inclusive and transformative character education shows that a holistic and emancipatory approach is needed to overcome the limitations of the functionalist paradigm that has dominated so far.

## ***Power Relations between Teachers, Students, and School Institutions in the Formation of Internalization of Character Values***

The analysis of power relations in the context of character education reveals the complex dynamics between teachers, students, and school institutions as actors who have different positions and interests in the educational arena. Michel Foucault conceptualized power not as something owned by a particular individual or institution, but as a relationship that is dispersed and operates through various mechanisms and technologies. In the context of education, power operates through mechanisms of discipline, surveillance, and normalization that shape the subjectivity of students. Teachers, in their position as agents of educational institutions, carry out disciplinary functions by supervising, evaluating, and normalizing student behavior in accordance with established character standards. The process of internalizing character values is basically a process of subjectivity in which learners are formed into subjects who are obedient and subject to norms constructed by power structures.

The role of teachers as value facilitators and moral agents in shaping students' character puts them in an ambivalent position (Rifan, 2025). On the one hand, teachers are expected to be role models who inspire and empower students to develop autonomous and critical characters. On the other hand, teachers also function as institutional instruments to ensure that students adopt the values and norms desired by the system. The contextual approaches, local cultures, habituations, and collaborative projects that teachers use in building character education can be understood as strategies to bridge the tension between institutional demands and pedagogical needs that are responsive to the diversity of learners. However, limited resources, lack of teacher training, and low parental involvement indicate that teachers often lack adequate capacity and support to carry out their transformative roles optimally.

The implementation of character education through various strategies such as differentiated learning, routine projects, and extracurricular activities shows the efforts of school institutions to create an environment conducive to character building. But from a critical perspective, these strategies can also be understood as disciplinary technologies that aim to form certain habitus and dispositions in students. Habitual character habituation carried out in a routine and structured manner reflects the operation of disciplinary powers that work through repetition and normalization (Prayoga et al., 2024). Students who succeed in internalizing the expected character values will be rewarded in the form of recognition and legitimacy, while those who fail or refuse will face sanctions or stigmatization. This reward and punishment mechanism is an integral part of the power economy in the education system that disciplines the body and soul of students.

Evaluations are carried out periodically to monitor the development of students' character and inform the improvement of the program reflecting surveillance operations in the education system. Constant surveillance of students' behavior and character development creates what Foucault calls panopticism, which is a condition in which individuals feel constantly supervised and thus internalize the mechanism of self-control. In this context, learners are not only shaped by external disciplines, but also develop self-discipline that makes them regulate their own behavior according to the norms that have been internalized. This process can produce conformity and docility that are counterproductive to the development of moral autonomy and critical thinking which should be the goal of emancipatory education.

Structural support, conducive school culture, and the involvement of the educational community as determining factors for the success of the implementation of character education show that the power relationship in education is not only vertical (between institutions and individuals) but also horizontal (between individuals and groups in the community). Conducive school culture can be understood as the hegemony of certain values that have become common sense among school citizens, thereby reducing resistance and increasing consensus. But the consensus needs to be criticized: is it the result of democratic dialogue and authentic participation or is it the result of symbolic manipulation and manufactured consent? Low involvement of the educational community, especially parental involvement, indicates alienation and disconnect between schools and society, which in turn undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of character education (Santika Viridi & Husnul Khotimah, 2023).

## ***Alternative Perspectives for the Implementation of Emancipatory and Social Justice Character Education***

Based on a critical analysis of the various dimensions of character education implementation, an alternative perspective that is more emancipatory and socially just can be formulated. This perspective departs from the premise that character education should not be understood as an indoctrination of taken-for-granted values, but rather as a dialogical and critical process that enables learners to develop a critical awareness of social realities and the capacity to act transformatively. Paulo Freire, in the concept of liberation education (pedagogy of the oppressed), emphasizes the importance of conscientization or critical awareness as a process by which learners develop the ability to read social reality critically and act to change it. In the context of character education, this means that instead of only teaching normative values, character education must facilitate students to develop critical literacy capacity for the values themselves.

Reflective pedagogical practices that emphasize the importance of critical reflection on character education assumptions, values, and practices become an important foundation for transformative implementation. Teachers need to be encouraged not only to be transmitters of values, but also to be transformative intellectuals who are able to facilitate a critical and emancipatory learning process. This requires a transformation in teacher training, where teachers are equipped not only with technical-pedagogical competence but also with analytical-critical capacity to understand the political and

structural dimensions of education. Adaptive internal policies and cross-sectoral collaboration are needed to create an educational ecosystem that supports transformative pedagogical practices (Santika Viridi & Husnul Khotimah, 2023).

The integration of spiritual and social values through a holistic approach needs to be reformulated to overcome the dichotomy between individual and social dimensions in character formation. Emancipatory character education must be able to link the development of individual virtue with a commitment to social justice and structural transformation. This means that values such as honesty, responsibility, and hard work should not be understood solely in an individual context, but should also be linked to a commitment to the fight against injustice, corruption, and structural inequality in society. Students need to be facilitated to develop what is called social justice orientation, which is a moral commitment to contribute to the creation of a more just and equal society.

Adaptation of character education to the local context and cultural diversity needs to be done more radically, not only limited to technical modifications but as a genuine recognition of the plurality of values and knowledge. This requires a deconstruction of the assumption of value universalism that is often the justification for cultural hegemony. A more democratic and participatory approach to determining the character values to be transmitted needs to be developed, where various stakeholders including learners, parents, and local communities have the space to participate in defining those values. The synergy between local culture and national values needs to be understood not as subordination of one to the other, but as a creative dialogue that produces a contextual and meaningful synthesis (Santika Viridi & Husnul Khotimah, 2023).

Character education evaluation needs to be reformulated from a surveillance and control mechanism to a process of reflection and learning that supports authentic moral growth (Parwati & Suastra, 2024). Instead of focusing on the measurement and assessment of conformist behavior, evaluations should provide space for learners to reflect on their moral experiences, explore complex ethical dilemmas, and develop sophisticated moral reasoning. Reflective portfolio approaches, moral dialogue, and inquiry-based learning can be a more emancipatory alternative to behavioristic behavioral tests and observations.

Overcoming resource limitations, lack of teacher training, and low parental involvement requires significant political commitment and resource allocation from states and communities. But more than that, a paradigm shift is also needed in understanding the purpose and meaning of character education itself. As long as character education is still understood in a functionalist framework as an instrument to create obedient and productive citizens in the existing system, these structural limitations will continue to exist. It takes courage to imagine character education as a transformative project that aims to prepare a generation that is not only able to adapt to the existing system, but also able to criticize and change it to be more just and humane. In an era of digitalization full of new challenges, character education must be able to facilitate students to develop critical literacy towards technology and media, as well as the capacity to use technology as an instrument of liberation rather than domination (Rifan, 2025).

## Conclusion

A critical study of the implementation of character education in schools through the lens of the sociology of education with a critical perspective reveals the complexity of power relations, mechanisms of symbolic violence, and the reproductive process of social inequality that operates in the educational arena. The critical paradigm of the sociology of education, using the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, succeeds in dismantling the taken-for-granted assumptions in character education discourse that have been dominated by functionalist-normative approaches. This study found that the implementation of character education in schools cannot be understood as a neutral and objective value transmission process, but rather as an arena of meaning contestation in which the character values of the dominant group are hegemonized through formal curriculum and hidden curriculum, while the values of the marginalized group tend to be discriminated against or ignored. The mechanism of symbolic violence operates through a process of habituation and habituation of characters that seem natural but actually reproduce the habitus of the dominant class, in which certain cultural capital is privileged in the system of institutional evaluation and recognition. The power relationship between teachers, students, and school institutions forms a process of internalizing character values through discipline, surveillance, and normalization technologies that create obedient and conformist subjectivity, instead of developing moral autonomy and critical awareness.

Structural challenges such as limited resources, lack of adequate teacher training, low parental involvement, and the gap between policy ideals and implementation realities show that the problem of character education is not only a technical-pedagogical problem but also a political and paradigmatic problem that requires systemic transformation. Based on these findings, this study formulates an alternative perspective for the implementation of character education that is more emancipatory and socially just, emphasizing the importance of conscientization or critical awareness, reflective pedagogical practices, policies that are adaptive to cultural diversity, and a commitment to social justice and structural transformation. Transformative-emancipatory character education must be able to facilitate students to develop critical literacy towards the values themselves, the capacity to analyze and criticize the structure of injustice in society, as well as an agency to act as an agent of progressive and humanist social change, so that character education is not only an instrument of social reproduction but also a medium of liberation and transformation towards a more just society and democratic.

## Acknowledgments

The author expresses a deep appreciation to critical thinkers in the sociology of education, in particular Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, whose works form the theoretical foundation of this research. Thank you to the academic community for providing the literature and critical resources that enriched the analysis in this study. Awards were also presented to education practitioners and policymakers who continue to strive to transform character education into more emancipatory and socially just. Finally, I would like to thank all parties who have provided intellectual and moral support in completing this research, with the hope that this critical study can contribute to the paradigmatic transformation of character education in Indonesia.

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