WEAVING TOGETHER REASON, EMOTION, AND WILL: SLR—A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR GENERATION ALPHA

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Abstract

This study aims to systematically synthesize research findings on the implementation of a holistic approach to character-based learning for Generation Alpha, emphasizing the integration of cognitive (reasoning), affective (feeling), and conative (will/action) dimensions. The study employs a qualitative approach using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design. The data sources consist of 15 scholarly articles published in Indonesian national journals indexed in SINTA 1–6 between 2021 and 2026, retrieved through Google Scholar. The literature selection process was conducted systematically through stages of identification, title and abstract screening, full-text review, application of inclusion–exclusion criteria, and article quality appraisal. Data were analyzed using thematic synthesis to identify trends in models, implementation strategies, effectiveness, challenges, and conceptual gaps. The findings indicate that the holistic approach significantly contributes to balanced character development by integrating cognitive, moral, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of learning. Implementation effectiveness is influenced by instructional consistency, teacher competence, and supportive policies and school culture. Major challenges include limited teacher capacity and structural institutional constraints. Furthermore, the digital-native characteristics of Generation Alpha require adaptive holistic strategies through technology integration, strengthening digital literacy, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities. The study produces a conceptual synthesis framework that serves as a foundation for developing contextual and sustainable character-based learning.

Keywords: character education, holistic approach, generation alpha

INTRODUCTION

Advances in digital technology and the tide of globalization have fundamentally transformed the socio-cultural landscape and the dynamics of the learning process for Generation Alpha children—that is, the group born since the early 2010s and raised in an environment saturated with cutting-edge technology from an early age. This generation is characterized by a high level of engagement in the digital realm, yet this simultaneously poses serious challenges in fostering comprehensive character values, encompassing the cognitive (reason), affective (emotion), and conative (will) dimensions. Various recent studies indicate that character education is a fundamental element to ensure that the learning process is not solely focused on academic mastery but also capable of shaping individuals who are ethical, moral, and of integrity amidst today's digital advancements (Darwati et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the implementation of character education in practice still faces significant challenges. The phenomenon of reduced face-to-face social interaction, the dominance of unfiltered digital content, and the lack of robust implementation of holistic learning strategies have resulted in the character development of Generation Alpha not yet achieving optimal results. These conditions demand an approach that does not solely emphasize the development of cognitive aspects but also comprehensively integrates emotional and behavioral dimensions of character. A number of empirical studies and literature reviews confirm that integrating

character values into formal learning is a key element in strengthening students' moral and ethical resilience amid the challenges of the digital age (Indah Aditya Putri & Liesna Andriany, 2024). To foster well-rounded individuals, an educational reorientation is needed that can simultaneously weave together reason, emotion, and will. Reason represents intellectual intelligence and critical thinking; emotion addresses emotional, ethical, and empathetic aspects; while will is the driving force of intention or determination to act positively in society. Regarding the soul, Ki Hadjar Dewantara explains that within it lies the Trisakti Jiwa (three powers of the soul): thought, feeling, and will (cipta, rasa, and karsa). Cipta is the power of thought to seek truth. Rasa is the movement of the heart or matters related to feelings. Meanwhile, karsa is the will or determination, which is the manifestation of human desires after being considered by reason and feelings (Sutrisno & Zuchdi, 2023 in Dewantara 451–452).

Within this framework, the holistic approach is positioned as a conceptual and methodological choice deemed capable of integrating reason, emotion, and will seamlessly into the character education process. This approach emphasizes harmony among the academic, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions to foster a well-rounded individual who is responsive to the dynamics of changing times. Various studies on character education employing a holistic approach demonstrate significant opportunities to strengthen students' moral values and character through the integration of academic learning with the consistent cultivation of attitudes, values, and behaviors (Sinurat, 2024). Although research on character education and holistic learning has shown considerable progress over the past decade, the majority of studies still focus on cognitive aspects, while the integration of affective (emotional) and conative (volitional) dimensions has not been analyzed comprehensively or proportionally.

A number of studies have examined the success of specific learning models in shaping character, but these efforts tend to remain fragmented, lack comprehensive integration, and have not yet produced a robust conceptual framework regarding how these three dimensions can be synergistically integrated into learning practices. This study aims to conduct a systematic synthesis of research findings discussing the application of a holistic approach in character-based learning for Generation Alpha, with an emphasis on the integration of the cognitive (reason), affective (emotion), and conative (will) dimensions. More specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify research trends, various models, and implementation strategies for the holistic approach in character education; (2) analyze patterns of success, constraints, and conceptual gaps in character education practices for Generation Alpha; and (3) develop a conceptual framework based on the synthesis findings as a foundation for developing character education responsive to the characteristics of the digital generation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design. This design was chosen to gain a comprehensive and structured understanding of the implementation of a holistic approach in character education for Generation Alpha through the synthesis of findings from previous research. The SLR process was conducted systematically, transparently, and in a replicable manner through the stages of formulating research questions, searching for literature sources, screening articles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, assessing article quality, and integrating and interpreting research results.

The research subjects were drawn from scientific articles published in SINTA 1–6 indexed national journals with a publication span of 2021–2026. A total of 15 articles were selected as the primary data sources based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) addressing character education; (2) holistic learning, or the integration of cognitive, affective, and conative

dimensions; and (3) relevance to the context of Generation Alpha or students in the digital era. The research objects are concepts, models, strategies, and empirical findings related to the holistic approach in character-based learning as described in these articles. Data collection was conducted through a literature search in the Google Scholar database, limiting sources to national journals indexed in SINTA 1–6. The search process utilized relevant keywords, such as character education, holistic approach, Generation Alpha, and terms relevant to the context of Generation Alpha or the digital era. The retrieved articles were subsequently screened through stages of identification, title and abstract screening, full-text review, and eligibility determination based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Contribution of a Holistic Approach to Character Education

A review of the literature indicates that a holistic approach to character education is capable of integrating cognitive, affective, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions in a cohesive manner. This approach not only contributes to the achievement of academic learning outcomes but also to the reinforcement of character values, such as responsibility and cooperation, within the school environment. The primary objective of the holistic approach is to develop individuals who possess a balance between intellectual ability and emotional maturity, which in turn plays a role in fostering a conducive school climate and supporting the strengthening of students' character. Thus, the integration of academic learning processes with character development through a holistic approach has a positive impact on the overall development of students' personalities (Sinurat, 2024). One of the key principles in managing holistic learning is the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects into learning activities. Students do not merely acquire knowledge through concepts or rote memorization alone, but also through real-world experiences, social interactions, and activities that involve emotions and ethical values. Thus, the learning process becomes more meaningful and capable of developing character more comprehensively, demonstrating that the application of a holistic approach is effective in shaping students to possess moral integrity, a disciplined attitude, and empathy reflected in their daily activities (Aziz et al., 2025). In principle, the learning process is not only intended to ensure students master the established competencies but is also designed to help them understand, recognize, and internalize values so that they are reflected in their behavior. Through a holistic-integrative approach, character education should address all aspects of a child's developmental needs. In a broader context, character building can be integrated into both curricular and co-curricular activities, with the active involvement of all school stakeholders in its implementation (Antara, 2019).

Challenges in Implementing Character Education

A number of studies have revealed critical challenges in the implementation of character education based on a holistic approach, including educators' limited ability to implement this approach consistently, as well as the lack of optimal alignment between policies and support from the school environment. These findings indicate that both structural and operational barriers remain obstacles to actualizing character values into effective teaching practices (Agustin & Ulfatun, 2024). Limitations in educators' competencies and the inadequacy of supporting policies are factors hindering the implementation of holistic-approach-based character education across various levels of education (Yusgiantara et al., 2024). Previous findings indicate that there is currently no functioning mechanism to optimize the implementation of character education policies; many students still fail to comply with regulations and carry out the proposed policy programs; furthermore, the dissemination

efforts are not optimal because the dissemination process is not comprehensive (Darma & Wulandari, 2022).

Relevance to Generation Alpha and the Digital Age

Various studies have specifically highlighted the characteristics of Generation Alpha and their learning needs in the digital age. A character education strategy tailored to the characteristics of Generation Alpha involves the use of digital technology, the development of digital literacy, and collaboration between schools, families, and the community—all of which collectively reflect a holistic approach that is responsive to the changing times (Amalia et al., 2025). The emergence of various new social media platforms makes the world feel within reach, as almost everything can be accessed quickly and conveniently thanks to internet connectivity. The rise of Google as a search engine was followed by social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Line, Google, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, and AI (Artificial Intelligence), enabling global information exploration with just a fingertip. Teachers in schools are no longer the sole source of information, as many people are leveraging technological advancements to create constructive and beneficial works (Jurlissani, 2021). In the digital age, where humans and technology have become one, this enables students of Generation Alpha to design their own learning projects through digital simulations and experiments tailored to their individual interests, fostering greater creativity and innovation (Amrullah et al., 2024).

The application of technology in character education opens opportunities to address various challenges long faced by educators. These challenges include disparities in educational access, low student interest in traditional learning, and suboptimal monitoring of character value implementation within school and family environments. By utilizing technological tools, teachers can design learning strategies that are more engaging, participatory, and student-centered. For example, digital applications, educational games, and online learning systems can be used to foster the values of honesty, collaboration, and discipline. This approach provides students with opportunities to learn through real-world practice and reflective processes, which form a crucial foundation for the development of strong character (I'tikaf, 2024).

Integration of Moral Values, Religious Education, and School Culture

Other studies underscore the urgency of integrating moral and cultural values into the implementation of holistic character education. The application of a holistic approach that accommodates cultural and religious values in elementary schools can strengthen a school climate conducive to the balanced development of students' character, fostering both moral values and academic achievement (Ayu et al., 2024). Character development strategies that integrate religious values—specifically by combining tolerance and ethics within Islamic religious education—play a role in shaping students' character holistically (Shofiyya, 2024). Character education as a national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible, and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through an emphasis on universal values that we all share. Thus, according to Frye, character education must be a national movement that positions schools as agents for instilling noble character values through learning and setting examples (modeling). Through character education, schools are expected to strive to shape students to possess noble character values, such as respect and care for others, responsibility, integrity, and adherence to rules. On the other hand, character education must also guide students to avoid negative or prohibited attitudes and behaviors. Character education does not merely teach students what is right and what is wrong; it also instills habits (habituation) regarding what is good so that students understand, can feel, and

are willing to practice them. Thus, character education shares the same mission as moral education (Zaenal Abidin, 2021). Character values within society and existing cultures are directly intertwined with various cultural, social, and communicative phenomena (Ahmadi et al., 2021). According to Lickons, there are two values considered essential to develop into character: respect and responsibility. Lickons views these two values as crucial for personal well-being, maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, fostering a humane and democratic society, and contributing to a more just and peaceful world (Muthoharoh, 2021). The influence of foreign cultures through digital media often conflicts with local and religious values. This phenomenon can lead to the erosion of students' religious character, marked by behavior that fails to reflect noble ethics, a lack of respect toward parents, and an increasing tendency toward individualism and social achievement. In this context, education grounded in local and religious values is crucial for addressing the influence of foreign cultures in the digital age (Hulaymi & Septiana, 2024).

Synergy Among Schools, Families, and the Community in a Holistic Approach.

Research findings indicate that the implementation of a holistic approach to character education in the schools studied has been effective in fostering a learning environment conducive to students' character development. This approach integrates various dimensions of character—such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and collaboration—into all academic activities, extracurricular programs, and daily interactions within the school setting. In the classroom, teachers do not merely deliver content but also foster character values through modeling, dialogue, and reflection on real-life events (Sinurat, 2024). Schools need to integrate character education into all dimensions of school life. In addition to curricular programs, extracurricular activities also play a crucial role in developing students' character. Student organizations, for example, can serve as a vehicle for learning values such as honesty, collaboration, and leadership. These activities become more engaging when students are actively involved and trusted to manage them independently. Furthermore, a positive and supportive school environment, which fosters habits of mutual respect and appreciation, further strengthens character development beyond formal classroom instruction. Character education is not solely the responsibility of teachers or parents but a collective responsibility shared by schools, families, and the community. Through character education, it is hoped that individuals will emerge who are not only academically excellent but also possess integrity and a high level of social responsibility. This can be achieved through the implementation of holistic and creative strategies at every level of education. With the effective implementation of character education, it is hoped that a resilient younger generation will emerge—one ready to face various future challenges and capable of making constructive contributions to society (Yusgiantara et al., 2024). Character development is influenced by parental upbringing; however, many parents today remain focused solely on material fulfillment, while aspects such as education, virtuous conduct, and affection are often neglected, leading to undesirable behavior in children. Efforts to address this issue can be realized through collaboration between families, the community, and schools. This synergy can begin with the implementation of an integrated character-building program involving parents, educators, and the local community. Schools can hold regular meetings with parents to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the character values embedded in the curriculum. On the other hand, the social environment can play a role through collective activities that foster values of goodness, such as community service or social outreach activities. Parental participation in school activities—such as attending events, workshops, or extracurricular programs—can also enhance their role in the process of fostering children's character. Through the establishment of strong collaboration between families, the community, and schools, it is

hoped that a comprehensive and conducive educational ecosystem will emerge, supporting the positive development of students' character (Agustin & Ulfatun, 2024). The importance of the integration of the roles of schools, parents, and the social environment in designing adaptive character education strategies for Generation Alpha (Amalia et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

The synthesis results show that a holistic approach to character education lies primarily in the integration of various dimensions of student development, namely cognitive, affective, social, moral, and spiritual. Findings across studies indicate that learning is not only oriented toward academic achievement but also toward experiences of values and reflection; thus, character development occurs in a more holistic and sustainable manner. This reaffirms that character education is effective when designed as an integrated process rather than an add-on. However, this effectiveness is significantly influenced by implementation factors. Limitations in teacher competencies and the lack of robust policy support highlight a gap between the conceptual framework and field practice. Thus, a holistic approach requires strengthening educators' capacities, operational guidelines, and institutional support systems to ensure consistent implementation. In the context of Generation Alpha, holistic character-based learning is increasingly relevant because the characteristics of digital natives demand adaptive strategies. The integration of technology, digital literacy, and project-based learning offers opportunities to strengthen character through authentic experiences. Technology is not merely a medium but also a space for practicing values. The discussion also underscores the importance of integrating moral, religious, and school cultural values as the ethical foundation of learning. Universal values such as respect and responsibility remain central, yet they must be contextualized within local cultures and global digital challenges. The overall findings point to one main pattern: the success of a holistic approach is largely determined by the synergy of the educational ecosystem. Schools, families, and communities must work together to ensure that the internalization of values occurs consistently across environments. Thus, a holistic approach is not merely a pedagogical model but a collaborative framework for shaping the character of Generation Alpha.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the Systematic Literature Review, it can be concluded that a holistic approach to character education plays a crucial role in integrating the cognitive, emotional, and volitional dimensions of Generation Alpha. This approach supports the comprehensive development of students' character through the integration of cognitive, affective, social, moral, and spiritual aspects, ensuring that the learning process is not solely focused on academic achievement but also on the internalization of values and the cultivation of character-based behavior. The study's findings indicate that the success of implementing a holistic approach is influenced by the consistency of its application in teaching practices, the level of readiness and competence of educators, as well as supportive policies and a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, the characteristics of Generation Alpha, which is developing in a digital environment, demand responsive character-based learning strategies, including the use of technology, the strengthening of digital literacy, and collaborative roles among schools, families, and the community. Therefore, the holistic approach can serve as a relevant conceptual foundation for the development of character-based learning for Generation Alpha, while also providing strategic direction for the strengthening of contextual and sustainable character education.

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