

Student Perceptions of Character Education in Indonesian Language and Literature Learning

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Abstract: Character education has become a global priority in national curricula, commonly integrated through core subjects such as language and literature. In the Indonesian context, Indonesian Language and Literature (BSI) learning plays a strategic role in nurturing moral, social, and cultural competencies among students. This study aims to explore senior high school students' perceptions of character education as experienced in BSI classrooms. Employing a descriptive qualitative design supported by quantitative data, the research was conducted at a public senior high school in Baubau City, involving 33 students and 2 BSI teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics. The findings show that 78.8% of students perceive character values as clearly visible in learning activities, 69.7% regard the lessons as relevant to their everyday experiences, and 63.6% report fair and consistent teaching practices. Activities considered most effective for value internalization include structured literary discussions (81.8%), reflective writing (72.7%), and politeness language analysis (66.7%). This study addresses a critical gap by positioning students as central informants to reveal how they perceive, experience, and interpret character education within language and literature learning. The practical implications underscore the importance of implementing dialogic inquiry and culturally responsive teaching, particularly through the use of local literary texts that reflect students' sociocultural realities. The study contributes to the development of a perception-based framework for character education implementation in language learning contexts, thereby strengthening culturally grounded pedagogical practices in Indonesia.

Keywords: Character Education, Dialogic Pedagogy, Local Texts, Reflective Literacy, Student Perception

A. Introduction

Character education has become an important mandate in the national education system which is integrated into all subjects, including Indonesian Language and Literature (BSI), as an effort to form students with integrity, noble character, mutual

cooperation, and social sensitivity (Corsini & Giannelli, 2021; Sanjayanti et al., 2022; Aridasarie & Rohmah, 2024). In the context of BSI learning, the process of internalizing values is not only carried out through the delivery of linguistic materials, but also through literacy activities such as reading literary works, reflective writing, and discussing dialogically (Rahmawati et al., 2020; Ordoñez et al., 2021). These activities are strategic vehicles to instill prophetic values such as humanization, liberation, and transcendence (Anthony et al., 2021). As has been shown in the study of the content of Indonesian textbooks used in secondary schools. Theoretically, character formation through language learning can be explained through *virtue ethics* and reflective pedagogy that encourages learners to internalize values through a process of *caught-taught-sought* (Rifai et al., 2022; Trisiana & Utami, 2022), where values are captured by example, taught explicitly, and sought out and reflexively internalized by learners. Several studies have also shown that the development of teaching tools based on multiculturalism and character education can improve literacy skills as well as students' sensitivity to social and moral issues that arise in literary texts and language practices (Pires Pereira & Campos, 2023; Pantiwati et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2023; Novianti, 2022).

Although many studies have examined policy aspects, textbook content, and teachers' strategies in internalizing character values. However, there is still a critical gap from previous studies on how students themselves understand, experience, and interpret these character values in their daily learning. Most previous studies have focused more on the implementation of character education from the perspective of teachers or assessing the content of character values in teaching materials, while very few have really explored how students interpret the presence of these values in daily learning practices. In fact, understanding student perception is very important to know the extent to which the process of internalizing values is really felt, understood, and interpreted as part of the learning experience. In addition, curriculum changes that increasingly emphasize Pancasila student profiles, character projects, and differentiated learning, have not been followed by adequate empirical studies related to the connection between student perceptions and typical pedagogical strategies in BSI learning, such as literary discussions, reflective writing, and appreciation of local works (Tartaglia et al., 2022).

In recent years, research has shown significant progress in character value mapping in BSI textbooks and literacy-based learning practices. Recent studies confirm that signals of the prophetic values of humanization, liberation, and transcendence are not only explicitly present in the text, but also appear implicitly through literary dialogues, class discussions, and students' interpretive practices (Li et al., 2021). A recent hybrid systematic literature review demonstrates that character education is now widely studied as an effort to shape character through students' moral, emotional, cultural, and spiritual development not just cognitive aspects (Aulia & Fanny Anshory, 2025). In this context, prophetic values namely humanization

(prioritizing humanity), liberation (freedom from social injustice), and transcendence (spiritual and moral awareness that bridges humans with noble values) are proposed as fundamental ethical pillars in character education, especially in the tradition of prophetic pedagogy (Rusman, 2023). Recent empirical and theoretical works support that character education based on humanitarian awareness and spirituality (through prophetic values) has an important role in shaping students who not only excel academically, but also have social sensitivity, responsibility, and integrity (Mahfud & Sofiatu Zahriyah, 2025). The internalization strategies carried out by teachers during face-to-face and distance learning have also provided an overview of the variety of pedagogical approaches and obstacles faced in instilling values. Furthermore, the emergence of language teacher practice communities shows that literacy-based character pedagogy has great potential to increase students' value awareness and active participation. The development of teaching materials that integrate literacy and character values, including multicultural content, has also proven effective in improving literacy performance as well as students' social sensitivity (Dieruf et al., 2020) (Buyarov, 2023). In this theoretical landscape, this research places prophetic values, virtue ethics, and the "catch, taught, find" model as an analytical lens to examine how students perceive, experience, and interpret character education in BSI learning.

The uniqueness of this research lies in its focus on the student experience as the main subject, not just the object of policy or the recipient of the teaching. This study places students' voices as the main source of data to understand how they assess the clarity, relevance, and fairness of the implementation of character education in BSI learning. This approach allows for the disclosure of students' perceptions of "value signals" that arise in learning activities such as literary text analysis, rhetoric, and reflective writing. This research also combines Heliyon's analytical framework of prophetic values with indicators of student learning experience and agency, resulting in a deeper understanding of how learners interpret the process of internalizing values in an actual and contextual context (Puspitasari et al., 2023). This is very relevant to the current education situation in Indonesia, which is emphasizing the integration of character strengthening and literacy in every subject.

In terms of contribution, this research provides a theoretical contribution by clarifying how students read and interpret character value signals in BSI literacy activities. This enriches the discourse between virtue-based character education theory and reader response theory in language education. Methodologically, this study offers a design of student perception instruments that link prophetic value categories with concrete experiences in BSI learning, which can be replicated in various school contexts. Meanwhile, practically, the findings of this study can be a foundation for BSI teachers to design learning strategies that are more sensitive to student experiences, as well as assist schools in evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of character education from the perspective of students.

Based on these theoretical and empirical foundations, this study asks several main questions: (1) What is the perception of high school students on the clarity, relevance, and fairness of the implementation of character education in learning Indonesian Language and Literature? (2) What BSI learning activities are most likely to instill prophetic values according to students, and how do they assess their involvement and agency in these activities? (3) What factors of students and schools contribute to such variations in perception? In line with that, this study also proposes an exploratory hypothesis that the involvement of literature-based literacy is positively associated with students' perception of character education, the visibility of prophetic values predicts the meaning of learning and student participation, and the consistency of teacher practice is related to positive perceptions of character education.

B. Methods

This study used a convergent parallel research design method with qualitative descriptive data as primary data and supported by simple quantitative data as secondary data with the aim of understanding in depth students' perceptions about the implementation of character education. (Tseng et al., 2023; Adams et al., 2023; A. J. Castro & Williamson, 2024) in learning Indonesian Language and Literature. This approach was chosen to capture the subjective experiences of students and teachers in the context of actual learning, as well as provide a measurable picture of the perceptual aspects that arise in the teaching and learning process. The research was carried out in Baubau City High School, Southeast Sulawesi Province, in the odd semester of the 2025/2026 school year.

The study respondents consisted of 33 students of class XI and 2 teachers of Indonesian subjects who actively teach Indonesian Language and Literature subjects. The selection of respondents was carried out by technique purposive sampling, taking into account their direct involvement in the BSI learning process as well as their experience participating in the character education strengthening program at school (Marttinen et al., 2024; E. Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024). The students who became respondents came from one class that had consistently followed the Indonesian learning process for one semester. Meanwhile, teachers are selected based on their teaching experience of at least five years and their involvement in the planning and implementation of learning that is integrated with character values.

Data collection is carried out through Three main techniques: (1) Closed and open questionnaires to explore students' perceptions related to the clarity, relevance, fairness, and involvement of character values in BSI learning activities; (2) Semi-structured interviews with subject teachers to obtain pedagogical perspectives and strategies for internalizing character values applied in the classroom; and (3) Direct observation learning activities in the BSI classroom during three meetings to see the

actual form of character value integration in teaching practice. The questionnaire instrument was developed based on the dimensions of prophetic values humanization, liberation, and transcendence as used in contemporary character education research (Wong et al., 2024; Saux et al., 2021; Suparno et al., 2020). The instrument was validated in terms of content through discussions with two lecturers in language and character education, then tested for readability to five students before the implementation of the main research.

Qualitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis through the process of reduction, open coding, categorization, and theme withdrawal (Milošević & Lukić, 2020; Saltan et al., 2025; Cheek et al., 2024). The main theme of students' perception of character education. This analysis is carried out inductively to ensure that the findings produced come directly from field data. Meanwhile, quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed in a descriptive statistics using the calculation of the percentage, average, and frequency of occurrence of student perceptions on each indicator. The results of both then triangulatively integrated (Chohan et al., 2024; Rifai et al., 2022). Validity is maintained by *member checking* and *peer debriefing* (Yulu & Masran, 2023; Japar et al., 2023). Triangulation was carried out by comparing student answers, classroom observations, and teacher interviews to find the suitability and difference in perception between learning practices and student experiences.

C. Results and Discussion

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation studies that have been conducted, this study reveals various findings related to students' perceptions of character education in Indonesian language and literature subjects in high school. A series of data collected provides a comprehensive picture of the current conditions, obstacles faced, as well as opportunities and challenges that need to be considered in the process of character education through Indonesian language subjects.

1. Students' perception of the clarity, relevance, and fairness of the implementation of character education (RQ1)

Based on a questionnaire filled out by 33 students, it was found that: 78.8% of students stated that character values were "clearly visible" in learning Indonesian Language and Literature (BSI). 69.7% of students rated learning activities as having high relevance to their real lives. 63.6% of students stated that BSI teachers had applied the principles of fairness and consistency in class interactions. 21.2% of students stated that character values were "sometimes visible", Especially when teachers focus on exam material and cognitive achievement alone. Furthermore, 15.2% of students admitted that they did not always feel involved in the discussion of grades, although they could recognize grades in the text.

Meanwhile, from interviews with 2 BSI teachers, both stated that character values are always integrated through literary texts and literacy activities, but they acknowledged the limitations of time and curriculum pressure that make not all learning sessions can be focused on value dialogue.

2. The most effective learning activities instill character values (RQ2) Students identified the three learning activities that they felt most contained character values:
- a. Structured literary discussions: chosen by 81.8% of students. They found this activity to allow them to express their views and hear their peers' views with mutual respect.
 - b. Reflective writing (essays/journals): chosen by 72.7% of students. This activity provides space to associate the values in the text with personal experiences.
 - c. The analysis of the language of manners in the text: chosen by 66.7% of students. This activity reinforces students' understanding of how value arises in communication.

In addition, 54.5% of students feel more engaged when teachers give them the freedom to choose local texts or themes that are close to their lives. The two teachers also emphasized that reflective assignments and literary discussions are the *most effective means* to instill values.

3. Factors that affect perception variation (RQ3)

The analysis showed that the level of positive perception was higher in students who:

- a. Attend classes where teachers consistently apply norms and provide equivalent feedback.
- b. Getting authentic and dialogical tasks, not just formative exercises.
- c. Exposed to material with character, especially local literary texts.

Students who rated learning as less relevant mostly attributed it to learning that focused too much on exams, rather than on reflection on grades. Two teachers admitted that there was administrative pressure on the curriculum that affected the intensity of the discussion of character values in the classroom.

Tabel 1. RQ Mapping

No	Research Question (RQ)	Field Findings	Related Learning Activities
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1	RQ1 – Clarity of character values	78.8% of students stated that character values were clearly visible in BSI learning	Discussion of literary texts, value dialogues, character analysis
2	RQ1 – Relevance of learning	69.7% of students rated learning relevant to real life	Use of local text, reflective writing
3	RQ1 – Teacher fairness and consistency	63.6% of students feel teachers are consistent and fair in classroom interactions	Reinforcement of class norms, equivalent feedback
4	RQ2 – Effective activities instill value	Literary discussion (81.8%), reflection (72.7%), politeness analysis (66.7%) most preferred	Structured literature discussions, reflective journals, speech behavior analysis
5	RQ2 – The role of student voice	Engagement increases when students are given space to express their opinions and reflect	Student-led discussion, peer dialogue
6	RQ2 – Local text influence	Local literary texts reinforce relevance and engagement	Local text analysis, cultural value dialogue
7	RQ2 – Character literacy integration	Literacy activities increase the meaning of moral values	Literature-based critical discussion
8	RQ3 – Character material	Prophetic text reinforces the visibility of character values	Reading and interpretation of literary texts
9	RQ3 – Critical literacy & character	Critical literacy strengthens the understanding and internalization of values	Literary text-based critical discussion

Discussion

The finding that 78.8% of students were able to recognize character values in BSI learning reinforced the results of Heliyon’s research (Anyiwo et al., 2021) which shows that Indonesian textbooks are full of prophetic values of humanization, liberation, and transcendence that can be used as a medium for character formation. In the context of Baubau City High School, the visibility of this value becomes stronger when teachers connect texts with the reality of students’ lives.

Structured literary discussion activities were the most “visible” activity by students in instilling value (81.8%). These findings are in line with Reader-Response Theory research which states that students’ active involvement in interpreting texts critically strengthens *student voice* and attitude formation (Yamaguchi et al., 2022). Reflective writing, chosen by 72.7% of students, was shown to help internalize character values through the process of personalizing meaning. This supports the results of research on reflective literacy and personality formation conducted by (Vorontsova et al., 2021; Atmazaki et al., 2023).

Teachers’ involvement in the community of character pedagogy practice also contributes to students’ perceptions of fairness and consistency. The two teachers in this study showed relatively stable patterns of feedback and interaction. This is in line with studies (Abidin et al., 2023) who found that teacher consistency and belief in the development of students’ character can improve a fair classroom climate.

The findings that about 21.2% of students felt character values were only “occasionally visible” and 15.2% of students felt less engaged, reflecting a phenomenon *Student Voice tokenism* submitted by (Rosidah et al., 2022). This situation is also in accordance with the warning (Rahadiani et al., 2024) that learning practices that are too “policy-driven” can obscure the space for value dialogue and critical thinking. In terms of fairness and emotion learning, these findings relate to research (Pantiwati et al., 2023) which suggests that perceptions of justice and a supportive class climate correlate with positive emotional engagement. Baubau students who felt actively involved also reported a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience.

D. Conclusions

This study shows that learning Indonesian Language and Literature (BSI) at SMA Kota Baubau has become a strategic space for strengthening character education, with 78.8% of students stating that character values are clearly visible, 69.7% consider learning relevant, and 63.6% feel the fairness and consistency of teachers. The activities that have the most influence on students’ positive perceptions are structured literary discussions, reflective writing, and the analysis of the language of manners, which not only help them understand the moral values in the text, but also make room for student voice and agencies. Consistency of teacher pedagogy, use of characterful materials, and authentic assignments proved to be key factors that strengthened these positive perceptions. On the other hand, learning that is too exam-oriented and minimal student participation is still a weak point for a small percentage of respondents. The practical implications of these findings are the need for BSI teachers to consistently develop dialogical learning strategies that make room for student interpretation, expand the use of local and prophetic texts, and strengthen the teacher’s community of practice to ensure consistency of character values in every classroom activity. Schools and policymakers can leverage these outcomes to design learning policies that balance academic achievement and character building. Recommendations for further research include expanding the context to schools with more diverse characteristics, increasing the number of respondents, and longitudinal exploration of changes in student perceptions over time, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of integrating character education in learning Indonesian Language and Literature.

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