



Progressivism Philosophy Synthesis for Character Education Reconstruction in Indonesian Curriculum

Sintesis Filsafat Progresivisme untuk Rekonstruksi Pendidikan Karakter dalam Kurikulum Indonesia

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Abstract

General Background: Moral degradation among elementary school students in the era of globalization has raised concerns about the alignment between character education goals and curriculum practices. **Specific Background:** In Indonesia, character education has been formally integrated into the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum as part of national educational reform. **Knowledge Gap:** However, the implementation of character education often remains administrative and symbolic, while classroom practices still emphasize cognitive assessment rather than experiential moral development. **Aims:** This study examines the philosophy of progressivism as an analytical framework for reconstructing character education within Indonesian curriculum policy. **Results:** Through qualitative literature analysis and comparative philosophical examination of Dewey, Neill, Lickona, and Freire, the study finds that progressive principles such as reflective learning, dialogical interaction, and experiential participation are partially reflected in national curriculum design. The Independent Curriculum shows a stronger progressive orientation than the 2013 Curriculum, yet its implementation remains constrained by teacher preparedness, institutional culture, and assessment systems. **Novelty:** This study proposes a synthesis of classical progressivism and critical pedagogy to construct a holistic–reflective model of character education. **Implications:** The proposed framework supports the development of reflective, experience-based, and socially aware character education within Indonesian curriculum reform.

Highlights

- Progressive values are present in national curriculum policy but weakly implemented in classrooms
- Experiential and participatory moral learning structures appear in the Independent Curriculum
- Dewey and Freire perspectives provide a conceptual basis for reflective character formation

Keywords: Progressivism Philosophy; Character Education; Indonesian Curriculum Policy; Critical Pedagogy; Moral Education

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN 2548 2254 (online)

ISSN 2089 3833 (print)

Edited by:

Delora Jantung Amalia

Reviewed by:

Desak Putu Anom Janawati

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Published: 08 Maret 2026

Citation:

*Astri Nurfauziah, Yusuf Tri Herlambang,
Tita Mulyati (2026)*

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Character Education Reconstruction in
Indonesian Curriculum

*Pedagogia: Jurnal Pendidikan. 15:1.doi:
10.21070/pedagogia.v15i1.2195*

INTRODUCTION

Over the course the last few years, the world has witnessed unprecedented advancements in science and technology, especially the development of the internet and access to information. However, these advancements have also aided in the deterioration of human morals and a shift in human values, especially in the field of education. These concerns have been observed to be more prevalent in children of primary school age. In primary schools in Indonesia, a lack of respectful behavior towards teachers has been observed. Aggressive behavior, bullying, and peer conflict have been observed. Teachers have also noted a lack of responsibility regarding communal areas and a lack of empathy and increased emotional outbursts. These behaviors are signs of disciplinary problems, but more importantly, they show that the school environment does not successfully foster or reinforce positive values. Free association, inappropriate dress styles, and drug use have caused many young people to lose their identity. There are many more examples of student delinquency, especially among elementary school students (Nuraida, 2022). This condition indicates that students tend to lose their national cultural identity due to the negative influence of the unfiltered flow of global information (Anatasya et al., 2024).

This moral degradation is a serious concern for education observers (Harefa et al., 2021). Therefore, education must play an active role in building children's character so they can grow into individuals with character in line with national identity (Dewi, 2019). This occurs because they tend to view foreign cultures as better and more interesting than their own. This moral decline among the nation's children is caused by the negative influence of foreign customs. However, all of these negative impacts can be overcome by optimizing the role of education in Indonesia (Pratomo & Herlambang, 2021).

Education and culture are two complementary and integrated elements, so that education can function as a means to build a civilization based on the cultural values of the Indonesian nation. This understanding is crucial because education is crucial

for human life, especially for Indonesia, where it is the key to building a high civilization. Therefore, education must be able to carry out its task of maintaining and sustaining the cultural value system so that the Indonesian people can develop as a whole. This includes the ability to be flexible and futuristic by emphasizing intellectual, moral, and socio-cultural aspects. This is based on a cultural approach in the context of dynamic social life and is rooted in the wisdom of the cultural values of the Indonesian nation (Herlambang, 2016).

As beings who are constantly learning, as explained in anthropology, humans have the ability to understand and pass on the culture of their ancestors to younger generations. Education needs to focus on developing individuals with character and awareness of nature and the environment, not just aiming to create individuals who are pragmatic-materialistic. This is important to avoid the formation of a paradigm trapped in the wrong development (maldevelopment), which views nature only as an object, is mechanistic, fragmented, and separate from humans, making it vulnerable to domination and exploitation (Yunansah & Herlambang, 2017).

Character education continues to be pursued today, with ongoing implementation, reinforcement, and development, such as the Pancasila student profile, which is the character of the current Merdeka curriculum. Character is an aspect that is linked to the human self and is something that is carried with one wherever one goes. Having good character makes a person viewed positively by others. Good character formation can occur through positive habits in the surrounding environment. In fact, character can be well-formed if adaptation is carried out from childhood. Children tend to imitate the actions of those around them, so the environment has a significant influence on the formation of their character. One important aspect of learning, especially in elementary school, is character education. The goal of character education is to enable students to think intelligently and have good personalities, so they can be beneficial to themselves, their families, and the wider community (Atika & A'yun, 2024).

The needs of formal education in this context must be revised. In addition to being a means of obtaining academic achievement or practical skills,

schools are expected to foster a wider range of moral and cultural skills. The political will for character education is evident in the government initiatives ranging from the 2013 curriculum to the incorporation of the Pancasila student profile into the independent curriculum. However, there is a gap between these normative desires and the quotidian pedagogical practices, especially at a time when schools are still preoccupied with students' behavioral issues (Wulandari et al., 2022).

Schools, as formal educational institutions, need to play an active role in anticipating the ever-growing impacts of globalization, particularly in character development in students. The Eastern character, known for its politeness and noble character, must be maintained amidst the inevitable tide of globalization. Philosophy, as a theoretical foundation in education, can be integrated into the determination of curriculum, methods, objectives, and the roles and positions of teachers or educators, as well as students themselves (Salirawati, 2021). Many schools still struggle to address issues, particularly those related to the decline in morals and ethics among students. The primary purpose of schools is to shape character and provide role models for students, although this currently contradicts these ideals.

Philosophy is the result of human thought that seeks and deeply reflects on the truth (Ilham, 2020). Philosophy can answer general questions regarding cause and effect, reasoning, values, and reason, with the aim of understanding the universe and the meaning and values contained within. A philosopher is called a philosopher (Fahira, 2022). Philosophy can be used to solve problems in human life. In the context of life, education is an important aspect, because only humans can provide and receive education. Therefore, education greatly requires philosophy. Educational problems are not only related to the implementation process, but also involve experience. Broader, deeper, and more complex problems can arise in education, which are not limited to experience or concrete facts, and cannot be reached by science (Mudana, 2019). If someone philosophizes, the goal is to seek better values. Meanwhile, education functions as the application of values found in human life. For the educational process to be successful, it is necessary to create moral individuals. Therefore, moral

education is crucial for human life, as it is hoped that moral development will proceed well, harmoniously, and in accordance with the norms, dignity, and values of humanity itself (Fahira et al., 2023).

The question of which educational method is the best has occupied many of the great thinkers of the Western world, such as John Locke and Immanuel Kant. When looking at the question from an epistemological standpoint, there is a distinct difference in the focus of Western educational theory and that of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Western thought gives more emphasis on rational argument and real world application, whereas Islamic tradition places an equal emphasis on both the rational and real sides by combining both rational argument and theocratic revelation, and the latter of course emphasizes an ethical formation. These varying perspectives continue to influence new educational theories in such broader intellectual movements as humanism and relativism. Within Islamic philosophy, Syed Muhammad Naqib al-Attas offers a critique of modern Western science and its epistemological secularism, claiming that an imbalanced focus of revelation has a detrimental effect on the moral and civilizational order (Aradika et al., 2022).

A robust philosophical foundation is essential for bridging the gap between the ideals of character education and its practical realities and for guiding the development of the curriculum and the methods of teaching. In this regard, the progressive school of educational philosophy offers the most pertinent approach for the transformation of the education implementation process. As Jalaluddin and Idi present, the philosophy of progressivism holds an inherent belief in the natural potential of individuals, which includes the talents and abilities one is born with. They add that every individual already carries basic talents and potential, especially in terms of thinking power, which enables them to overcome various challenges, obstacles, threats, and disturbances that arise from their environment (Jalaluddin & Idi, 2012). Progressivism criticizes traditional education and upholds student-centered education, believing in the natural potential of humans to overcome environmental challenges through their thinking power.

Most published studies on moral education in the 2013 curriculum and independent curricula focus

on political discourse and normative principles, largely ignoring its philosophical foundations. Consequently, a gap remains between the discourse on instilling values and methodological practices that continue to prioritize administrative procedures and cognitive measurement. Studies that explicitly synthesize classical progressivism and critical pedagogy to understand the dynamics of the national curriculum are still limited. The novelty of this research lies in the synthesis of classical progressivism (Dewey and Neill) with a normative character approach (Lickona) and critical pedagogy (Freire) to build a holistic-reflective conceptual model of character education that is contextualized with Indonesian curriculum policy. This study aims to explore the study of the philosophy of progressivism as an analytical tool in reconstructing the implementation of character education in the curriculum in Indonesia (Fadlillah, 2017).

METHODS

This research uses a literature study method (library research), a qualitative approach that relies on written sources as the primary data. This study was chosen because it focuses on theoretical and conceptual studies regarding the implementation of character education in the curriculum, viewed from a progressivist philosophical perspective.

The approach used was descriptive qualitative. The goal was to systematically describe how character values are implemented in the curriculum, as well as how they align with or conflict with the principles of progressivism philosophy (Creswell, 2016). The present research has not included field data collection, but has examined and interpreted expert opinions, educational policy, and prior research findings.

In this study, data was gathered through searches of literature on educational philosophy (focusing on progressivism and figures like John Dewey, AS Neill, Paulo Freire), domestic and foreign journals, curriculum policy documentation from Indonesia, and other secondary sources. For this study, data was analyzed through an organized interpretive analysis that involved thematic mapping, categorical coding, and comparative analysis of philosophy and policy documents. This study goes beyond source description to interrogate

the construction and positioning of the concepts of personality, progressive principles, and methodological orientations in the disputes of education. The findings of this study are the result of an iterative synthesis that posited emergent patterns in relation to the guiding questions of the study.

The literature review was selective and progressive personality development in relation to the Indonesian curriculum policy. This was to aid in analytical depth and rigor through comparative analysis and argument corroboration across sources. This was to ensure the synthesis derived was exhaustive and critical rather than selective.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Critical Analysis of the Progressivism Philosophical Perspective on Character Education

Progressivism sees education as an evolving process and focuses on the learner's direct experience, the freedom of thought, and the active participation of students in the learning process. In character education, progressivism strongly supports the ideal of crafting students who, in addition to being academically bright, also have positive social attitudes and behaviors, including being responsible, disciplined, empathetic, and possessing critical thinking skills (Ningrum et al., 2024). In John Dewey (1916) mind, education is the start of an attempt to reorganize society and where one's personality is formed through democratically lived experiences and not through the enforcement of constrictive, abstractly moral dictates. Therefore, the life of the classroom should be built to be a space where, through active participation, the habits of inquiry, responsibility, and social cooperation are to be developed. Understanding learning only as the passive reception of information is misguided. Meaning is to be actively constructed through social collaboration in a given context. This explains why the educational process is resourcefully relational, open, and dialogically collaborative. These are ideal progressive conditions for the development of personality.

In contrast, A.S. Neill, via his method at Summerhill School, maintained that only in freedom can true character develop. He maintained that external regulation would yield only false

compliance, not ethical consciousness (Neill, 1960). Neill's method provided children with a considerable amount of freedom, to the point that, in what would be considered extreme practice, the requirement to learn could be completely voided. He was of the opinion that children ought to learn of their own accord, and not because they were obliged to learn. From a progressive viewpoint, the development of character and the quality of the social setting in which the students engage are closely interconnected. When freedom is coupled with responsibility, the genuine moral instincts that emerge from real engagement (as opposed to externally imposed pressure) are likely to develop. In this sense, a non-authoritarian, peer respectful school environment is not only a moral but also an immensely important educational condition for the development of meaningful personalities.

Thomas Lickona's position is somewhat central, considering moral education in the context of the construction of curriculum and the culture of the school. He elaborated the significance of the social context, moral exemplars, and cultivation of virtues like social responsibility, honesty, and empathy. In his well-known formulation, character development includes moral cognition, moral commitment, and moral conduct, meaning the fusion of knowing, valuing, and doing a virtue (Lickona, 1996). This model articulates the place of character in both the essence of the school curriculum and the daily life of the school. Simultaneously, the strength of this model, and its normative clarity, can also be a weakness. When value construction is done without adequate critical scrutiny, it is at risk of being purely procedural and moralistic, and having little space for considering the wider social context in which these values are located.

Simultaneously, Paulo Freire brought a significant contribution to moral education. He emphasized that good character cannot be separated from social awareness and the struggle against injustice. In his view, character education must liberate and raise students' political awareness. Character education must encourage students to recognize their social realities, think critically, and act for more just social change. Therefore, teachers are expected to act as dialogue partners, not absolute authorities, who help students construct the meaning of character values reflectively (Freire, 1970).

Argumentatively, this article argues that Dewey's approach is more operational in the context of the national education system because it still provides structured pedagogical direction through organized experience. Neill offers an important radicalism of freedom as a critique of authoritarianism, but it is difficult to adopt systemically within the formal school structure of Indonesia. Lickona makes a strong normative contribution, but risks being trapped in formalistic morality if not critically contextualized. Meanwhile, Freire complements progressivism with a dimension of structural awareness that is relevant in the context of social inequality. Thus, the Dewey–Freire synthesis is the most adaptive theoretical position in the reconstruction of character education in Indonesia.

[Table 1. About Here]

The above table illustrates diversity and complementarity among the four figures. While Dewey and Freire highlight personality in a social framework, Neill stresses individual liberty, and Lickona focuses on value pedagogy.

B. Critique of the Implementation of the National Curriculum: Curriculum 2013 and the Independent Curriculum

While the 2013 curriculum attempt to introduce and promote moral education by focusing on the integration of values in the respective subjects, a number of studies (Hidayatullah, 2010; Wibowo, 2013) found that the integration in practice is mostly symbolic and administrative. The 2013 curriculum captures the hasty integration of moral education that is not backed by rigorous research and piloting. This raises a lot of questions about the quality and relevance of the curriculum. The primary purpose of the curriculum, like any other curriculum, is to promote collaboration and not take away the joy of teaching from the teachers (Priyono, 2018). However, the 2013 curriculum has been characterized to be too broad and too burdensome as it has a number of administrative and teaching responsibilities that are required of the teachers and the students. The increase in the number of hours has raised a lot of concerns that the expectations would

be stressors on the students and the teachers and would be contrary to the concept of a student centered learning environment. As such, the curriculum coupled with assessment made personality to be a mere component added to a rigid and emotionally charged evaluation system which did not improve learning.

More progressive changes were made by the Independent Curriculum with regard to student attributes in a framework of Pancasila and project-based learning. Independent Curriculum critics claim that the government should have worked on the 2013 curriculum revision instead of presenting it as a brand new curriculum. When the Independent Curriculum was introduced, critics pointed out that it was in a form that was poorly implemented as it was presented to schools and teachers to them in a form that was difficult to teach and develop. Additionally, the fact that the Independent Curriculum was introduced in a non-compulsory, phased manner was cited as a major cause of the inequitable distribution of educational quality in the schools (Saely & Sukiman, 2023). From the progressive side, it is most appropriate, because it gives the right to participate, explore, and reflect. The absence of sufficient teachers and sufficient facilities is a disadvantage (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Critique on the national curriculum stems from the same concern: the gap between the ambitious goal of the reforms, and the actual capacity of the surrounding institution. Evaluation studies consistently pose questions surrounding readiness of the implementation, the place of the teacher, curriculum fatigue, and situational relevance. It is the general opinion on the 2013 curriculum that it was overly expedited, and was too content dense, and that classroom practitioners had little input. The independent curriculum, which was meant to provide an alternative corrective pathway, has been similarly uneven in preparation and adoption, exposing the underlying structural weakness that comes with the progressive rhetoric. It is not the policy in itself that is the problem, but the perennial pattern that has us stuck in the place where the change to the curriculum is implemented before there is sufficient consideration on the paradigm shift that is to be had. Without continual evaluation, sufficient teacher involvement, and situational

adaptive responsiveness, transformative reform is little more than a program.

C. Comparative Analysis: Perspectives on the Implementation of Character Education through the Curriculum in the Study of Progressivism Philosophy

John Dewey and A.S. Neill, the Classical Philosophers, present the first perspective. John Dewey (1916) in *Democracy and Education*, outlined that education needs to be a social experience that is dynamic and contextual. He proposed the elimination of education's authoritarian structure and advocated for experiential learning to be the main method of shaping one's character. Dewey emphasized that character is developed through the mediation of social experiences where the element of freedom is present within the confines of the direction of the education. From this perspective, moral development is participatory within a predefined framework of a democratic society, and is not simply a byproduct of one's unbridled self-expression.

A. S. Neill extended this idea further by downplaying adult authority and leaving moral development to children's self-directed decisions. While both did not advocate for coercive moralism, they disagreed on the locus of pedagogical authority (Gray, 2013). Dewey situated autonomy in purposeful inquiry, whereas Neill preferred it almost without limit. The philosophical contradiction that exists between directed autonomy and total self-direction captures an enduring concern in character education, bringing forth the question of whether discipline constitutes an antecedent condition for freedom or whether it is an antithesis to freedom.

In 2013, the integration of Indonesia's National Curriculum with moral education through thematic learning made it possible to teach values in any subject. However, the value integration is generally cosmetic. Just like how values are documented in policy, in most cases nothing changes in the day-to-day teaching and the exercise of educational power. There is a gap between the design of the curriculum and the experience of the learners: policy denotes the attributes of a good character but in most cases, there

is policy absence in the process of interactive teaching. Most teachers experience the value of learning as a monolog and do not incorporate it into the learning activities. Unlike 2013, the Merdeka Curriculum is more flexible through the *Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Activities*. Character values embedded in the curriculum can be experiential through project-based learning. Nevertheless, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum faces the challenges of insufficient human resources, training, and infrastructure which continue to be a challenge (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum is closer to a progressivist approach than the 2013 Curriculum. However, the progressive approach of the Merdeka Curriculum has not been fully implemented due to the uneven systemic preparedness.

Hidayatullah (2010) from an Empirical Research Perspective cited that effective character education relies heavily on the interaction of teachers and students. He found that an authoritative approach actually results in false obedience, not internalization of values. Lickona (1996), conceptualized character education as a comprehensive endeavor that goes beyond classroom instruction to encompass the school culture and the broader moral ecology of the family and community. Universal ethical values and moral reasoning are emphasized to position character formation as intentional and systemic. When interpreted through a progressive lens, this framework can align with progressivism to the extent that freedom is exercised within the scope of responsibility and not independently of communal norms. Hidayatullah (2010) emphasizes local context and interpersonal relationships in character formation, while Lickona presents a systemic model that encompasses many elements. Both emphasize that a cognitive approach alone is not enough, and values must be lived out in practice.

Some criticisms of progressivism come from critical philosophical a character education figure from the US, stated that character education must be comprehensive, involving the curriculum, school culture, and family and community involvement.

He proposed character education integrated with universal values and moral reasoning. When character education is balanced between freedom and responsibility, it can also be integrated with a

progressivist approach. Hidayatullah (2010) focuses on the importance of the local context and the interpersonal dimension of character formation, and Lickona provides a model of character education that is more comprehensive. They both agreed that a cognitive approach is insufficient, and that the values of character education must be demonstrated (Freire, 1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the argued that it is important for practitioners to foster critical consciousness (conscientização) amongst students, so that they do not simply become good moral individuals, but also become socially transformative. While progressivism centers on experience of the individual and freedom to act as guides for character development, critical theory adds an element of structural consciousness, contending that character education must also develop students' perception of and activism against social injustice.

It is evident from the data collected that Progressivism Perspective (Dewey) is a valid starting point for constructing experience-based character education and democracy. The National Curriculum Approach (Independent Curriculum) is also starting to lean towards progressivism although the ideal distribution of progress has been lacking. Meaningful and defining teacher-student interactions, positive role modeling, and retrieval of values, are all elements that empirical studies recognize as critical. At the same time, character education critiques caution against forming an individual-centered morality. Without an awareness of the structures it is likely to become an a-political and stifled. Thus, progressive character education must be multi-dimensional, flexible, and interdisciplinary. It must situate and synthesize learning experiences into the social system of the school, the active and social participation of the community, and the persistent engagement and advocacy of social justice.

D. Theoretical Synthesis: Holistic and Progressive Character Education

Reflective and progressive character education builds on an integrated development of all dimensions of a students' personality, emphasizing an active, contextual, and experience-based learning. The experience-based active learning and character education systems and theories' synthesis demonstrate and highlight both systems' interrelation

and added value within themselves, while equally leading to the development of a balanced and adaptable character. Holistic education acknowledges the importance of the establishment of a safe and pleasurable atmosphere for the learning and social development of a person as a social-ethical lifelong learner. Holistic education also emphasizes and values the establishment of a social-ecological balance in the relationships between individuals and all living and non-living components of the Universe (Yuliana et al., 2020).

John Dewey's advocacy of progressivism perceives the formation of one's character as part of one's holistic experiences in life. In this regard, one cannot conceive of moral growth occurring through passive or superficial engagement, but rather through active participation in substantive engagements that integrate the learning process with the students' social realities (Laksmi et al., 2025). In contrast to viewing students as passive value-assimilators, progressivism sees students as active value creators through a process of critical thinking in a fluid and situational context. Within this framework, character education can be a practice that fosters reflective judgment, responsibility, and cooperative engagement through intellectually and socially demanding experiences. Teachers act as facilitators who guide students without being overly controlling, so that students can internalize character values naturally through direct practice, such as project-based learning and role-playing.

Based on literature analysis, the ideal implementation of character education is as shown in the following image.

[Figure 1. About Here]

Holistic and progressive models of character education reinforce and complement each other. Holistic education focuses on the whole and integrated person, while progressive education centers on active participation and direct involvement of the individual, which aids in the person's character development. When these two models are integrated, character education goes beyond the teaching of values and includes the training of students to be autonomous, creative, critical, and responsible in all the affairs of life. This approach fits the new educational frameworks which

call for flexible, contextual, and holistic character education of the students. The Independent Curriculum is a step in this direction but character education within it should not be restricted to a formal project but should be part of the live school culture.

[Figure 2. About Here]

The theoretical synthesis outlined here goes beyond simple conceptual integration of the ideas of the authors. It carries the assertion that progressive character education is attainable only when four basic conditions are met: reflective experience (John Dewey), responsible freedom (A. S. Neill), systemic internalization of values (Thomas Lickona), and structural-critical consciousness (Paulo Freire). The integration of the four dimensions provides a unique epistemological framework, the absence of any one of them will mean that character education is relegated to a symbolic or administrative exercise. In national policy, the fundamental problem lies not only in the design of the curriculum, but also in the inconsistency between the progressive ethos in the policy documents and the still bureaucratic and pedagogical practice. The gap indicates that curriculum reform at the without a corresponding shift in teacher and school culture will only be a reform in form, but not in the essence of value internalization.

E. Philosophical Reflection and Improvement Strategy

Character education grounded in progressivism calls for a fundamental shift in the entire educational process. Aligned with Dewey's (1916) philosophy and further developed by Freire (1970), character cannot be built through mere cognitive transmittance, but requires reflective experiential, democratic, and socially active processes. Education has to become a space of social practice where students live, reflect, and construct the meaning of values in their real lives. This in the school context means that the very social practice dimension of the school has to be transformed, far beyond the use of different social practice curricula. The shift from formal authority relations in teaching to an educational partnership in which the students are participants in a democratic

community has in part occurred to perform the moral and social educative functions of teaching, thus recognizing that educational values are rooted in the processes of teaching and learning (Hidayatullah, 2010).

For example, progressive character formation can practically occur through service learning and project-based inquiry integrated with the Pancasila Student Profile, in the context of the Independent Curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Wulandari et al., 2022). In these contexts, social care themes are not restricted to definitions. They are practiced in enduring participation, such as intergenerational outreach programs like “Sahabat Lansia,” and subsequently, through reflective writing and dialogical exploration of the notions of responsibility and solidarity. Environmental care can also be explored through participatory inquiry, such as school waste audits, data analysis, and campaigns on waste reduction designed by students. From the context of learning and ecopedagogy (Yunansah & Herlambang, 2017), these activities reposition values from mere knowledge to lived and critically reflective experience. Thus character is not added to the instruction, but is formed as a result of the reflective participation in real social phenomena.

Philosophical reflections also acknowledge the challenges of implementation. For example, typically qualitative character assessments (Salirawati, 2021), the reluctance to use dialogic methods, and the need for collaboration across stakeholders. Thus, there is a need for operational improvement strategies. First, teacher training does not stop at curriculum socialization but takes the form of progressive lesson study (Ningrum et al., 2024): teachers design project-based learning, observe peer practice, and then conduct collective reflection. Second, strengthening Dewey's (1916) democratic culture can be realized through weekly class discussion forums, where students participate in developing class rules and evaluating behavior together. Third, character assessments are developed in the form of reflective portfolios, attitude observation rubrics, and trilateral conferences (teacher, parent, and student) at the end of each project, not just on the results (Lickona, 1996). Fourth, schools build partnerships with local communities (Pratomo & Herlambang, 2021), for example, by collaborating with waste banks or local

micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), so that learning is contextualized and has real social value.

Progressivism may be read not as a ready-made solution, but as a philosophical orientation that unsettles conventional assumptions about character formation. Its promise lies in re-situating moral development within lived, dialogical experience; yet such a reorientation cannot operate at the level of rhetoric alone. When there is a lack of change within structures of pedagogical interaction, evaluative logic, and institutional culture, the tendency is that character education becomes part of the administrative routine. However, within a more coherent construct, where practice, evaluation, and the life of the school are in a mutually reinforcing relationship, character education can take the form of a continual reflective practice in which students embrace and contend with issues of responsibility, critical consciousness, and social belonging.

F. Limitations in the Implementation of Progressivism and Character Education

Although progressivism provides direction for holistic and democratic character education, there are realistic barriers when attempting to implement this philosophy. From this analysis, the challenges can be grouped into the following categories:

1. **Teacher Preparedness and Paradigms:** Most teachers have not mastered progressive pedagogy from experience and reflection. They tend to be more traditional in their teaching, advocating for memorization and teaching from an authoritative position. This creates barriers to teaching from different roles, especially positions where teachers must become dialogic facilitators and demonstrate values (Ningrum et al., 2024).
2. **For effective progressivism,** there must be prioritization of costs and funding for resources, to include adequate time management. In remote areas where there are limited resources, the proposed projects for progressive pedagogy are reduced to a bureaucratic exercise (Nabela et al., 2024).
3. **School Cultural Resistance:** One of the more nuanced yet significant barriers remains the

enduring authoritarian tendencies within school culture. While democracy and the freedom of thought are often championed as goals of education, the school culture may operate around hierarchy, control, and procedural compliance. In these environments, freedom is only accepted within constrained parameters, as they are defined by the school, thus restricting the extent to which students can be trusted to make their own decisions. The disparity between the school's democratic rhetoric and its day-to-day practices makes fostering true self-regulated and responsible behavior difficult.

4. Another structural challenge relates to the logic of the system of measurement. Assessment systems are primarily focused on measurable cognitive outcomes. In other words, assessment systems focus on and give value to what can be easily quantified and measured statistically. In contrast, the development of one's character occurs in and through one's affective dispositions, relational sensitivity, and moral reasoning. These are dimensions that do not lend themselves to being easily captured in a measurement system. There are important qualitative dimensions that are deemed to be impertinent just because measurement systems do not tend to measure the traits.

Although progressivism offers an abundance of possibilities for thinking about character education, the material and institutional barriers limitations impact the usefulness of progressivism. Practical realities such as the uneven distribution of resources and the varying levels of teacher preparedness, established cultural patterns, and the tensions of knowing relating to the assessment of character are barriers to the realization of progressivism. The challenges imposed by these realities suggest that progressive reform to education must take into consideration concrete realities social systems that require ongoing professional development, sufficient infrastructure, adequate systems of dialogue with the stakeholders, and evaluative systems that are aligned with the qualitative aspects of moral development.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows progressivism acts as both a philosophical guide and a structural blueprint for the reparation of character education in Indonesia's elementary schools. This research validates three findings; first, character education in schools becomes unusable when it is administratively formalized; second, values internalization is predicated on experiential-reflective- and dialogic learning; and third, the reform of curriculum must consider the epistemic transformation of the teachers and a culture of democracy in the school. While conceptually, the Independent Curriculum appears more in tune with progressive principles than the previous curriculum, most especially in the emphasis of experiential and participatory learning, its implementation is still limited by teacher preparedness, pre-existing logics of assessment, and inconsistent institutional backing. These limitations mean that the progressive character education is not attainable through a single correction of the curriculum. Its acceptability relies on the congruence of the pedagogical approach, constructive assessment, and the school and parents collaboration, so that the ethical imperatives are acted in day-to-day practice, and not only in a formal policy setting.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Aspect	John Dewey	AS Neill	Thomas Lickona	Paulo Freire
Focus on Education	Democracy and experience	Children's freedom	Universal moral values	Critical awareness
The Role of Teachers	Dialogic facilitator	Free companion	Moral models and value educators	Dialogue partner and liberator
Character View	Formed in social practice	Growing from personal autonomy	Must be taught and made a habit	Emerging from structural awareness
Weakness	Not suitable for bureaucratic system	Potential lack of direction	Too normative and formal	Difficult to implement systemically

TABEL 1 /Comparison of Criticism and Theoretical Contributions

LIST OF FIGURE

1. Ideal Implementation of Character Education 169

2. Conceptual Mind Map.....169



FIGURE 1/ Ideal Implementation of Character Education

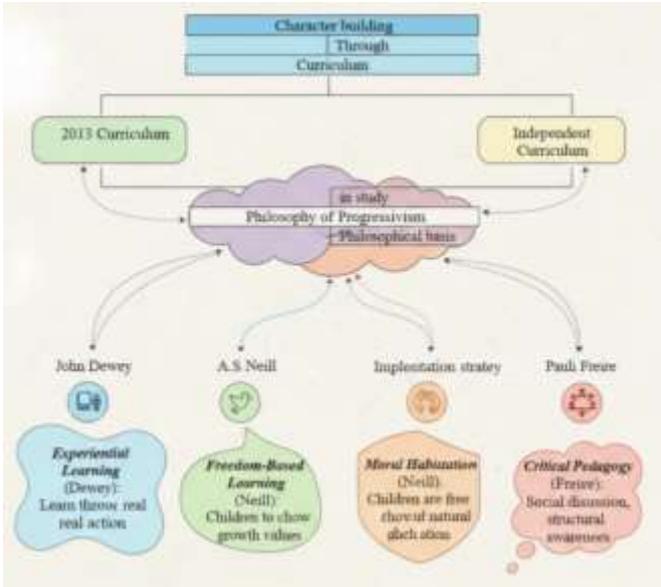


FIGURE 2 / Conceptual Mind Map