


Character Formation in Elementary Schools: Empirical Foundation for the AFK Strategy Based on Lickona's Framework

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history Received May 12, 2025 Revised June 15, 2025 Accepted June 29, 2025	<p>The growing concern over student behavior, including bullying, lack of empathy, and dishonesty, highlights the inadequacy of current character education practices in Indonesian elementary schools. This study aims to provide an empirical foundation and conceptual justification for a new instructional model, Action Feeling Knowing (AFK), designed to improve character development. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected from ten teachers at SDN 1 Labuhan Ratu through observation tools aligned with the five core PPK values: religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity. The results show an overall character competency score of 43.98%, with integrity and mutual cooperation being the weakest areas. Qualitative narratives point to a disconnect between moral lessons and real-life application, limited emotional engagement, and inconsistencies between school and home environments. In response, this study proposes the AFK strategy, which starts with student action, then moves to emotional reflection and cognitive understanding. Supported by behaviorist, constructivist, and humanist theories, this reversed sequence better matches the developmental stage of primary students. A bibliometric analysis using Publish or Perish and VOSviewer confirms the limited scholarly focus on this specific model, reinforcing its originality. The study concludes that AFK shows promise as an actionable, integrated, and developmentally appropriate approach to character education, warranting further research and classroom implementation.</p>
Keywords Character Education AFK Strategy Moral Development Elementary School PPK Values Action-Feeling-Knowing; Lickona Framework	

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I. Introduction

In recent years, the deterioration of student character has emerged as a pressing concern in Indonesian elementary schools (Bujuri et al., 2023; Sukarno et al., 2021). Increasing cases of bullying, dishonesty, and lack of empathy among young learners reflect not only behavioral disruption but also deep-rooted weaknesses in moral formation (Abdillah et al., 2025; Jannah, 2020). Schools, which should serve as nurturing environments for both intellectual growth and ethical cultivation, are struggling to address these issues effectively. Current practices often emphasize abstract moral instruction without ensuring meaningful integration into students' daily lives (Abdullah et al., 2020).

Bullying illustrates the urgency of this concern (Bahri et al., 2022; Ziyani & Kadri, 2024). Research indicates that children involved in bullying, whether as perpetrators, victims, or bystanders, tend to demonstrate limited empathy, weak self-control, and underdeveloped moral reasoning (Nikolaou, 2022). Conventional responses such

as moral warnings or disciplinary actions have proven insufficient. Instead, schools require pedagogical approaches that allow students to engage in concrete actions, reflect emotionally on their experiences, and gradually internalize prosocial values through meaningful and experiential learning activities (Li et al., 2020; Swearer et al., 2020).

Beyond the school environment, character formation also depends heavily on reinforcement within families and communities (Vinokur et al., 2023). Values are more effectively internalized when consistently modelled across multiple social contexts, enabling children to contextualize moral principles and develop a stronger sense of social belonging (Chan et al., 2021). However, in Indonesia, a gap persists between policy and practice. The national *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK) program emphasizes five core values: religiosity, integrity, independence, nationalism, and cooperation (Pratomo & Suhartati, 2021; Yuwiantri et al., 2020) yet implementation remains inconsistent. Teachers often lack

practical strategies, parental engagement is uneven, and instruction is usually disconnected from real-life application (Darus et al., 2022; Fatimah et al., 2024).

Preliminary findings from this study further highlight the problem. A survey conducted with ten teachers at SDN 1 Labuhan Ratu revealed low student performance across all five PPK domains, with low overall. Teacher narratives emphasized several obstacles: values tended to be taught abstractly without practical application, teachers did not consistently model expected behaviours, and reinforcement at home was often inadequate (Kumari, 2022).

These findings suggest the urgent need for a paradigm shift in the way character education is implemented (Bulkani et al., 2025). Conventional approaches dominated by lectures or passive role modelling have failed to foster authentic behavioural and emotional engagement. Without meaningful opportunities for action and reflection, students' understanding of moral concepts does not translate into sustainable character development. What is required is a coherent and developmentally sensitive strategy that integrates knowledge, emotional engagement, and concrete behaviour (Moller et al., 2025; Sholichah et al., 2023).

To address this gap, the present study introduces the *Action–Feeling–Knowing (AFK)* strategy, a reconceptualization of Lickona's triadic framework of moral knowing, feeling, and action (Japar et al., 2024). Unlike the traditional sequence, AFK emphasizes an action-first approach that is supported by developmental psychology, particularly Piaget's theory of the concrete operational stage (Bajovic & Rizzo, 2021). According to this perspective, elementary students are more likely to grasp moral principles after engaging in real actions, reflecting emotionally on the experience, and then arriving at cognitive understanding through guided reasoning (Jackson, 2020).

The uniqueness of AFK lies in its reversal of Lickona's established sequence and its more substantial alignment with the developmental needs of elementary students (Izzati et al., 2019). Bibliometric analysis using Publish or Perish and VOS viewer (2019–2024) supports this originality. While Lickona's framework dominates existing research, explicit applications of AFK remain rare, especially in primary school contexts. The visualization in Figure 1 illustrates this gap: central nodes such as "students," "character," and "Lickona" dominate, while "AFK," "action," "feeling," and "knowing" appear peripherally with weak linkages. This demonstrates that the action-first sequence has received limited scholarly attention and underscores the contribution of this study.

Accordingly, this study provides a preliminary empirical foundation for the AFK strategy by analysing the current state of character education in Indonesian elementary schools and offering a conceptual justification

for reordering moral learning processes. Grounded in behaviourist, constructivist, and humanist traditions, AFK is proposed as a comprehensive and context-sensitive framework. The study thereby lays the groundwork for subsequent research aimed at developing, testing, and refining AFK-based instructional models as an innovative approach to character education.

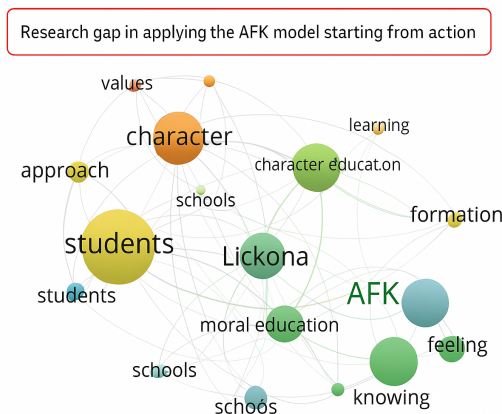


Fig. 1. Research gap AFK model

II. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design, aimed at exploring and diagnosing the current state of character education among elementary school students in Indonesia, with the ultimate goal of providing empirical and theoretical justification for the development of the AFK (Action–Feeling–Knowing) strategy (De Muth, 2019; Tünkler, 2020). The research design centers on field-based observation and expert input from elementary school teachers, interpreted through an interdisciplinary lens involving educational psychology, moral philosophy, and curriculum theory.

A. Research Design and Approach

The research adopts a descriptive–explorative approach, focusing on understanding teachers' authentic experiences and challenges in implementing character education at the elementary level. Descriptive methods are used to portray the actual state of character development among students, while exploratory analysis identifies gaps and opportunities for strategic intervention (Hjoujj, 2023). This approach avoids variable manipulation or hypothesis testing, instead emphasizing the generation of contextual, grounded data that reflect local educational realities—an essential diagnostic basis for developing the AFK strategy.

B. Participants and Research Setting

Participants in this study consisted of 10 elementary school teachers from SDN 1 Labuhan Ratu in East Lampung Regency, Indonesia, who were selected through purposive sampling. The selection was based on several criteria, including having a minimum of five years of teaching experience, active involvement in school-based character education programs, familiarity with the PPK

(Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter) framework, and a willingness to provide detailed and reflective insights.

The sample included teachers from grades 1 through 6, providing a range of perspectives across developmental stages. SDN 1 Labuhan Ratu was chosen for its representativeness as a public school in a semi-urban area facing common implementation barriers, including limited resources, diverse student backgrounds, and the absence of structured character education programs. The small sample size aligns with the qualitative orientation of the study, prioritizing depth over breadth and positioning teachers as both respondents and reflective practitioners.

C. Instruments and Data Collection

Data collection used a specially designed teacher observation sheet based on the five core PPK values: religiosity, nationalism, independence, cooperation, and integrity (Yenita et al., 2020). Each of these values was further defined with observable behavioral indicators, such as performing prayers or spiritual rituals to show religiosity, respecting national symbols to reflect nationalism, completing tasks without prompts as a sign of independence, cooperating in group work to demonstrate cooperation, and being honest during evaluations as an indicator of integrity.

Teachers were asked to rate how often and how consistently students showed each behavior over a set period, using a numerical scale (e.g., 1 = never, 5 = always). These scores were then averaged across all indicators for each value, resulting in a set of percentage scores that reflect the overall state of character development among students in the school.

The instrument development process involved expert consultation and internal validation. The first draft was reviewed by two curriculum experts and one educational psychologist to ensure construct validity. A pilot test was then conducted with two non-sample teachers to refine wording and improve indicator clarity. Revisions were made collaboratively before the full-scale deployment of the instrument. In addition to the observation sheet, semi-structured interviews and field notes were used to gather contextual insights. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and followed up with reflective discussions to clarify scores and collect narratives about the challenges faced in implementing character education.

D. Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was conducted in three main stages: quantitative aggregation, thematic interpretation, and literature mapping (Alford & Teater, 2025). The analysis in this study was conducted in three main stages. The first one, Quantitative aggregation, was carried out by converting raw scores from teacher observation sheets into percentage values for each of the five core PPK domains. These findings indicate that student character competencies are critically low, far below the expected

threshold for effective moral internalization among elementary school students and thus serve as a baseline diagnosis of the challenges faced in daily classroom practice.

The second stage, Thematic Interpretation, involved coding the interview transcripts inductively using NVivo 12 software. Two researchers performed independent coding, followed by inter-coder agreement checking, which yielded a Cohen's Kappa value of 0.84, indicating strong reliability. From this process, several emergent themes were identified, including limited student engagement in value-based activities, weak connections between moral instruction and real-life application, inconsistent teacher role modeling, limited reinforcement of values at home, and difficulties in integrating values into academic subjects.

And the last one, Bibliometric literature mapping, was finally employed to position the study within the broader scholarly discourse. Using Publish or Perish and VOS viewer software, 500 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024 were analyzed and selected for relevance to character education and moral pedagogy. The visualization revealed that while research on character education and Lickona's triadic framework occupies a central position, terms related to AFK, such as "Action-Feeling-Knowing" and "reversed sequence," appear only at the margins, with weak interconnections. This confirms that the AFK strategy remains underexplored in both national and international contexts (Majumdar, 2022). Through this three-stage process, the study not only provides a comprehensive diagnosis of character education challenges but also reinforces the originality and relevance of AFK as an innovative approach worthy of further development and empirical testing.

E. Research Validity and Ethical Considerations.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed several validation techniques. Investigator triangulation was implemented by involving multiple researchers in coding and interpreting the qualitative data. Additionally, trustworthiness was strengthened through data triangulation, which utilized observation sheets, interviews, and literature mapping, as well as member checking, in which participants reviewed the findings to confirm their accuracy. Ethical procedures included informed consent, assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, and adherence to principles of non-punitive use of data findings, which are intended to improve educational interventions rather than evaluate or penalize individuals.

III. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings from a preliminary diagnostic study on character formation among elementary students, as observed and evaluated by ten teachers at SDN 1 Labuhan Ratu. The study's objective

guided the analysis to examine the current state of student character in relation to the five core values of the national Character Education Reinforcement (PPK) program: religiosity, nationalism, independence, cooperation, and integrity. By combining quantitative teacher evaluations with qualitative reflections, the findings provide a comprehensive picture of both the extent of value internalization and the challenges faced in classroom practice.

The results are organized into four main themes: overall character competency scores, domain-specific weaknesses, qualitative insights from teacher narratives, and supporting bibliometric findings that justify the need for a new strategy, specifically AFK (Action-Feeling-Knowing). Together, these findings not only highlight the critical gaps in current character education practices but also support the development of an innovative approach tailored to the developmental traits of elementary students.

A. Main Findings

1) Overall, Character Competency Scores

The first stage of analysis combined teacher evaluations of student behavior across the five core PPK values: religiosity, nationalism, independence, cooperation, and integrity. Each teacher used a structured observation tool to rate their students, focusing on the frequency and quality of behavioral indicators related to each value.

The resulting data, visualized in the bar chart (Figure 2), show the following scores: religiosity (44.50%), nationalism (44.34%), independence (44.25%), cooperation (43.51%), and integrity (43.29%). The overall average score across all five domains was 43.98%.

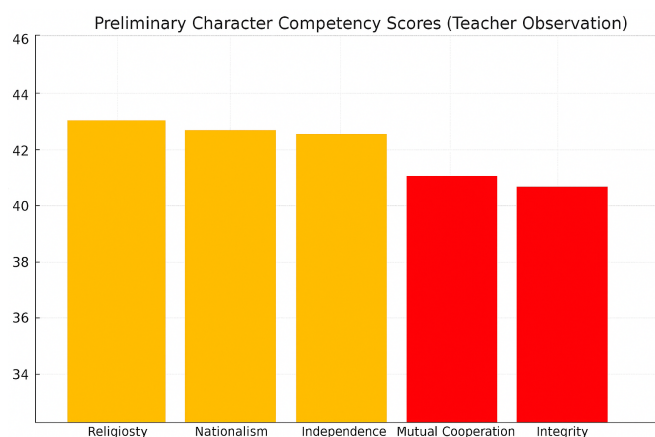


Fig. 2. Preliminary Character Competency Scores Based on Teacher Observation

When compared to previous evaluations of character education in Indonesian elementary schools, these scores are significantly below the expected threshold. For instance, studies have Prasetyo & Baswedan, (2020) reported that effective character formation in primary education is typically reflected in competency levels shown above 70%. This stark discrepancy highlights not

identified not only the weak internalization of values in the observed school but also a potential systemic issue in the broader implementation of the national PPK program.

The data also reveal an apparent domain-specific weakness. Integrity and cooperation emerged as the lowest-scoring dimensions, indicating that students do not consistently embody honesty and accountability, and showing that collaborative attitudes exist. Even religiosity, which recorded the highest percentage (44.50%), still shows only procedural engagement (e.g., ritual compliance) without deeper affective or spiritual internalization. This suggests that students may possess surface-level awareness of expected values but lack authentic behavioral and emotional commitment to them.

Taken together, these findings confirm a persistent gap between policy expectations and classroom realities. They reinforce the urgent need for a pedagogical innovation that connects moral instruction with real-life application, emotional reflection, and consistent behavioral reinforcement, highlighting the importance of developing the AFK (Action-Feeling-Knowing) strategy. (Nielsen & Ma, 2023).

2) Domain-Specific Weaknesses

A closer examination of the data reveals that none of the five PPK values achieved satisfactory levels, with integrity and cooperation emerging as the weakest domains. Integrity recorded the lowest score (43.29%), indicating frequent cases of dishonesty during tests, lack of accountability in group work, and avoidance of admitting mistakes. Teachers consistently observed that students tended to shift blame to peers rather than demonstrate responsibility. Cooperation was only slightly higher (43.51%), characterized by poor collaboration, reluctance to help peers, and the dominance of specific individuals during group activities. These patterns suggest that individualistic tendencies overshadow the cultivation of solidarity and shared responsibility, values that are central to Indonesian educational and cultural contexts (Yusriadi & Hamim, 2022).

Even the relatively highest-scoring domain, religiosity (44.50%), failed to reflect robust internalization. Teachers noted that although students engaged in religious practices such as prayer, these behaviors often remained ritualistic and procedural, lacking emotional depth and reflective meaning. This finding signals that values perceived as deeply ingrained in Indonesian society may be practiced superficially without genuine affective or spiritual integration (Shalihin et al., 2020).

The distribution of domain-specific weaknesses is illustrated in Figure 3, which highlights the comparatively lower scores for integrity and cooperation relative to religiosity.

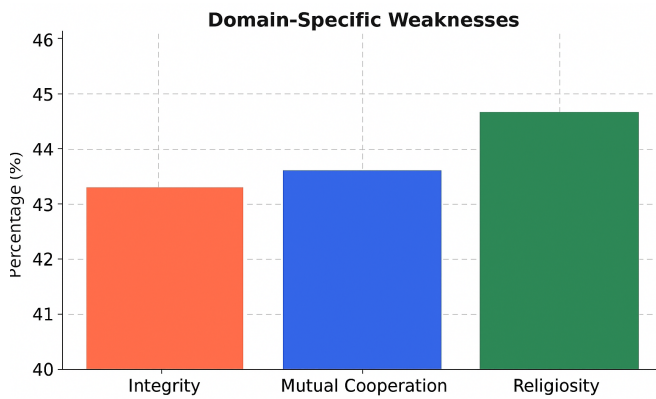


Fig. 3. The distribution of domain-specific weaknesses

Taken together, these findings demonstrate a consistent gap between students' cognitive awareness of expected moral behaviors and their authentic behavioral enactment. This discrepancy reflects critiques in the broader literature, which argue that conventional character education often remains instructional and superficial, without creating opportunities for emotional engagement or authentic moral practice (Sun et al., 2021). Within this context, the AFK (Action–Feeling–Knowing) strategy offers a promising solution, as it begins with concrete action, encourages emotional reflection, and culminates in cognitive understanding, thereby addressing precisely the weaknesses identified in integrity and cooperation while deepening the internalization of religiosity.

B. Comparison with Previous Research

1) Bibliometric Gaps and Synthesis of Findings

The novelty of the AFK strategy is further supported by a bibliometric analysis of 500 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024, identified using Publish or Perish with the keywords “character education,” “moral development,” and “values education.” The results were visualized with VOS viewer using a minimum co-occurrence threshold of five to ensure only relevant and frequently connected terms were mapped.

The visualization revealed that dominant nodes such as “Lickona,” “students,” and “character” occupied central positions, confirming the substantial prevalence of Lickona's triadic model (knowing–feeling–acting) in global discourse. In contrast, terms directly associated with the AFK approach, such as “Action–Feeling–Knowing” and “reversed sequence,” appeared only on the periphery of the map, with weak linkages to central clusters. This confirms that AFK remains underexplored in both national and international contexts, especially in primary school settings.

This conceptual gap is significant because it mirrors the empirical findings of this study: students show low translation of moral knowledge into consistent behavior and minimal emotional engagement. Existing research predominantly promotes cognitive-first approaches,

which risk leaving students with abstract moral knowledge but no opportunity to practice or emotionally process values (Zhang et al., 2025).

By synthesizing these bibliometric insights with the study's quantitative and qualitative results, a clear conclusion emerges: character education in its current form is insufficiently grounded in real action and emotional experience. The AFK model offers a theoretically grounded alternative that directly addresses this gap by starting with action, then guiding emotional reflection, and finally connecting to cognitive reasoning (Nalipay et al., 2021). This sequence is especially suited to children in the concrete operational stage, enabling them to experience morality first, feel its emotional weight, and only then articulate the underlying principles

Importantly, AFK directly targets the weakest domains identified in this study, integrity and cooperation, by creating structured opportunities for students to act honestly, collaborate meaningfully, and reflect on the emotions elicited by these actions before formalizing moral conclusions (Abulela et al., 2023). This approach is consistent with key educational theories: behaviorism emphasizes habit formation through repeated moral action, constructivism highlights active engagement and social interaction in meaning-making, and humanism underscores the role of emotional well-being in authentic moral growth (Bates, 2021).

In sum, the bibliometric analysis not only confirms the originality of AFK but also positions it as a timely response to a documented pedagogical gap. It provides a compelling case for researchers and policymakers to explore AFK further through curriculum design, teacher training, and large-scale implementation studies.

C. Theoretical and Practical Implications

1) Qualitative Themes from Teacher Reflections

To complement the quantitative data, teachers were invited to share open-ended reflections on their observations. The qualitative insights provide explanatory depth to the low scores recorded across the five PPK domains. Several recurring themes emerged from the narratives.

The first theme was a disconnection between moral teaching and daily practice. Teachers reported that character values were often delivered as isolated lessons, such as during dedicated “character education” sessions, without consistent reinforcement in other subjects or school routines. One teacher remarked, “*We teach students to be honest during PPK classes, but we never follow up during exams or assignments.*” This pattern suggests that moral instruction remains fragmented and lacks integration into the broader school ecosystem (Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023).

A second theme highlighted the limited role modeling by teachers and school staff. Respondents expressed

concern that students often witnessed inconsistencies between what was taught and what was modelled in practice. As one teacher noted, *“How can students learn integrity when they see teachers manipulating attendance records or ignoring school rules themselves?”* Such contradictions undermine the credibility of moral education and weaken students’ motivation to internalize values.

The third theme pointed to home–school discrepancies in value reinforcement. Teachers frequently observed that parental practices sometimes contradicted the values promoted at school. One participant commented, *“We encourage independence here, but at home, students are still being spoon-fed everything.”* This highlights the importance of synergy between school and family environments to ensure consistent moral development.

Finally, teachers emphasized the issue of low emotional engagement in the delivery of character education (Samala et al., 2024). Lessons were often framed cognitively or behaviourally, without opportunities for students to reflect on empathy, regret, or gratitude. This lack of affective involvement limits the internalization of values, as emotions are central to moral reasoning and development (Nengah Suastika et al., 2020).

These four themes are summarized in Figure 4, which visually represents the core challenges identified by teachers in character education practices.

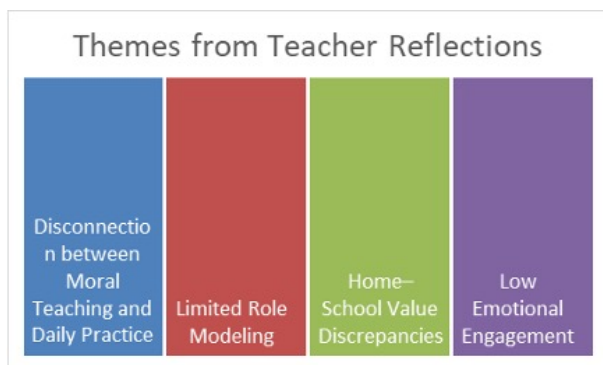


Fig. 4. Themes from Teacher Reflections

Taken together, these qualitative findings explain why character competency scores remain low and provide strong justification for a strategy that incorporates explicit action, emotional reflection, and guided reasoning, the core components of the AFK framework. By addressing fragmentation, promoting consistent role modeling, aligning school and home efforts, and enhancing emotional engagement, AFK has the potential to change character education from mere procedural instruction into genuine moral development.

The results of the initial survey at SDN 1 Labuhan Ratu show strong evidence that character development among elementary students is still greatly lacking across all five PPK core values, religiosity, nationalism, independence,

cooperation, and integrity. Student performance consistently fell below 45%, significantly short of the 70% benchmark typically considered sufficient for proper moral learning in primary education and (Nemakhavhani, 2024). When these results are considered alongside teacher narratives and bibliometric mapping, they reveal a systemic disconnect between policy ambition and the classroom. This section interprets the implications of these findings in light of existing models of character education and justifies the need for a new pedagogical framework: Action–Feeling–Knowing (AFK) (Alimuddin et al., 2020).

The first key implication is that current approaches to character education are failing to produce meaningful behavioral transformation (Jasti & Pavani, 2021; Metaferia et al., 2023). Although the PPK program provides a structured national framework with clear goals, students often demonstrate only superficial awareness of values without embodying them in daily behavior. For instance, the low score in integrity reflects frequent cases of dishonesty and avoidance of responsibility. Teachers reported patterns of cheating, blame-shifting, and lack of remorse, indicating a persistent gap between moral knowledge and moral action. Such findings resonate with Hart, (2022) the critique that traditional character education overly emphasizes cognitive instruction, telling students what is right, without offering opportunities to enact values in authentic contexts.

Another significant implication concerns the limited role of emotional engagement. Teacher reflections show that students rarely had space to explore or articulate the emotional dimensions of their actions, such as empathy, guilt, or gratitude (Stellar & Gordon, 2024). Instead, moral lessons were often delivered in procedural or punitive ways, leaving values as external rules rather than internalized convictions. This finding underscores a weakness in current practice: the absence of affective engagement, which De Buck & Pauwels, (2021) is identified as an essential element of moral development. Without fostering emotional sensitivity, character education risks remaining abstract and detached from students’ lived experiences.

The proposed AFK strategy directly addresses these shortcomings by reversing Lickona’s traditional sequence of knowing–feeling–acting. Grounded in Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, AFK begins with concrete action as the entry point for moral learning, followed by emotional reflection, and culminating in cognitive reasoning. This order aligns with the developmental characteristics of elementary students, who are in the concrete operational stage and learn best through tangible experiences. For example, engaging in collaborative tasks or demonstrating honesty in evaluative settings provides opportunities for action, which can then be processed emotionally before being framed in moral reasoning.

Multiple theoretical perspectives further reinforce the validity of AFK. Behaviorism (Thorndike's Law of Effect) emphasizes habit formation through repeated action and reinforcement; constructivism (Piaget) underscores the active role of learners in constructing moral meaning through experience; and humanism (Maslow, Habermas) highlights the importance of emotional well-being and critical reflection in enabling authentic moral growth. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that AFK is not merely a conceptual innovation but a pedagogically and developmentally sound strategy.

The bibliometric analysis conducted in this study also strengthens the claim of novelty. While terms such as Lickona, students, and character education dominate scholarly discourse, AFK-related concepts occupy peripheral positions, with weak connections to mainstream research clusters (Royeen, 2020). This indicates that few empirical studies have systematically tested AFK, particularly in the Indonesian elementary context. The scarcity of such research points to a significant opportunity for AFK to contribute both theoretically and practically to the global character education discourse (Truong, 2024).

Beyond the classroom, the findings highlight contextual challenges such as the disconnect between school and home environments (Yunitasari et al., 2025). Teachers frequently observed that parental practices undermined school-based moral instruction, either by modeling inconsistent behaviours or excusing misconduct. This fragmentation indicates that character formation cannot be confined to the school environment but requires synergy between schools, families, and communities. The AFK framework has the potential to bridge this gap by incorporating take-home reflective activities or parent-child engagements that extend value reinforcement beyond the classroom (Bentley & Shoffner, 2025).

Equally important is the role of teachers (Chen & Wu, 2022; Nisa et al., 2024). While teacher modeling remains vital, the data show that inconsistent adult behaviour is eroding students' trust and disengaging them from moral learning. Thus, modeling must be complemented by structured pedagogical strategies like AFK, which shift teachers from being mere transmitters of values to being key facilitators of active moral development. By guiding students through cycles of action, reflection, and reasoning, teachers can foster agency and ownership in students' character growth.

Taken together, these findings highlight that conventional approaches to character education are no longer sufficient. The reality of persistently low student scores, teacher frustration, and fragmented value ecosystems necessitates a strategy that is developmentally appropriate, emotionally engaging, and empirically grounded (Vaquier et al., 2020). The AFK model meets this need by offering a coherent, cyclical approach that is both adaptable and scalable. Although the current study is

limited to one school, its alignment with broader national challenges suggests wider applicability.

In conclusion, character formation in Indonesia. Elementary schools are not only a moral imperative but also a pedagogical challenge requiring research-based innovation. The AFK framework, validated through empirical data, theoretical grounding, and bibliometric analysis, provides a promising direction by beginning with what students do, allowing them to reflect on how they, and guiding them toward what they come to know. AFK redefines character education as an active and transformative process. Future research should therefore focus on designing curricula, developing instructional modules, and validating assessment tools that capture growth across the three AFK domains, ensuring that character education evolves from policy aspiration to lived practice.

IV. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the urgent need to update character education strategies in Indonesian elementary schools. Data from teacher observations show that student performance across five core PPK values, religiosity, nationalism, independence, cooperation, and integrity, remains consistently below 45%, indicating a significant gap between policy and classroom practice. Qualitative insights from teachers also reveal that current methods often fail to connect moral instruction with real-life experiences, emotional engagement, or consistent reinforcement of behavioral change. In response, the study introduces the Action Feeling Knowing (AFK) strategy, a pedagogical model that reverses the traditional order of moral learning. Instead of starting with abstract moral knowledge, AFK begins character development through real-life actions, followed by emotional reflection, and then moral reasoning. This approach aligns with the developmental needs of elementary students and is supported by behaviorist, constructivist, and humanistic learning theories. The AFK model addresses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of character while offering a structured, actionable, and context-sensitive solution for teachers and schools. The research also includes a bibliometric analysis highlighting the limited number of studies explicitly applying the AFK model in educational practice, underscoring the novelty and relevance of this approach. Although the current research is diagnostic, it provides a strong empirical and theoretical foundation for future work on developing, implementing, and evaluating AFK-based instructional tools. Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on integrated character education and offers practical guidance for fostering morally grounded, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible individuals' student-learners.

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