

## An evaluation of student personality program in secondary schools: a systematic literature review

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Nov 14, 2024

Revised Dec 12, 2025

Accepted Feb 1, 2026

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#### Keywords:

Character education

Evaluation

Personality program

Secondary schools

Student development

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of education is to uplift and develop human personality, morals, behavior, and character. Despite various initiatives and plans, the efforts to cultivate good values and character among students are increasingly challenging due to the negative influence of the local environment as well as the borderless social media. This issue called many researchers to conduct studies to evaluate the implementation of student personality programs in secondary schools, but systematic literature reviews (SLR) on this topic are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a SLR to evaluate past studies related to the assessment of student character programs. The SLR writing process was according to the preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis (PRISMA). Two main databases, namely Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, were used to identify relevant articles and sources. Based on the thematic analysis, four main themes were found, which were behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the implementation of student character programs, which can serve as an important reference for educators to strengthen character development among secondary school students. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective programs in addressing the challenges of nurturing character among the younger generation in the modern era.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Personality or character is the attributes that go hand in hand with one's behavior and form one's identity. In education, character is not only related to self-development but also to the relationships between students, teachers and the surrounding community. Personality is a unique characteristic that distinguishes an individual from another [1]. The development of student character refers to the process of cultivating good habits and transforming social behavior norms into internal habits and self-awareness. It further involves making changes for the survival and growth of individuals in terms of their behavior and quality of abilities [2]. Besides academic curriculum, character development can also be fostered through hidden curriculum such as creating a good school culture and environment. The hidden curriculum in schools, which encompasses informal norms, values and social practices, has a significant impact on character development. This includes how teachers interact with students and how school rules are accepted and implemented in daily life [3].

In Malaysia, this cultural practice has been incorporated into the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025, which outlines key elements to achieve student aspirations. Among these, the fifth aspiration: ethics and spirituality focus on spirituality, ethical conduct, and civic responsibility. The

Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) is committed to producing students who not only have high intellectual, emotional and physical skills but also focus on values, personality and unity. Developing values, character and unity among students need to be balanced with intellectual, emotional and physical development to ensure the prosperity and progress achieved by Malaysia can be maintained. In order to achieve these noble aspirations, the focus on the development of student values, personality, and unity which was previously attended only on co-curricular activities has begun to be comprehensively expanded by strengthening the existing personality development programs inside and outside the classroom, as well as preparation of long-term strategic planning for the development of values, personality, and unity [4].

In this study context, the researcher will focus on the evaluation of the personality program implementation in secondary schools. The focus of the personality program implementation includes behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social aspects. The main research question to be explored is: how effective is the implementation of character programs for students in secondary schools based on behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social aspects? Additionally, the supplementary research questions to be explored include: what are the elements of character programs that have the most impact on fostering positive behavior among students? and how do parental and teacher involvement influence the implementation of character programs in secondary schools?

The personality program for secondary school students is a vital issue that attracts researchers to study more deeply about its evaluation. Numerous studies [5]–[7] along with other studies on personality program implementation, highlight the need for a systematic literature review (SLR) to consolidate and better understand previous findings. Despite a need for a SLR, even today, the scope is not very extensive. Most personality programs are implemented primarily to satisfy stakeholder expectations, rather than focusing on the effectiveness of their goals. Effectiveness refers to the achievement of objectives and the outcomes of the program. This study seeks to address this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis that evaluates not only the implementation of the program but also its actual impact on student character development. Such an assessment is crucial as it informs decisions regarding the quality of the program and the individuals involved [8]. Clearly, a SLR on the evaluation of the implementation of secondary school students' personality programs has received little attention. Conducting a SLR is crucial because a traditional literature review has various issues such as transparency, author bias, recruitment bias and publication bias. In contrast, an SLR is a comprehensive, transparent and structured method for reviewing literature in an academic setting.

The novelty of this study lies in its systematic and thematic evaluation of student personality development programs, particularly at the secondary school level- an area that has received limited attention in the existing literature. This study is among the earliest to apply the preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis (PRISMA) method in a social science context to explore personality education. In addition, this study introduces a thematic framework encompassing behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social dimensions- a comprehensive model that is rarely synthesized in previous studies. This study also provides meaningful insights into the implementation of such programs in multicultural education systems like those in Malaysia and Indonesia.

This study conducts an SLR to identify gaps in the evaluation of student personality programs in secondary schools, providing a valuable contribution to both knowledge and practice in the field of personality education. It also has the potential to advance the theoretical understanding of character development and to offer practical guidance to educators and policymakers in strengthening personality programs at the secondary school level. By referring to this SLR, stakeholders, particularly educators, school administrators, and researchers can better understand the most effective elements of personality development initiatives. Furthermore, the benefits of this study are expected to be substantial and multi-dimensional. Firstly, it will provide educators, school administrators and policymakers with a clearer understanding of the most effective elements in student personality development programs. Secondly, it can serve as a reference for developing culturally appropriate and evidence-based personality education initiatives, particularly in Malaysia and other plural societies. Thirdly, the findings may inform future curriculum development, teacher training modules and community engagement strategies to support holistic student development.

The implementation of character education programs in schools generally follows two primary approaches, either as standalone components or through integration into subject-based instruction. In certain education systems, personality development exists as a specific strand in the curriculum, while in others, it is embedded across subjects such as moral education, Islamic studies, civic education and history. These integrated approaches aim to reinforce moral values and behavioral expectations within academic learning contexts.

In Malaysia, the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025 emphasizes character development under the fifth student aspiration: ethics and spirituality. In this context, character education is implemented through both direct and indirect approaches. Direct approaches include co-curricular and classroom-based programs such as moral education, Islamic education and history, where values such as patriotism, mutual

respect, and empathy are taught explicitly. Indirect approaches include hidden curriculum, school culture, and leadership programs, such as *Program Sekolah Penyayang* and *Program Sahsiah Terpuji*, which aim to nurture empathy, discipline, and civic engagement through whole-school practices. In the development of the School Curriculum 2027, the concept of *Karamah Insaniah* (human dignity) has also been introduced, focusing on the formation of values, ethics and integrity as the core of student character building [9].

In Indonesia, character education has become a national priority through the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum (K-13), which emphasizes competency-based learning integrated with moral values. The government's initiative, *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK) or strengthening character education, integrates character education into all subjects and school activities. These values align with the principles of Pancasila, the philosophical foundation of Indonesia. Character education practices in Indonesia include structured moral instruction, co-curricular involvement and cultural activities such as flag-raising ceremonies and student leadership programs that focus on discipline, mutual respect and service to the community.

Both countries employ different approaches to religious education. In Indonesia, which has notable religious diversity, students are allowed to study religion according to their respective beliefs. In contrast, Malaysia, where Islam is the dominant religion implements Islamic studies for Muslim students, while non-Muslim students are offered moral education as an alternative [10]. This comparative approach between Malaysia and Indonesia highlights a shared regional emphasis on character education, though implemented through varied methods of integration and delivery. Both countries recognize the importance of developing students' ethical, emotional and social competencies as preparation for becoming responsible citizens in a multicultural society.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis

In conducting this SLR, the researchers adopted PRISMA as the guiding framework. PRISMA comprises seven sections, encompassing a total of 27 items along with several sub-items, which may be followed when developing an SLR [11]. Although this SLR is situated within the field of social science, PRISMA remains an appropriate reference as it assists in formulating a clear research question and facilitates a systematic search process. Furthermore, PRISMA contributes to the reduction of various forms of bias and supports effective study synthesis [12] through a structured search strategy involving four distinct stages, namely identification, screening, eligibility, and article quality assessment.

### 2.2. Formulation of the research question

The research questions for this SLR were developed based on the PICO framework. PICO is a mnemonic commonly used to construct SLR research questions grounded in qualitative synthesis, enabling the identification of essential elements that should be incorporated into SLR research questions [13]. The PICO framework consists of three core components: P=population/problem, I=interest, and Co=context. Guided by these components, three principal aspects which are students (population), evaluation of personality program implementation (interest), and secondary schools (context) were used to formulate the main research question: what is the evaluation of the implementation of student personality programs in secondary schools? The systematic search process includes identification, screening, and eligibility stages, as illustrated in Figure 1.

### 2.3. Systematic searching strategies

#### 2.3.1. Identification

Identification refers to the process of selecting and expanding suitable keywords for use in the article search procedure. Keywords play a crucial role in the search process, as they enhance the precision of articles retrieved for the SLR. Based on the research questions outlined earlier, three primary keywords were identified, namely evaluation, personality program and secondary school. To broaden the search scope, synonyms, related terms and variations of the main keywords were determined. This process was conducted using an online thesaurus, by referring to keywords employed in previous studies, consulting the Scopus database and seeking expert opinions. The outcomes of the identification stage are presented in Table 1.

Based on the identified keywords, the article search was conducted using two main databases, namely Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus. These databases were chosen due to several advantages they offer. First, Gusenbauer and Haddaway [14] reported that databases, such as WoS and Scopus demonstrate strengths in conducting comprehensive searches, producing more stable search results and providing more advanced search functionalities compared to other databases. In addition, Martín-Martín *et al.* [15] emphasized the advantages of WoS and Scopus with respect to quality control and the use of a systematic indexing framework.

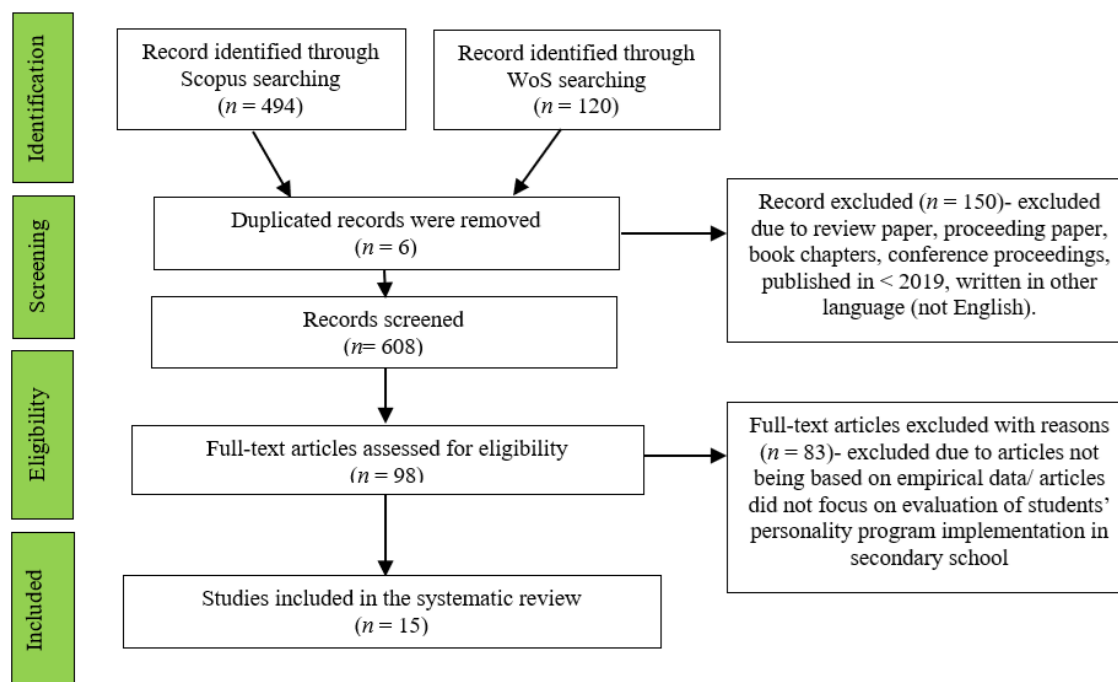


Figure 1. SLR diagram flow chart [12]

The search strategy applied in these databases (WoS and Scopus) involved advanced search techniques using basic functions, including Boolean operators (AND, OR), phrase searching, truncation, wildcards and field code functions (refer to Table 1). Besides this approach, manual searching was performed through the handpicking method using Google Scholar and ScienceDirect, as well as the snowballing technique applied to selected articles. Based on the selected keywords, databases and search strategies, a total of 494 articles from Scopus and 120 articles from WoS were retrieved. All retrieved articles then proceeded to the second stage of the systematic search strategy, namely the screening process.

Table 1. Search string for searching database articles

Database	Search string
WoS (n=120)	TS= (("evaluation" OR "appraisal" OR "measurement" OR "assessment") AND ("personality" OR "character" OR "individual" OR "identity" OR "disposition") AND ("programme" OR "initiative" OR "plan") AND ("secondary school" OR "junior high school" OR "middle school" OR "intermediate school"))
Scopus (n=494)	TITLE-ABS (("evaluation" OR "appraisal" OR "measurement" OR "assessment") AND ("personality" OR "character" OR "individual" OR "identity" OR "disposition") AND ("programme" OR "initiative" OR "plan") AND ("secondary school" OR "junior high school" OR "middle school" OR "intermediate school"))

### 2.3.2. Screening

Screening refers to the process of applying inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify articles that are suitable for inclusion in the SLR [16]. A total of 614 articles retrieved during the identification stage were subjected to the screening process. The first screening criterion applied in this SLR was the year of publication, whereby only studies published within the most recent five-year period (2019–2023) were selected. The choice of this time frame was supported by several considerations. First, this time frame aligns with the maturity concept discussed by Kraus *et al.* [17], which suggests that a considerable number of relevant studies were published during this period.

Furthermore, a review of the primary databases indicated that 2019 marked the beginning of a notable increase in publications related to the evaluation of student personality programs in secondary schools. To ensure quality control, this SLR included only publications in the form of journal articles. In addition, to facilitate clarity in reading and comprehension, only studies published in Malaysian language and English were considered. Moreover, inclusion was limited to articles that presented relevant empirical data. Consequently, review articles were excluded, as the main objective of this SLR is to find out and identify the findings of previous studies and not a review of previous studies.

An additional criterion concerned the focus of the study findings. Selected articles were required to report findings that specifically addressed the evaluation of the implementation of personality programs among secondary school students. Articles that mentioned the implementation of student personality programs without clearly indicating the conduct of an evaluation were excluded. This criterion was applied to ensure that all selected articles contributed relevant findings to the review. Following the screening process, 510 articles were excluded for failing to meet the established criteria, leaving 98 articles for the subsequent stage. The applied inclusion criteria are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	
Year of publication	Within the past five years (2019-2023)
Publication type	Journal articles
Language	Malay and English
Types of findings	Empirical
Focus of findings	Data related to the evaluation of student personality program implementation in secondary school

### 2.3.3. Eligibility

The next process is an eligibility check on the remaining 98 articles selected during the initial screening process. Eligibility is a process in which a second screening would be done to ensure once again that all the selected articles were accurate and relevant to the SLR. This process entails reviewing the title and abstract of each article. If relevance cannot be determined from the title and abstract alone, then the methodology, results and discussion sections are reviewed. During this process, 83 articles were excluded as their focus did not specifically address the evaluation of personality program implementation among secondary school students. These articles were removed for several reasons, including a focus on programs targeting the general public rather than secondary school students, duplication of records, limited access to full texts, and articles categorized as scoping reviews. Following the eligibility assessment, 21 articles were deemed suitable to proceed to the next stage, namely the quality assessment. In this study, the systematic search process using the PRISMA method was shown in Figure 1.

### 2.3.4. Article quality assessment

All selected articles were subjected to an initial quality assessment to minimize potential bias and to identify studies with possible methodological limitations [18]. Two evaluators were appointed from among the researchers to conduct the assessment. As this SLR incorporated studies employing different research designs, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, the evaluators utilized the mixed methods appraisal tool (MMAT) as the guiding framework for article evaluation [19].

Each article was assessed using two preliminary criteria followed by five design-specific criteria. At the preliminary stage, article quality was examined based on the following principles: i) whether the stated research question was clearly defined and ii) whether the data obtained were sufficient to address the stated research questions. Only articles that fulfilled both preliminary criteria proceeded to the subsequent stage, which involved categorization according to research design (qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods) before evaluation using the five specific criteria. For each criterion, the evaluators selected one of three response options, namely “yes”, “no”, or “cannot tell”, with the latter applied when the evaluation outcome was unclear or uncertain. To ensure consistency and reliability, both evaluators were required to reach mutual agreement for each article. In cases where consensus could not be achieved, a second opinion was sought.

From the 21 articles assessed, 15 articles met at least three of the specified criteria and were therefore included in this SLR. In contrast, five articles by Zhang *et al.* [20], Haug *et al.* [21], Lima-Serrano and Lima-Rodríguez [22], Effendi [23], and Suraiya *et al.* [24] were excluded for failing to meet the minimum requirements. The outcomes of the article quality assessment are presented in Tables 3-5.

Table 3. Quantitative article quality assessment

Basic/study criteria	[20]	[21]	[22]
Is the stated research question clear?	Yes	Cannot tell	Cannot tell
Is the data obtained able to answer the stated research questions?	No	Cannot tell	Cannot tell
Is the sampling strategy used relevant to answer the research question?	Yes	Cannot tell	Cannot tell
Is the selected sample representative of the population being studied?	Yes	Cannot tell	Cannot tell
Are the measurements used appropriately?	Cannot tell	Cannot tell	Cannot tell
Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	No	Cannot tell	Cannot tell
Is the statistical analysis used appropriately to answer the research question?	Cannot tell	Cannot tell	Cannot tell
Verdict	Not accepted	Not accepted	Not accepted

Table 4. Qualitative article quality assessment

Basic/study criteria	[23]
Is the stated research question clear?	Cannot tell
Is the data obtained able to answer the stated research questions?	Cannot tell
Is the qualitative approach used appropriately to answer the research question?	Cannot tell
Is the qualitative data collection methodology used sufficient to answer the research question?	Cannot tell
Are the results obtained from the data sufficient?	Cannot tell
Is the interpretation of the study results can be proven with the data?	Cannot tell
Is there continuity between the source, collection, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative data?	Cannot tell
Verdict	Not accepted

Table 5. Mixed method article quality assessment

Basic/study criteria	[24]
Is the stated research question clear?	Yes
Is the data obtained able to answer the stated research questions?	Yes
Is there a justification to use mixed methods to answer the research question?	No
Can these different research components be combined effectively to answer the research question?	No
Are the combined qualitative and quantitative results interpreted accurately?	No
Are differences and elements of inconsistency between quantitative and qualitative results well addressed?	No
Do the different study components comply with the quality criteria for each study design involved?	No
Verdict	Not accepted

### 2.3.5. Data extraction and analysis

The data extraction process was performed on articles that had successfully passed the quality assessment stage. This process involved two researchers. As this SLR focused on examining findings from previous studies concerning the implementation of personality programs, data extraction emphasized three key sections of each article, namely the abstract, results and discussion. Where required, other sections containing relevant information were also reviewed. The extracted data were subsequently organized into a table to support the analysis process. Following data extraction, data analysis was undertaken. As this SLR adopted an integrative review approach that incorporated multiple research designs, qualitative synthesis was identified as the most appropriate analytical method [25]. Several analytical approaches can be applied within qualitative synthesis; however, thematic analysis was selected as one of the most suitable techniques for analyzing findings derived from diverse research designs [26]. Thematic analysis seeks to identify recurring patterns across previous studies based on the similarity or relevance of the extracted findings.

To determine appropriate themes, the extracted findings were examined individually. Findings that demonstrated similarity or relevance were grouped into the same data category, after which suitable themes were assigned to each group. Through this process, four main themes were identified: behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social. The findings within each theme were then further reviewed to develop subthemes, resulting in a total of seven subthemes. All identified themes and subthemes were subsequently re-evaluated to ensure their alignment with the research questions. A validation process was carried out by two experts, one specializing in SLR methodology and the other in Islamic education. Both experts confirmed that the four main themes and seven subthemes were appropriate and relevant to the research questions. The identified themes and subthemes are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. The main themes and subthemes

Author/theme	Research design Sub-theme	Behavioral		Emotion		Cognitive	Social	
		Behavioral change	Physical health	Emotional intelligence	Emotional management	Cognitive ability	Social skills	Social wellbeing
[5]	QN	/			/	/		
[7]	QN	/		/		/		
[27]	QN	/			/	/	/	
[28]	QN		/		/		/	
[29]	QN	/			/			/
[30]	QL	/			/		/	/
[31]	QN	/		/		/	/	
[32]	QN	/			/		/	/
[33]	QN		/		/		/	/
[34]	QN	/		/	/	/		
[35]	MX	/				/		
[36]	QN		/		/			
[37]	QN	/			/			/
[38]	QN	/	/		/			/
[39]	QL	/			/	/		/

QN=quantitative; QL=qualitative; MX=mixed methods

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Article background

Of the 15 articles selected, six of them were published in 2022, six were published in 2021 and three were published in 2019. Additionally, 15 selected articles, each published in one journal that was International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, the South African Journal of Education, the Journal of Medical Internet Research, the Journal of Physical Education and Sport, the Journal of Educational, Cultural and Psychological Studies, Journal of Medical Internet Research, BMJ Open, Preventive Medicine Reports, JMIR Formative Research, Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, Child & Youth Care Forum, Perspectives of Science and Education, Sustainability, Frontier in Psychology, and Frontier in Pediatrics. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify the main themes and subthemes. In this process, four main themes were identified, which were: behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social. Next, the findings from the main theme were examined for the formation of subthemes, which produced seven sub-themes, namely: behavioral change, physical health, emotional intelligence, emotional management, cognitive ability, social skills, and social wellbeing. All identified themes and subthemes were subsequently re-assessed to confirm their relevance to addressing the research question: what is the evaluation of the student personality program implementation in secondary schools?

#### 3.2. Major systematic literature review findings

##### 3.2.1. Behavior

The sub-themes under the behavioral theme are behavior change and physical health. Kozina *et al.* [5] state that character change occurs through student's awareness of academic achievement. This change refers to a positive shift in awareness, encouraging students to work harder. In their study, the relationship between character and confidence significantly affects mathematics achievement. The emphasis on character values should be incorporated into curriculum learning, additional curriculum and a conducive environment whether at home or in school [30]. Therefore, this experience will give an impression of a better self-understanding as well as a clear goal [39]. Meanwhile, the physical health care sub-theme is closely related to the individual's psychomotor and psychosocial development [28]. Study by Kompán *et al.* [36] involving climbing and meditation activities by students can overcome feelings of discomfort and fear as well as improve self-confidence, physical performance, and cooperation [38]. This is supported by Mastorci *et al.* [33] that school programs can improve self-image and body satisfaction among teenagers aged 12 to 14 years from the aspect of empowerment and awareness of health and well-being.

Overall, findings under the behavioral theme and its sub-themes indicate that character change is largely driven by students' self-awareness and personal experiences. The role of teachers in schools and parents serves as a catalyst in creating a conducive environment for shaping positive behavior. In addition, physical activities also have a significant impact on individual personal development. Therefore, the integration of curriculum, co-curriculum, and extracurricular activities constitutes an essential element in efforts to develop a balanced and holistic character.

##### 3.2.2. Emotion

The sub-theme under emotion is emotional intelligence and emotional management. Research by Lippolis *et al.* [7] state emotional intelligence involves controlling the attention of how individual emotions react, focus and analyze information for cognitive function in the complex situations. Their study revealed a significant difference in self-control between students enrolled in the music curriculum and those following the standard curriculum. Students who follow the music curriculum are more likely to have better performance in the audiovisual working memory. Therefore, activities, methods, and learning resources influence the level of emotional intelligence of students through the integration of knowledge [7], [31], [34]. Meanwhile, the next subtheme is emotional management. Generally, each student has a diverse personality. The teacher's role is to create a conducive atmosphere in which the uniqueness of each student is appreciated [30]. The implementation of personality programs in schools aims to foster self-reflection about individual skills [32]. The programs that are conducted are not only focused on students in the mainstream but also involve those at risk. Debenham *et al.* [29] focus on how to manage emotions to reduce alcohol consumption as well as knowledge about the dangers of cannabis. Similarly, a study by McKay *et al.* [27] on adolescents with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) through the Alfi VR method to increase the level of concentration based on emotional regulation.

In relation to the emotional theme and its sub-themes, the reviewed studies suggest that emotional intelligence is strongly influenced by the learning approaches, resources and support systems provided to students. In this context, the variety of effective teaching techniques and resources employed by teachers plays a crucial role in uncovering students' abilities to face complex situations. The aspect of emotional intelligence is also not limited to mainstream students but also extends to at-risk students through their ability

to manage their own emotions. Nevertheless, this achievement depends on the methods, resources, and guidance provided by teachers.

### 3.2.3. Cognitive

The subtheme under cognitive is cognitive ability. Students who achieve excellent marks are often regarded as having superior cognitive abilities [7]. Due to their excellence, they are seen as role admired for their qualities and values [35]. However, cognitive ability is not measured through academic excellence alone, but individual ability is also subject to specific treatment and remedial programs [27], [29]. Although the effect may be seen in the long term, the individual's abilities and capabilities are considered as an effort to reflect on existing experiences [32], [34], [39].

The analysis of the cognitive theme and its sub-themes finds that individuals' cognitive abilities vary. Typically, cognitive ability is often associated with academic intelligence. However, it also encompasses at-risk individuals who participate in treatment and rehabilitation programs, such as adolescents involved in alcohol and drug use. In this context, the cognitive ability of at-risk individuals depends on their capacity to effectively manage and respond to the situations they encounter.

### 3.2.4. Social

The sub-theme under social is social skills and social well-being. The foundation for students' social skills begins when there is interaction either at home or in school. This interaction is expected to meet the norms of cultural behavior and local society [5], [33]. For example, hardworking, thoroughness, responsibility, patriotism, and tolerance [28], [31]. Meanwhile, the next subtheme is social well-being. In order to change unhealthy behavior, the environment plays a vital role in promoting a healthy lifestyle [33]. Personality programs combine mental health and social well-being strategies [29]. A study by García-Raga *et al.* [37] on the effectiveness of the meditation program at school is seen in interpersonal relationship scope. In addition, the development of positive relationships between teachers, students, and all school members can be optimized through advice and counseling [30].

For the social theme and its sub-themes, the findings emphasize that social interaction between individuals influences the formation of students' character. The interplay of home, school and community environments shapes and strengthens students' social skills. Ultimately, these social interactions will define the behavioral traits chosen by the students. At this stage, the roles of parents and teachers are crucial in fostering positive relationships with children or students for balanced social development.

### 3.2.5. Relationship between themes

The analysis of personality development program interventions across all four themes demonstrates that student development is a holistic process shaped by dynamic interactions between behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social aspects. Positive behavioral change typically begins with self-awareness, strengthened through environmental support and appropriate learning experiences. Such awareness subsequently enhances motivation, self-confidence and students' ability to adapt to academic demands and daily challenges.

From the emotional perspective, emotional intelligence and effective emotional management play a critical role in helping students interpret complex situations, develop self-control and manage stress. Strong emotional regulation facilitates cognitive learning processes, thereby improving students' ability to make decisions, solve problems and apply new experiences reflectively. The cognitive aspect serves as the foundation for intellectual understanding, thinking skills, and strategic competence in responding to various situations. Cognitive ability is not only demonstrated through academic performance but also develops through targeted interventions involving at-risk students. This cognitive development mutually reinforces emotional and behavioral growth, particularly in building resilience and the ability to evaluate actions rationally.

Meanwhile, social development acts as the framework that integrates all these aspects. Interactions at home, in school and within the community shape students' social skills and influence how they communicate, collaborate, and adapt within social environments. Stable social well-being enables students to practice positive behavior, manage emotions effectively and optimize their cognitive abilities. These four themes collectively reflect how personality programs operate in real school settings, whereby behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social components function as integrated elements within program activities, teacher practices, and school culture. The integrated model of these themes is illustrated in Figure 2.

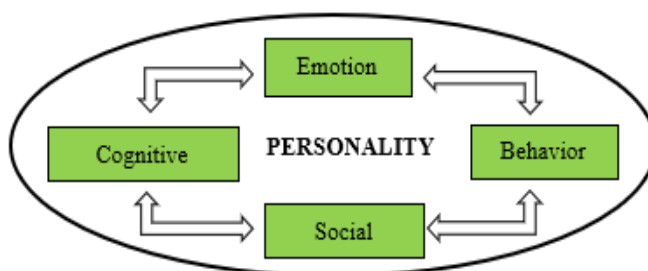


Figure 2. Integrated personality model

### 3.3. Discussion

This section will discuss the findings of the study regarding the research question. The study found that the implementation of personality programs has varying impacts depending on cultural context, the level of involvement of teachers and parents and the approach used in the program. Based on a review of previous studies within different cultural contexts, significant positive direct effects of emotional and spiritual intelligence on school culture were identified, alongside significant positive direct effects on the strengthening of student character [3]. This suggests that higher levels of emotional and spiritual intelligence implementation, together with supportive work culture, contribute to stronger character development among students.

In other findings related to the level of involvement of teachers and parents, it was found that parents' approach to education, as well as their involvement, varies according to social class, resources and school culture. However, the relationship between parent associations and school administration is generally governed by the social history and culture of the particular school [39]. This indicates that the role of the school and parents' approaches to specific programs and their involvement differ based on social class, culture and the historical context of the school [40]. Furthermore, Telef [41] reported a positive and significant relationship between secondary school students' happiness and school satisfaction, as well as their positive experiences within the school environment. Regression analysis revealed that school satisfaction, resilience, and confidence are significant predictors of students' happiness at the secondary school level. As students are exposed to both positive and negative experiences in school, the development of a positive school climate plays an important role in influencing behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social changes among students.

In understanding the surrounding culture, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory divides the environment into four systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. These systems represent the connections or continuities related to the environment and the interactions of the students themselves. Hence, this theory is based on in-depth studies that link students' relationships with their environment, including society, environmental influences, climate, culture, language, and beliefs [42], [43]. Specifically, in the Malaysian context, the microsystem includes family and school interactions shaped by Malaysia's ethnic and religious diversity. The exosystem reflects differing school resources between rural and urban areas, which may limit program delivery and impact. The macrosystem is heavily influenced by national education policy, Islamic values for Muslim students and moral education for non-Muslims, creating distinct pathways in personality education. Similarly, in Indonesia, the Pancasila philosophy and decentralized education system shape implementation differently. These contextual nuances suggest that personality programs must be sensitive to cultural and institutional realities, beyond generic approaches.

The microsystem framework survey is a process that involves the interaction between students and those closest to them, such as family, school, and daycare centers. This group generally represents the most frequent interactions between students and their parents or those close to them [44]. Therefore, this microsystem layer is the first layer that connects students with the world around them. Meanwhile, the mesosystem refers to the network of relationships between microsystems (such as family, school, peers and the community) that interact and collectively shape an individual's developmental experience. The quality of these relationships can have either a positive or negative impact on the individual's growth and development [45]. Next, the exosystem describes the environment and groups around the student that do not directly involve them but still have a significant impact, such as the parents' workplace, the neighborhood, and the school environment. Generally, the exosystem involves external environments that affect changes in parents' emotions and feelings, which in turn directly and indirectly affect the children [46]. Meanwhile, the macrosystem involves societal norms, including values and culture. This system explains the responsibilities and roles of society within a particular culture. The interaction patterns in this system are interconnected, influencing individual development.

Therefore, character education among students, especially teenagers, plays a crucial role as it can influence the development of adolescent values and shape the development of traits such as character, morality, prosocial behavior, and skills like intercultural dialogue, critical thinking, and decision-making. Adolescence represents a critical stage of neurological development, which significantly affects behavior, decision-making processes, emotional well-being, and overall conduct. Although adolescent thinking is often associated with increased exposure to risk, it also demonstrates a strong capacity to be shaped positively through the presence of role models, dynamic classroom practices, whole-school innovations, and supportive learning environments both at home and in school [40], [47].

The approach to learning history is one example of character development among students based on local cultural contexts. The integration of teaching and learning curricula can directly and indirectly educate students' character [48]. Through the integration of education, students not only learn about historical events, but also develop a sense of discipline, mutual respect, and religious values that support the shaping of national character [49]. A study by Maskun *et al.* [50] found that historical documentary films have proven to enhance students' learning outcomes, especially in the experimental group. Therefore, historical documentaries are effectively used to increase students' knowledge of the subject of history. This approach to history learning also shows an impact on strengthening character, student engagement, understanding of cultural preservation, and raising awareness [51].

Contextual analysis shows that the effectiveness of personality programs highly depends on cultural background, institutional support, and socio-economic factors. For instance, the multicultural context of Malaysia and Indonesia requires a more flexible approach to involve students from various ethnic and religious backgrounds [52]. Therefore, it is recommended that personality programs be designed with cultural sensitivity in mind to ensure greater acceptance and effectiveness. Additionally, the effectiveness of these programs is also influenced by the level of support from parents, teachers, and the community, which should be strengthened through collaboration among various stakeholders.

There are patterns and gaps in identifying the aspects of effectiveness in the implementation of student personality programs. For example, while some studies show the positive impact of meditation programs on mental health, there are constraints in implementing them in rural areas due to the lack of facilities and human resources [22], [27]. Additionally, findings suggest that activities such as meditation and hiking can boost self-confidence and student cooperation, while music activities aid in emotional management and cognitive development. However, the effectiveness of these activities is often influenced by the level of institutional support from schools, such as the provision of a conducive learning environment and a positive school culture. Therefore, it is important to address these gaps by adapting programs to meet the needs of the local community.

A closer reading of the reviewed articles also reveals several methodological and contextual limitations. For example, most studies reviewed [5], [7] were conducted in European or Western settings, with limited applicability to Malaysian or Indonesian schools. Only a few studies incorporated multicultural, religiously plural, or socio-economically diverse environments, which are key characteristics of Malaysian secondary schools. This gap indicates a need for locally grounded empirical research to complement international findings. Moreover, the reviewed studies varied in quality and scope, with some relying on cross-sectional designs that limit causal inference. These observations underscore the necessity of developing more robust and context-specific research in Malaysia and Indonesia to inform policy and practice effectively. In conclusion, a SLR involving 15 selected articles shows that the main aspects in the evaluation of the implementation of personality programs consist of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social. All of these aspects need to be identified especially by teachers in evaluating student character through the implementation of personality programs in secondary schools.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study presents a systematic review of the literature on the evaluation of character program implementation in secondary schools, focusing on behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social dimensions. Sub-themes including behavior change, physical health, emotional intelligence, emotional management, cognitive ability, social skills, and social well-being were examined. These dimensions are central to evaluating personality program implementation because they shape and influence students' character development. However, the review indicates that existing findings are often general and insufficiently reflective of the Malaysian and Indonesian educational contexts. To enhance program effectiveness, future research should examine how Malaysia's multicultural composition, religious education dichotomy and rural-urban disparities influence the delivery and outcomes of personality programs. Similarly, the Indonesian context shaped by the Pancasila philosophy and decentralized governance requires closer analysis. Adapting programs to these socio-cultural and institutional settings would likely strengthen their relevance and impact.

The findings of this SLR demonstrate that personality education programs evaluated from behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social perspectives function as catalysts for character development among secondary school students. Future research should extend such evaluations to the primary school level, as character education ought to begin in the early stages of child development. Greater emphasis on Malaysian- and Indonesian-based empirical studies is necessary to generate context-specific insights grounded in the cultural and institutional realities of these countries. Moreover, future studies should investigate differences in behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects between primary and secondary students to better understand developmental variations. Comparative research involving urban and rural schools, as well as government and private institutions, is also essential to identify potential implementation gaps across educational settings. Expanding future SLRs to include additional databases, such as the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), would broaden the scope of accessible studies. Researchers should also examine local journals that align more closely with Malaysian and Indonesian educational contexts. Furthermore, cultural and social factors influencing program effectiveness across diverse school environments warrant careful attention. A more holistic and integrated approach incorporating psychological, social, and cultural dimensions would provide a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the impact of personality programs on student character development.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The review was confined to articles indexed in WoS and Scopus, limiting the inclusion of local perspectives, particularly those reflecting Malaysian practices. Although the SLR approach enhances methodological rigor, it excludes other valuable sources such as policy reports, scholarly books, conference proceedings, and working papers, which often contain practical insights and field-based evidence. Their exclusion may reduce the overall comprehensiveness of the findings. Additionally, restricting the review to English-language publications may introduce language bias and limit access to high-quality studies published in other languages. Since personality interventions are implemented globally, the omission of non-English sources may affect the representativeness of the review. The study also does not sufficiently address socio-cultural differences between urban and rural schools, which may influence program effectiveness and raise concerns regarding generalizability. Variations in cultural values, social norms, and educational resources may affect the success of personality development initiatives. Consequently, the findings may reflect contexts with stronger educational infrastructures more than those facing distinct challenges. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating local journal articles, conducting deeper analyses of cultural and societal influences, and undertaking longitudinal studies. Long-term research would enable a more thorough assessment of the sustained effects of personality programs on students' behavior, mental health, academic achievement, enduring personality traits, and the validity of measurement instruments used in program evaluation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude to all individuals and institutions who contributed indirectly to the completion of this study.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

The authors declare that no funding was received for the conduct of this study.

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This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

## INFORMED CONSENT

The authors confirm that informed consent was obtained from all individuals included in this study.

## DATA AVAILABILITY




The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [MIH], upon reasonable request.

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