



Mapping the Intellectual Landscape of Character Education Research: A Systematic Literature Review of Trends, Themes, and Collaboration Networks

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Abstract: This study aims to map the intellectual landscape of character education research through a bibliometric-based Systematic Literature Review (SLR), focusing on the relationship between character education and civic education in the school context. Data were obtained from the Scopus database, where 522 documents were identified, limited to English-language journal articles published between 2016 and 2026. Bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer to identify publication trends, author contributions, affiliations, countries, and keyword co-occurrence patterns. The findings indicate a significant increase in publications on character education, with character education and civic education emerging as strongly interconnected central themes. The thematic mapping reveals several major clusters, including virtue ethics and moral values approaches, democratic civic education, curriculum and learners, methodological approaches based on human experiences, as well as pedagogical innovations such as project-based learning, empathy, and digital literacy. These findings indicate a shift in character education research from a normative approach toward a more integrative, contextual, and practice-oriented perspective. This study contributes theoretically by clarifying the intellectual landscape of character education research and this study supports policies promoting integrated character-civic curricula, whole-school approaches, innovative pedagogy, teacher professional development, and holistic assessment aligned with 21st-century educational challenges.

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Introduction

Character education has emerged as one of the strategic issues in global education, as it plays a crucial role in shaping individuals who are not only intellectually competent but also possess moral integrity, social responsibility, and civic awareness (Irawan et al., 2023; Irawan & Firdaus, 2021; Pradanna & Irawan, 2024; Wijayanti et al., 2025). Various contemporary social challenges such as increasing violence, intolerance, the degradation of moral values, and the weakening of public ethics have positioned character education as a fundamental foundation for achieving holistic and sustainable educational goals (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Howard et al., 2004; Lickona, 2019; Muhtar et al., 2019). In response to this growing urgency, research on character education has developed significantly over the past few decades. Studies in this field no longer focus solely on individual moral formation but



have increasingly integrated other approaches, including values education, civic education, moral education, social-emotional learning, and culture- and religion-based education (Downey & Kelly, 1978; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Kohlberg, 1981; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008).

This diversity of perspectives indicates that character education is a multidimensional field of study that continues to evolve in line with social dynamics and educational policy developments across countries (Arthur, 2003; Lickona, 1992; Rachman et al., 2020; Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022; Yang et al., 2023). However, the rapid growth of scholarly publications in character education also presents its own challenges. The proliferation of themes, approaches, and research contexts has led to fragmented knowledge, making it difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of research directions, dominant themes, key contributors, and existing research gaps. This condition is further reinforced by the fact that most literature reviews in character education remain narrative or conventionally systematic, often focusing on program effectiveness or specific conceptual frameworks (Arthur et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2015).

Bibliometric approaches contribute methodologically by quantitatively mapping publication trends, citations, collaboration networks, and keyword patterns within a research field (Donthu et al., 2021). When integrated with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), they provide an objective and comprehensive macro-level overview of the intellectual structure and dynamics of character education research (Booth et al., 2016; Dick et al., 2005; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The use of VOSviewer-based mapping is particularly relevant given the post-pandemic surge in publications, driven by heightened attention to moral resilience, empathy, and civic responsibility after COVID-19 disruptions. This rapid growth has fragmented the literature, making systematic visualization crucial for identifying dominant themes, emerging trends, and research gaps. Moreover, because character education overlaps conceptually with moral education, values education, citizenship education, ethics education, and social-emotional learning, bibliometric visualization helps clarify thematic clusters and intellectual boundaries.

In the 21st-century context, character education is increasingly framed as a response to globalization and digitalization, addressing ethical challenges such as cyberbullying and misinformation by promoting responsibility, honesty, resilience, and moral literacy. It also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in fostering peaceful, inclusive, and just societies (UNESCO, 2015; Sachs, 2015). This study contributes by extending analysis to 2026 to capture post-pandemic developments, integrating a civic education perspective into character education discourse, and applying rigorous SLR criteria with advanced bibliometric mapping using Scopus, thereby offering a more comprehensive macro-level review than prior fragmented studies. At the policy level, character education has been embedded in national curricula worldwide under diverse frameworks. In Indonesia, it is implemented through the Strengthening Character Education initiative and the Pancasila Student Profile, emphasizing religiosity, diversity, cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity (Mughtar & Suryani, 2019). Similar civic and moral emphases appear globally, shaped by local contexts (Howard et al., 2004). However, cross-national variations remain insufficiently mapped. Without systematic analysis, the field risks fragmentation. Therefore, bibliometric-based SLR mapping is essential to identify intellectual trajectories, leading contributors, emerging topics, and interdisciplinary connections, supporting both scholarly advancement and evidence-based policymaking (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

Accordingly, this study maps the intellectual landscape of character education research through a bibliometric-based SLR, focusing on its relationship with civic education

in school contexts. It aims to clarify the field's theoretical structure and provide practical guidance for researchers, educators, and policymakers in developing character education aligned with 21st-century challenges.

Research Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using secondary data from journal articles indexed in the Scopus database, collected on February 5, 2026. Scopus was selected for its comprehensive coverage and recognition as a leading international academic database. Bibliometric processing and network visualization were conducted using VOSviewer version 1.6.20, a tool designed to systematically map and analyze scientific literature (van Eck et al., 2010; van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Waltman et al., 2010).

The initial search applied the query TITLE-ABS-KEY (“character education” OR “civic education”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“school”), with limitations set to publication years 2016–2026, source type journals, document type articles, and English language. This search yielded 993 articles. To ensure relevance, two inclusion criteria were applied: (1) publication within the last ten years (2016–2026), and (2) explicit focus on character education and civic education in school contexts. Further refinement using Exact Keywords (“Civic Education,” “Character Education,” “Education,” and “Character”) resulted in 599 relevant documents, consisting of 275 documents under “Civic Education,” 237 under “Character Education,” 81 under “Education,” and 60 under “Character.” All records were exported in CSV (Excel) format for verification and further processing. The dataset was examined using the “Analyze Search Results” feature in Scopus and subsequently analyzed using VOSviewer version 1.6.20 to generate bibliometric network visualizations (van Eck et al., 2010; van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Waltman et al., 2010). Visualization was selectively applied to datasets that most clearly represented significant patterns aligned with the research objectives. Each abstract was independently reviewed to confirm its relevance to the study focus. Any minor discrepancies in article selection were resolved through discussion and consensus among the authors.

The article selection process, consisted of three stages: identification, screening, and eligibility and inclusion. At the identification stage, 993 articles were retrieved from the Scopus database using the predefined search keywords. During the initial screening based on Criteria 1 and 2, 394 articles were excluded for not meeting the requirements, leaving 599 articles for further review. In the eligibility and keyword-based inclusion stage (Criteria 3 and 4), an additional 77 articles were excluded due to misalignment with the research scope. As a result, 522 articles were deemed eligible and included in the final analysis. This systematic procedure ensured that only highly relevant studies that fully satisfied the established criteria were analyzed in this review

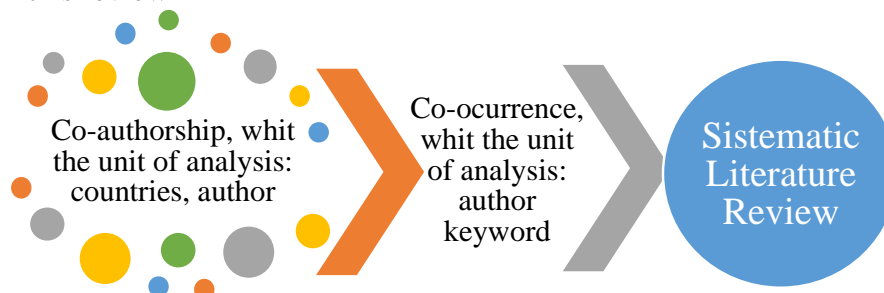


Figure 1. Research data type Analisis Bibliometrics in VOSviewer.

Figure 1 illustrates the analytical framework applied in this systematic literature review, which provides a structured and rigorous procedure for filtering and evaluating

scholarly publications. This approach not only identifies relevant studies but also constructs a reliable knowledge map of the research domain. Through a multi-stage process identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion it excludes studies that do not meet predefined quality and relevance criteria, thereby ensuring valid and representative data synthesis. Such a methodological framework is particularly important amid the rapid growth of scientific publications. Systematic reviews offer a transparent and replicable structure that reduces selection bias and enhances reporting accuracy (Chávez Erives et al., 2024; Muñoz Marín et al., 2023; Rivas et al., 2024). Beyond academic contributions, the findings also provide evidence-based insights for policymakers and stakeholders, supporting strategic research planning and policy formulation (Abdillah, Buchari, et al., 2023; Abdillah, Widianingsih, et al., 2023a, 2023b). Moreover, systematic literature reviews play a strategic role in strengthening a field's conceptual foundations. By synthesizing theoretical trends, methodological patterns, and empirical findings within a defined period, they help identify research gaps, clarify inconsistencies, and propose innovative directions for future inquiry. As noted by Di Vaio, Hassan, & Alavoine (2022) and Di Vaio, Hassan, Chhabra, et al. (2022), systematic reviews bridge scientific practice and future policy needs. They can also support theory development and the validation of existing frameworks (Vos et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Results and Discussion

In this study, a mapping of research topics and thematic areas was conducted. A total of 522 documents were successfully identified and analyzed using the “Analysis results” feature in Scopus and visualized through VOSviewer. This analysis aimed to identify and understand publication trends related to the keywords “character education” OR “civic education” available in the Scopus database. The analysis was specifically limited to studies published over the last ten years to emphasize research novelty and capture recent trends related to the topic. The annual distribution of publications from 2016 to 2026 is presented in Figure 3.

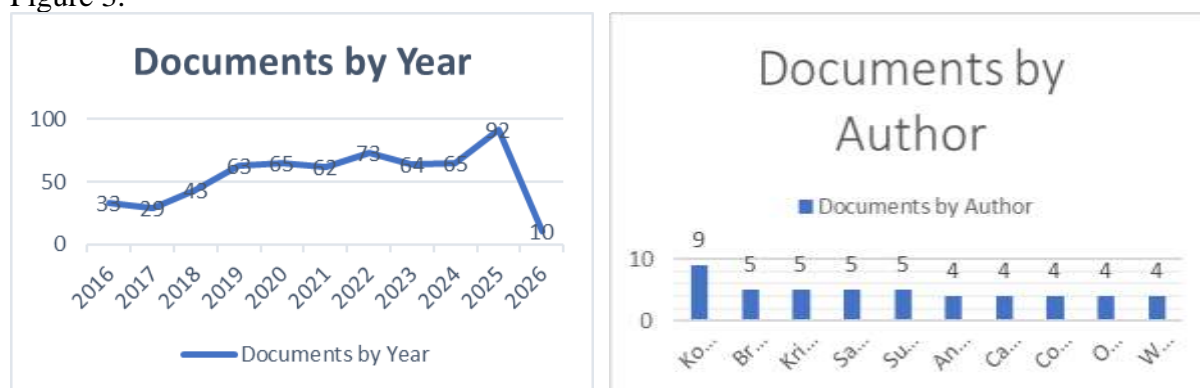


Figure 2. Documents published over the last 10 years, categorized by author

Source: Scopus database, 2026

Figure 2. Based on a Scopus search using the keyword combination TITLE-ABS-KEY (“character education” OR “civic education”) AND “school”, with publication year limits from 2016 to 2026, document type restricted to English-language journal articles, and the selection of relevant exact keywords (Civic Education, Character Education, Education, and Character), the findings indicate that research at the intersection of character education and civic education within the school context has experienced significant development over the past decade. The figure illustrates the annual growth of research publications from 2016 to 2026. Overall, the publication trend demonstrates a fluctuating yet generally upward



pattern, indicating increasing academic attention to the topic. During the early period (2016–2018), the number of publications remained relatively limited, ranging from 29 to 43 documents, suggesting that research in this field was still in its early developmental stage. However, since 2019, a notable increase has occurred, marked by a rise to 63 publications, followed by relative stability during 2020–2021 despite minor fluctuations.

Publication output reached its peak in 2022, with 73 documents, indicating a phase of research expansion and heightened scholarly productivity. Although a slight decline and stabilization were evident during 2023–2024, the overall trend continued to reflect consistent research output. The highest surge occurred in 2025, with 92 documents, representing an intensification of research interest, potentially driven by the growing relevance of character and civic education issues, global educational policy agendas, and interdisciplinary research initiatives. The sharp decrease in 2026, with only 10 documents, is most likely attributable to incomplete publication data for the ongoing year, rather than a substantive decline in scholarly interest. This pattern reflects the dynamic evolution of character education research within the broader context of social studies and civic education, influenced by curriculum reforms, educational policy developments, and shifting academic research priorities over the past two decades.

Table 1. Author Details

Author	Citations	Documents	h-index	Affiliation/ Country
Komalasari, Kokom	365	50	11	Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Brunsdon, Jamie Jacob.	151	23	8	University of Memphis
Kristjánsson, Kristján	3,997	150	31	University of Birmingham
Sarkadi	53	9	4	Universitas Negeri Jakarta
Supriyadi, Tedi	413	53	13	Université de Paris, Boulogne-Billancourt, France
Andolina, Molly W.	1,349	14	7	DePaul University
Casmana, Asep Rudi	209	18	9	Universitas Negeri Jakarta
Conklin, Hilary Gehlbach	699	29	14	DePaul University
Oberle, Monika	70	13	5	Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
Walker, David Ian	475	36	11	The University of Alabama

The analysis of publication distribution by authors indicates that scholarly contributions in the fields of character education and civic education within the school context remain distributed rather than dominated by a single author. This finding suggests that the field has developed through collective contributions from researchers across multiple institutions and countries. Based on the figure, Komalasari, K. emerges as the most productive author, with nine indexed articles published between 2016 and 2026. Komalasari's prominence reflects a significant role in advancing research on character and civic education in schools, particularly in relation to value reinforcement, character-based civic education, and the implementation of values education within formal educational settings. A second group of authors with moderate productivity such as Brunsdon, J.J., Kristjánsson, K., Sarkadi, and Supriyadi, T. each contributed five publications. The presence of these scholars highlights the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches in the field, ranging from the philosophy of character education and virtue ethics perspectives to the implementation of character education within school curricula and civic learning practices. Other authors, including Andolina, M.W., Casmana, A.R., Conklin, H.G., Obele, M., and Walker, D.I., contributed four publications each, indicating active but non-dominant engagement. Their work enriches the field through emphases on civic engagement, citizenship pedagogy, the role of teachers, and the relationship between character education and students' civic participation. Overall, this pattern suggests that research on character

education and civic education in schools represents a mature yet pluralistic field, in which epistemic authority is not concentrated in a single scholar. Such a structure reflects a healthy academic dynamic that remains open to multiple perspectives and supports the contextual development of theory and practice in character and civic education across diverse educational systems. Moreover, these findings point to substantial opportunities for strengthening cross-author and cross-institutional collaboration, particularly through comparative and cross-national studies, to deepen understanding of how character and civic education are implemented in schools in response to the global challenges of the 21st century.

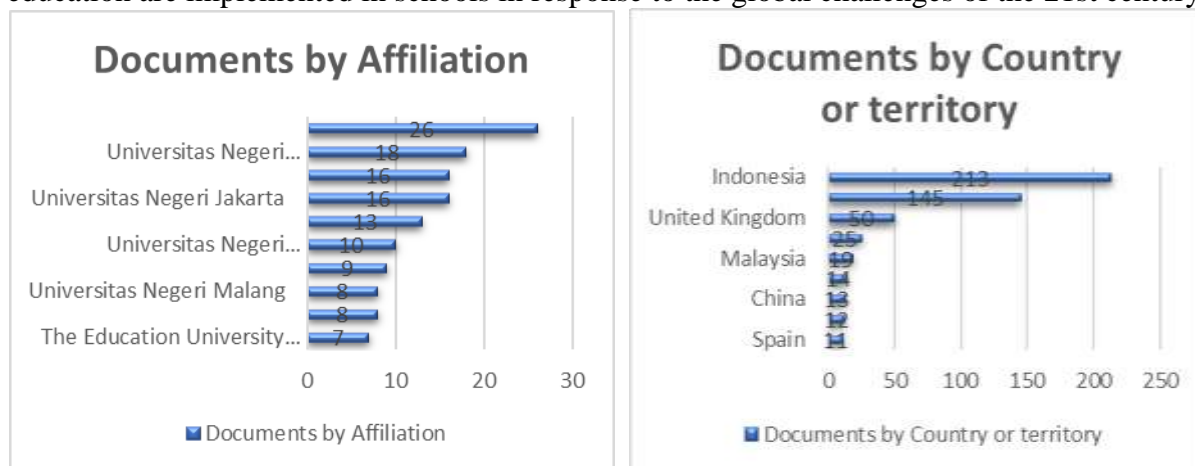


Figure 3. Top 10 universities and 10 countries with the most documents

Source: Scopus database, 2026

Presents the top ten universities with the highest number of publications, illustrating the distribution of scholarly output by institutional affiliation. The data indicate that knowledge production in character education and civic education within school contexts is concentrated in a limited number of higher education institutions that function as research hubs. This concentration reflects both accumulated academic expertise and strong institutional commitment to value-based education research. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) ranks first with 26 publications, underscoring its central role in advancing research on character and civic education. This dominance signals a strong institutional orientation toward values education, Pancasila education, and the implementation of character and civic education in schools, spanning theoretical development and practical application. The second position is held by Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta with 18 publications, demonstrating consistent contributions, particularly within teacher education institutions (LPTK) that prioritize character and citizenship formation. International engagement is reflected in the contributions of University of Birmingham (16 publications) and The Education University of Hong Kong (7 publications). Their presence confirms that research on character and civic education extends beyond the Indonesian context and is integrated into global academic discourse, especially in relation to theoretical frameworks, virtue ethics, and global citizenship education. Other Indonesian institutions, including Universitas Negeri Jakarta (16 publications) and Universitas Sebelas Maret (13 publications), further reinforce the national research ecosystem through curricular, pedagogical, and policy-oriented studies. Meanwhile, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Universitas Negeri Malang, and Universitas Negeri Surabaya reflect broader regional participation across Indonesia. Overall, this institutional pattern highlights a combination of nationally grounded research strength and internationally oriented perspectives, suggesting

substantial opportunities for expanded inter-institutional collaboration, particularly through comparative and practice-based studies.

The country-level analysis further reveals a geographical imbalance in knowledge production. Research on character and civic education appears more developed in certain national contexts, reflecting differing policy priorities and academic agendas. Indonesia dominates with 213 documents, far exceeding other countries. This prominence indicates that character and civic education are strategic national concerns, especially in light of curriculum reforms and the reinforcement of Pancasila-based values. It also reflects the active role of Indonesian scholars in examining implementation models, pedagogical approaches, and practical challenges in schools. The United States ranks second with 145 documents, confirming that civic and character education constitute well-established fields of study, particularly in relation to democracy, citizenship, civic engagement, and moral education in multicultural societies. Compared with Indonesia’s policy-driven emphasis, U.S. research tends to foreground theoretical, empirical, and evaluative approaches. The United Kingdom follows with 50 documents, contributing significantly to conceptual and pedagogical frameworks linked to global citizenship, liberal democracy, and values education in pluralistic contexts. Other European countries, such as Germany (25 documents) and Spain (11 documents), provide more limited yet meaningful contributions, especially in normative studies, educational ethics, and civic education within democratic and social integration frameworks. In Asia, Malaysia (19 documents), Hong Kong (14 documents), China (13 documents), and South Korea (12 documents) demonstrate growing engagement, often focusing on the integration of cultural values, national identity, and globalization challenges in school education.

Taken together, this distribution underscores both the global relevance and contextual diversity of character and civic education research, while also pointing to uneven research capacities across regions. To further examine the thematic structure and conceptual relationships within this field, the co-occurrence network analysis is presented in Figure 4.

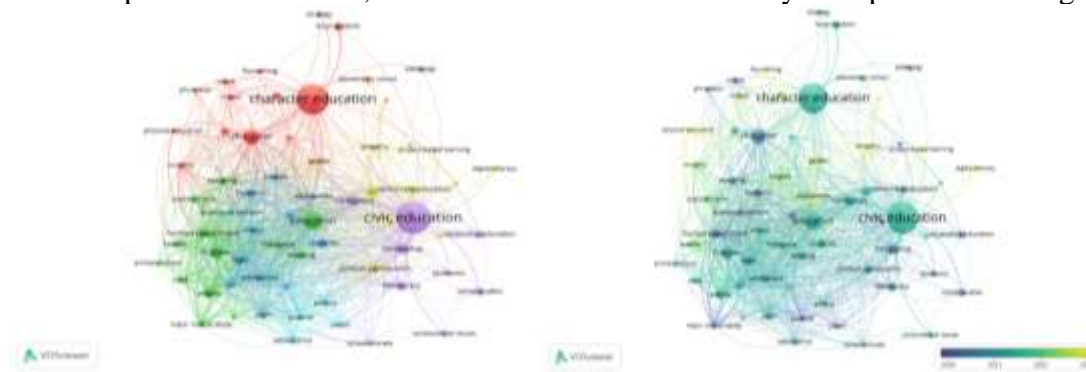


Figure 4. Co-occurrence networks and overlay visualization

Source: Processed via Vosviewer, 2026

Table 1. Cluster Details

Keyword in Scopus database: “character education” OR “civic education”	
Cluster 1 (Red)	Character, character education, flourishing, leadership, local wisdom, moral education, morality, prudence, physical education, strategy, teachers, virtue, virtues,(13 items)
Cluster 2 (Purple)	Child, digital media, education, human, human experiment, Indonesia, learning, major clinical study, primary school, questionnaire, teacher, teaching (12 items)
Cluster 3 (Blue)	Adolescent, adolescents, adult, female, high school, humans, male, school, humans, school, school, student, students (11 items)



Cluster 4 (Green)	Action civics, civic engagement, democratic education, digital literacy, empathy, high schools, political participation, project-based learning, secondary education, voting (10 items)
Cluster 5 (Yellow)	Citizenship, citizenship education, civic education, controversial issues, curriculum, democracy, school climate, social studies, textbooks (9 items)
Cluster 6 (Light Blue)	Adolescence, juvenile, politics qualitative research, youth (5 items)
Cluster 7 (Orange)	Elementary school, gender, open classroom climate (3 items)

The bibliometric visualization generated using VOSviewer maps the intellectual structure and thematic patterns of research on character education and civic education in school contexts (2016–2026). The keyword network, organized into thematic clusters based on co-occurrence and link strength, shows a multidimensional field covering normative foundations, pedagogical practices, methodological approaches, and contemporary issues. The first (red) cluster positions character education as the dominant and central node, strongly connected to character, virtue, virtues, morality, phronesis, flourishing, moral education, and local wisdom. This reflects a foundation in virtue ethics and moral value formation, while the inclusion of local wisdom and strategy highlights cultural contextualization. Links to pedagogy, elementary school, teachers, and physical education indicate its cross-curricular implementation, particularly at the primary level. The second cluster (purple/yellow) centers on civic education and citizenship, closely linked to democracy, political participation, social studies, textbooks, controversial issues, school climate, and open classroom climate. This demonstrates an emphasis on democratic competencies and participatory awareness, framing civic education as institutional practice shaped by democratic school culture.

The third (blue) cluster includes education, students, school, high school, adolescents, male, and female, functioning as a bridge between character and civic education. Emphasis on learning and curriculum underscores curriculum design and teaching–learning processes as strategic arenas for value internalization, while the recurring presence of Indonesia signals its significant contribution to global scholarship. The fourth (green) cluster highlights methodological dimensions, including qualitative research, questionnaire, teacher, and primary school, indicating a focus on lived experiences, perceptions, and practical implementation. The fifth (yellow) cluster captures contemporary themes such as empathy, project-based learning, digital literacy, democratic education, action civics, civic engagement, and voting, signaling a shift toward participatory and transformative pedagogies responsive to 21st-century challenges. Additional clusters address developmental stages (adolescence, youth) and issues such as gender and classroom climate. The overlay visualization (2020–2023) reveals a temporal dynamic. In 2020 (dark blue nodes), research emphasized democracy, citizenship, political participation, social studies, and textbooks, focusing on normative and institutional dimensions of civic education, consistent with foundational perspectives (e.g., Banks; Banks & Banks). During 2021–2022 (green nodes), attention shifted toward integrating character education within school learning, linking education, students, curriculum, schools, and adolescents, reflecting recognition that character development and civic competence are inseparable, in line with Berkowitz, Bier, and Lickona. In 2022–2023 (yellow nodes), trends increasingly emphasized empathy, project-based learning, digital literacy, democratic education, and local wisdom, signaling responses to globalization and digital transformation and aligning with Kahne and Westheimer. Although character education remains central across periods, its stronger connections with empathy, local wisdom, and project-based learning indicate a paradigmatic shift from

moralistic transmission toward transformative, experience-based learning, consistent with arguments by Arthur and colleagues.

Overall, the overlay analysis confirms that research has progressed from predominantly normative frameworks toward innovative, participatory, and context-sensitive pedagogical approaches. Character and civic education are increasingly intertwined, conceptualized not merely as value transmission but as dynamic processes responsive to evolving social, political, and technological realities.

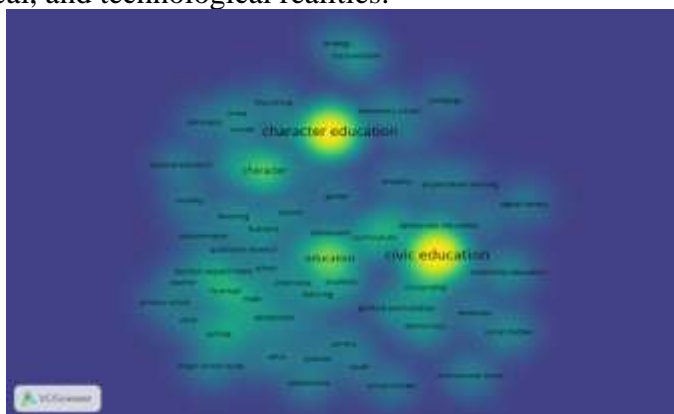


Figure 5. density visualization VOSviewer

The VOSviewer density visualization highlights the intensity and concentration of research themes in character education and civic education from 2016 to 2026. The bright yellow nodes for both concepts indicate their high frequency and centrality, confirming that they function as the two core pillars of contemporary value and citizenship education, conceptually interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The dominance of character education reflects its grounding in virtue ethics, emphasizing moral habituation, virtues, and human flourishing. The appearance of keywords such as local wisdom and strategy suggests a growing contextual and cultural orientation, particularly in countries like Indonesia, where local values inform moral and pedagogical practice. Meanwhile, the strong density around civic education underscores its foundation in democratic citizenship theory, linking closely with democracy, citizenship, and political participation. This indicates that civic education is increasingly viewed as a means of fostering active, critical, and participatory citizens rather than merely transmitting constitutional knowledge. Medium-density areas connecting both fields such as education, curriculum, students, and learning support an integrative moral civic framework in which character formation provides the moral foundation and civic education enables its public enactment. The presence of themes like empathy, project-based learning, digital literacy, and democratic education signals a shift toward transformative, participatory, and constructivist pedagogies, emphasizing authentic engagement and real-world civic practice. Methodologically, the prominence of keywords such as qualitative research, questionnaire, teacher, and students indicates the dominance of empirical, experience-based approaches. This suggests that character and civic education are studied as socially embedded practices shaped by classroom climate, school culture, and pedagogical relationships. Overall, the density analysis shows a clear evolution from normative philosophical orientations toward integrative, contextual, and practice-based approaches. Character and civic education are increasingly understood as a holistic value-learning ecosystem aimed at forming ethically grounded individuals and responsible democratic citizens in response to globalization and digital transformation.



Implications and Directions for Future Research Character Education

The bibliometric mapping reveals not only thematic expansion but also a structural transformation in the conceptual architecture of character education research. Rather than treating character education and civic education separately, the analysis shows a systematic convergence of both domains within research clusters and keyword networks. The dominance of character education and its strong linkage with civic education indicate a paradigmatic shift from individual moral cultivation toward a civic-oriented model embedded in democratic participation. This aligns with scholarship emphasizing character education as a holistic process preparing ethical and participatory citizens (Arthur, 2003; Arthur et al., 2016; Chickering, 1964; Howard et al., 2004). The prominence of virtue, morality, phronesis, and flourishing confirms virtue ethics as a continuing theoretical foundation, consistent with prior arguments on its relevance for school-based character education. At the same time, the integration of local wisdom signals a shift from universalistic models toward culturally contextualized frameworks (Asror et al., 2024; Hidayati et al., 2020; Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008). From a civic education perspective, the density of keywords such as civic education, citizenship, democracy, and political participation reflects an emphasis on strengthening democratic competence and engagement (Hoskins & Crick, 2010; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). The growing focus on action civics and controversial issues indicates movement from transmission-based approaches toward participatory and reflective models (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Methodologically, research remains dominated by qualitative and survey-based studies exploring perceptions and practices (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). While valuable, future studies should incorporate longitudinal and experimental designs to assess long-term impacts on moral and civic behavior (Lickona, 2019). Emerging themes such as empathy, project-based learning, and digital literacy further reflect adaptation to 21st-century challenges, highlighting the potential of real-world and digitally mediated civic learning (Bowyer & Kahne, 2020; Pradanna & Irawan, 2024; Suhardiyanto et al., 2025; Wijayanti, Masrukhi, et al., 2025; Wijayanti, Suhardiyanto, et al., 2025). Geographically, contributions are concentrated in countries such as Indonesia and the United States, underscoring the need for broader cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons to identify universal patterns and local variations (Arthur, 2003; Arthur et al., 2016; Chickering, 1964). Overall, the field has shifted from normative and knowledge-based orientations toward practice-oriented and participatory frameworks. This implies curricular reform toward action civics, project-based learning, and performance-based assessment that measures ethical decision-making and democratic engagement, ensuring that character education is enacted as lived democratic practice rather than abstract moral instruction.

Conclusion

The findings show that character education is a dynamic and continuously developing field, reflected in the growing number of publications and the expansion of research themes. Bibliometric mapping positions character education and civic education as central and interconnected domains, indicating a strong integrative approach between moral character formation and democratic citizenship competencies. Character education is therefore understood not only as a normative agenda but as a pedagogical practice aimed at fostering values, participation, and social responsibility. Thematic analysis identifies key clusters: virtue ethics and moral values, citizenship education, learner and curriculum contexts, experiential and human-centered methodologies, and innovative pedagogies addressing digital literacy, empathy, and project-based learning. This evolution signals a shift toward



more contextual, participatory, and future-oriented research paradigms. Geographically and institutionally, contributions are unevenly distributed, creating opportunities for comparative cross-cultural research to deepen understanding of implementation across educational systems. Overall, this SLR-based bibliometric mapping provides a comprehensive overview of the scholarly landscape, highlights dominant trends, and identifies future directions, offering a strategic reference for developing integrative and evidence-based character education aligned with 21st-century educational challenges.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, Educators and policymakers should integrate character and civic education through learner-centered, contextual, and project-based approaches supported by performance-based assessment. Curriculum alignment, continuous professional development, and rigorous longitudinal and mixed-methods research are essential to ensure measurable impact.

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