



Integrating Character Education and Global Citizenship in the Merdeka Curriculum: A Systematic Review of Challenges and Strategies

Ariani Songli^{1*}; Suyato²; Ranita Eka Desti Rahmawati³;
Maria Antoneta Karbeka⁴; Wingkolatin⁵

^{1,2,3,4}Civic Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

⁵Civic Education, Universitas Mulawarman, Indonesia

^{1*}Corresponding Email: arianisongli.2025@student.uny.ac.id

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Abstract: This study examines how character education and global citizenship education are integrated into Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum and identifies the main implementation challenges and strategies. Using a systematic literature review, the study analyzed ten Scopus-indexed articles published between 2020 and 2025 through thematic analysis. The findings show that the Merdeka Curriculum integrates character education through the Pancasila Student Profile, project-based learning, and contextual activities, while global citizenship is introduced through themes such as climate change, poverty, social inequality, cultural diversity, and digital citizenship. Three dominant issues emerge: limited teacher readiness, unequal digital infrastructure, and difficulty aligning global perspectives with local and national values. The review concludes that successful implementation requires continuous teacher professional development, stronger digital support, and more contextual curriculum design that connects global issues with local realities without weakening Pancasila-based identity and student character formation in everyday school practice at all levels of Indonesian education today and beyond sustainably.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji integrasi pendidikan karakter dan pendidikan kewarganegaraan global dalam Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia serta mengidentifikasi tantangan dan strategi implementasinya. Dengan metode systematic literature review, studi ini menganalisis sepuluh artikel terindeks Scopus yang diterbitkan pada periode 2020–2025 melalui analisis tematik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa Kurikulum Merdeka mengintegrasikan pendidikan karakter melalui Profil Pelajar Pancasila, pembelajaran berbasis proyek, dan kegiatan kontekstual, sedangkan kewarganegaraan global diperkenalkan melalui tema perubahan iklim, kemiskinan, ketimpangan sosial, keberagaman budaya, dan kewarganegaraan digital. Tiga persoalan utama ditemukan, yaitu kesiapan guru yang masih terbatas, infrastruktur digital yang belum merata, dan kesulitan menghubungkan perspektif global dengan nilai lokal serta nasional. Kajian ini menegaskan bahwa implementasi yang berhasil memerlukan pengembangan profesional guru secara berkelanjutan, dukungan digital yang lebih kuat, dan desain kurikulum kontekstual yang menghubungkan isu global dengan realitas lokal tanpa mengurangi identitas Pancasila dan pembentukan karakter peserta didik di sekolah secara berkelanjutan, adaptif, dan inklusif dalam praktik pembelajaran sehari-hari.

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A. Introduction

Global education is increasingly challenged to prepare students not only with academic competence but also with moral awareness, intercultural understanding, and the ability to respond to complex global issues. Contemporary challenges such as climate change, poverty, social injustice, digital transformation, and cultural conflicts require learners to develop strong character and global citizenship competencies. Consequently, education systems are expected to cultivate students who are responsible, empathetic, critical, collaborative, and capable of contributing meaningfully to both local and global communities (Yan et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, these demands have become increasingly relevant as schools strive to respond to rapid social, cultural, and technological changes. Academic achievement alone is no longer sufficient to prepare students for participation in an increasingly interconnected world. Students must also develop moral character, social responsibility, and global awareness. In response to these challenges, the Merdeka Curriculum represents a significant educational reform that emphasizes student-centered learning and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile (Utami et al., 2024). Grounded in Pancasila values, the curriculum aims to nurture learners who are not only academically competent but also capable of acting as responsible citizens at both national and global levels (Amalia et al., 2024).

Character education and global citizenship education have emerged as two important dimensions of twenty-first-century education. Character education focuses on developing values such as responsibility, empathy, integrity, cooperation, and respect for diversity, while global citizenship education encourages students to understand global challenges and actively participate in creating sustainable and inclusive societies. Within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, these two dimensions are expected to complement one another by fostering learners who possess strong moral foundations while remaining open to global perspectives.

Despite its considerable potential, the implementation of character education and global citizenship education within the Merdeka Curriculum remains challenging. Previous studies indicate that educational institutions frequently encounter limitations in technological infrastructure and learning resources, while many teachers report insufficient preparation for integrating global citizenship themes into classroom practice (Fitriyah et al., 2024; Rojas et al., 2025). In addition, translating abstract values into meaningful learning experiences remains a significant challenge for curriculum implementation (Yan et al., 2023). These conditions suggest that the successful integration of character education and global citizenship education depends not only on curriculum design but also on teacher readiness, institutional support, and contextual learning environments.

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) has become an important methodological approach for synthesizing evidence, identifying research trends, and evaluating existing knowledge within a particular field (Gutierrez-Bucheli et al., 2022). Through a systematic

and transparent process, SLR enables researchers to examine patterns, challenges, and opportunities across multiple studies, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of a research topic. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, an SLR is particularly valuable because it allows for a critical synthesis of how character education and global citizenship education have been conceptualized, implemented, and discussed in recent scholarly literature.

Several studies have examined character education, Pancasila values, global citizenship education, teacher readiness, and curriculum reform from different perspectives (Amalia et al., 2024; Fitriyah et al., 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2023; Utami et al., 2024). However, these studies generally address these issues separately. Existing literature tends to focus on pedagogical approaches, character development, civic education, or curriculum implementation in isolation. Limited attention has been given to systematically synthesizing how character education and global citizenship education are integrated within the Merdeka Curriculum and what implementation challenges and strategic responses emerge from recent research. Consequently, there remains a need for a comprehensive review that consolidates current evidence and provides a clearer understanding of the relationship between these two educational dimensions within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This study contributes to the literature by providing a systematic synthesis of recent studies published between 2020 and 2025 concerning the integration of character education and global citizenship education in the Merdeka Curriculum. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to map the relationship between Pancasila-based character education, global citizenship competencies, implementation challenges, and strategic responses for curriculum improvement. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions: How are character education and global citizenship education integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum? and What challenges and strategies are identified in implementing character education and global citizenship education within the Merdeka Curriculum? By answering these questions, this study is expected to provide theoretical insights and practical recommendations for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in strengthening more contextual, inclusive, and value-based educational practices in Indonesia.

B. Method

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine how character education and global citizenship education are integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum and to identify the main implementation challenges and strategies reported in recent literature. The SLR approach was selected because it enables the systematic, transparent, and replicable identification, evaluation, and synthesis of previous studies. The review focused on literature published between 2020 and 2025 to capture recent developments in character education, global citizenship, and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The literature search was conducted in the Scopus database using the keywords “character education,” “global citizenship,” and “Merdeka Curriculum,” combined with Boolean operators. Scopus was selected because it indexes high-quality, peer-reviewed international journals. The search was limited to English- and Indonesian-language journal articles published between 2020 and 2025.

To ensure relevance, inclusion criteria covered empirical studies and review articles discussing character education, global citizenship education, the Merdeka Curriculum, Pancasila-based character development, teaching methods, or teachers’ roles in educational reform. Articles were excluded if they did not address these topics, discussed the Merdeka Curriculum only from a technical perspective, were published before 2020, or fell outside the Indonesian educational context. From an initial 40 records, 10 articles met the eligibility criteria and were included in the final analysis.

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis through familiarization, open coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation. Extracted data included authors, publication year, research objectives, methods, key findings, and practical implications. These data were compared across studies to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and differences in the conceptualization and implementation of character education and global citizenship education within the Merdeka Curriculum. The review process is presented using a PRISMA flow diagram and a summary of the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

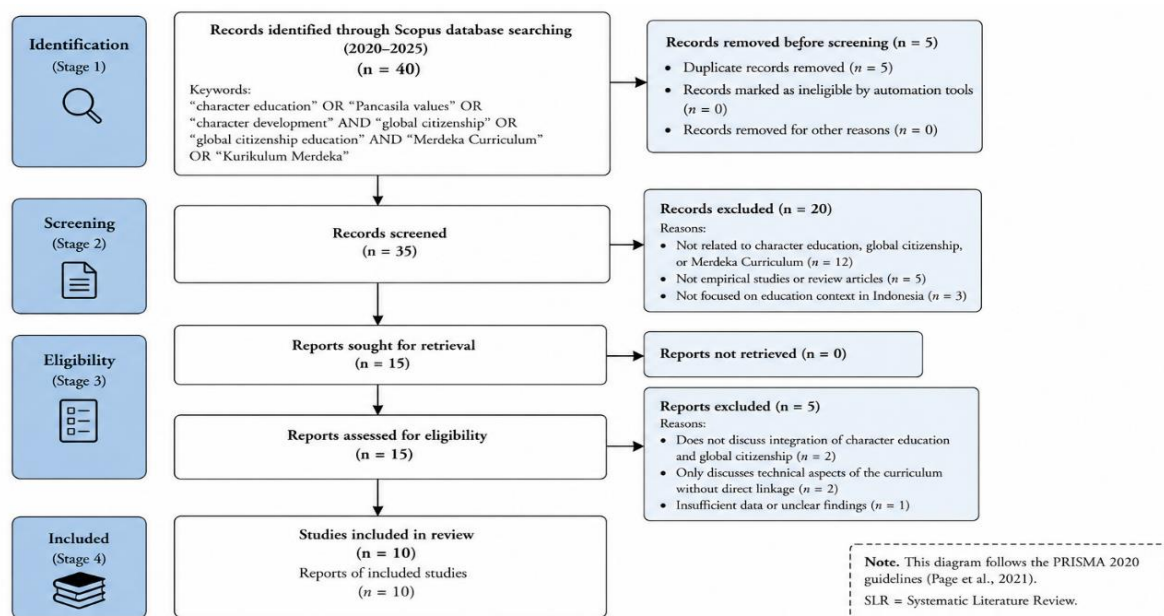


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

C. Result

Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

Following the PRISMA screening process, ten Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 met the inclusion criteria for this review. The selected studies examined the implementation of character education, Global Citizenship Education (GCE), and the Merdeka Curriculum within various educational contexts in Indonesia. Most studies employed qualitative approaches, while several adopted mixed-method, literature review, and bibliometric designs. The reviewed literature mainly focused on four interconnected areas: (1) Pancasila-based character education, (2) Global Citizenship Education, (3) implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and (4) teacher readiness and educational innovation.

Overall, the literature indicates that recent educational reforms in Indonesia have shifted from emphasizing cognitive achievement toward developing students' character, global competencies, and social responsibility. Across the reviewed studies, the Pancasila Student Profile consistently emerged as the principal framework through which these educational goals are operationalized.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

Category	Description	Frequency
Number of reviewed articles	Scopus-indexed journal articles	10
Publication period	2020–2025	10
Qualitative studies	Interviews, case studies, thematic analysis	5
Mixed-method studies	Quantitative and qualitative	2
Literature reviews	Review articles	1
Bibliometric/Mapping studies	Bibliometric analysis	2
Main educational context	Primary and secondary education	8
Higher education	Universities	2

Major Themes Identified from the Literature

The thematic analysis generated three dominant themes that consistently appeared across the reviewed studies: (1) character education within the Merdeka Curriculum, (2) integration of Global Citizenship Education, and (3) the role of teachers in curriculum implementation. These themes were identified through repeated coding of the selected literature and represent the principal dimensions discussed in recent studies.

Character education emerged as the most dominant theme. Almost all reviewed studies emphasized that the Merdeka Curriculum promotes students' moral development through the Pancasila Student Profile. Character formation is reflected in values such as responsibility, integrity, empathy, cooperation, respect for diversity, and social awareness, which are integrated into classroom instruction, project-based learning, and school culture (Yunitasari et al., 2025).

The second major theme concerns Global Citizenship Education. Rather than being implemented as a separate subject, GCE is embedded within contextual learning activities

that introduce students to global issues, including climate change, environmental sustainability, poverty, social inequality, cultural diversity, peace, and digital citizenship. These learning experiences encourage students to develop critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and responsible decision-making while maintaining their national identity.

Teacher readiness constitutes the third major theme. The reviewed studies consistently identify teachers as the key agents responsible for translating curriculum objectives into meaningful classroom practice. Successful implementation depends largely on teachers' pedagogical competence, understanding of global citizenship concepts, and ability to integrate Pancasila values into project-based learning.

Table 3. Major Themes Identified in the Reviewed Studies

Theme	Main Findings
Character Education	Character education is integrated through the Pancasila Student Profile, emphasizing moral values, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and respect for diversity.
Global Citizenship Education	GCE is incorporated through contextual learning on climate change, poverty, cultural diversity, social justice, sustainability, and digital citizenship.
Teacher Role	Teachers act as facilitators of project-based learning and are central to integrating character education and global citizenship into classroom practice.

Cross-Study Synthesis

A cross-study comparison demonstrates substantial agreement among the reviewed articles. Character education functions as the fundamental basis of curriculum implementation, whereas Global Citizenship Education complements character formation by expanding students' awareness of contemporary global issues. Rather than functioning independently, both components are integrated through project-based learning, contextual activities, and experiential learning approaches.

The synthesis also reveals that effective implementation requires alignment among curriculum design, teacher competence, school culture, and learning resources. Studies consistently emphasize that meaningful integration occurs when global issues are contextualized within local realities and reinforced through Pancasila values. Consequently, students are expected not only to develop global awareness but also to strengthen their national identity and social responsibility (Kuncorowati et al., 2025).

Table 4. Cross-Study Synthesis of Findings

Aspect	Evidence Across Studies	Overall Synthesis
Character Education	Reported by nearly all reviewed studies	Character education is the foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum through the Pancasila Student Profile.
Global Citizenship Education	Frequently discussed in studies published after 2023	GCE is integrated through contextual and project-based learning addressing global challenges.

Aspect	Evidence Across Studies	Overall Synthesis
Teacher Readiness	Identified consistently across studies	Teacher competence is the primary enabling factor for successful implementation.
Curriculum Approach	Contextual and project-based learning	Learning activities connect local wisdom with global perspectives.

Challenges and Strategic Responses

Although the reviewed literature demonstrates considerable potential for integrating character education and Global Citizenship Education, several implementation challenges remain. The most frequently reported challenge concerns teacher readiness, particularly limited conceptual understanding of GCE and insufficient experience in integrating global perspectives into classroom instruction. Another common challenge is unequal digital infrastructure, which restricts students' access to digital learning resources and global educational content. Several studies also identify difficulties in balancing global perspectives with Indonesian cultural identity and Pancasila values.

To address these issues, the reviewed studies consistently recommend strengthening continuous professional development for teachers, expanding digital infrastructure, developing contextual learning resources, and promoting project-based learning that links local community issues with global challenges. These strategies are expected to enhance both the quality and sustainability of curriculum implementation across diverse educational settings.

Table 5. Major Challenges and Recommended Strategies

Challenges	Recommended Strategies
Limited teacher readiness	Continuous professional development and practical GCE training
Unequal digital infrastructure	Improved digital facilities and equitable internet access
Difficulty integrating global and local values	Contextual learning based on Pancasila and local wisdom
Limited instructional resources	Development of teaching modules and project-based learning materials
Curriculum implementation variability	Stronger institutional support and curriculum guidance

D. Discussion

The present review demonstrates that character education and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) are systematically integrated within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum through the Pancasila Student Profile, project-based learning (Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila/P5), and contextual learning experiences. These findings directly answer the first research question by showing that the Merdeka Curriculum does not position character education and GCE as independent curricular subjects but integrates both as complementary dimensions of students' holistic development. Character education

provides the ethical and moral foundation through Pancasila values (Benawa et al., 2023), whereas Global Citizenship Education broadens learners' perspectives toward global responsibility, intercultural understanding, environmental sustainability, and digital participation. Consequently, the curriculum simultaneously develops students' national identity and global competence rather than treating these educational objectives as mutually exclusive.

This integration occurs because the Merdeka Curriculum adopts a competency-based paradigm that emphasizes authentic learning experiences instead of content transmission alone. Within this framework, students are encouraged to apply moral values while solving real-life problems through inquiry, collaboration, and project-based activities. Such an approach allows learners to connect local issues with broader global challenges, making character education more meaningful and applicable in everyday life. UNESCO (2015) similarly argues that Global Citizenship Education should be embedded across the curriculum through cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral learning domains, enabling students to develop knowledge, values, attitudes, and responsible actions simultaneously. Therefore, integrating GCE within the Pancasila Student Profile represents a contextual adaptation of global educational goals to the Indonesian socio-cultural context rather than the adoption of an external educational model.

The findings are consistent with Utami et al (2025), who found that Indonesian teachers have begun implementing Global Citizenship Education through the Merdeka Curriculum despite having limited familiarity with the formal concept of GCE. Their study demonstrated that collaborative projects grounded in local culture enable students to engage with global issues without abandoning Indonesian identity. Similarly, Sarkadi et al (2022) reported that integrating character education into classroom learning strengthens students' reflection, communication, collaboration, and civic participation through authentic educational experiences. The present review extends these findings by demonstrating that character education and Global Citizenship Education function as complementary educational constructs. Rather than viewing national identity and global competence as competing priorities, this review proposes that Pancasila values provide the ethical foundation upon which global competencies can be developed. This synthesis contributes to curriculum scholarship by offering an integrated conceptual perspective that bridges moral education, citizenship education, and twenty-first-century competencies within a single curricular framework.

Another important finding concerns the challenges encountered during curriculum implementation. Across the reviewed studies, three recurring barriers emerged, namely limited teacher readiness, unequal digital infrastructure, and the difficulty of contextualizing global issues within Indonesian cultural values. These findings answer the second research question by indicating that curriculum reform alone cannot ensure successful implementation. Instead, curriculum effectiveness depends on the interaction among teachers' professional competence, institutional support, technological resources, and contextual pedagogy. Similar conclusions have been reported internationally, where

curriculum innovations frequently fail to achieve their intended outcomes because teachers receive insufficient pedagogical preparation to translate policy into effective classroom practice (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Teacher readiness emerged as the most influential implementation factor because teachers determine how curriculum policies are transformed into meaningful learning experiences. Although the Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility through project-based learning, many teachers continue to perceive character education primarily as moral instruction rather than reflective, inquiry-based, and experiential learning. Moreover, Global Citizenship Education remains a relatively new concept within many Indonesian educational settings, leading to uncertainty regarding instructional design, assessment strategies, and classroom implementation. These findings reinforce those of Utami et al (2025), who concluded that teachers require continuous professional development to strengthen their understanding of GCE concepts and their ability to integrate global perspectives into everyday learning. Likewise, Ahmad et al (2023) emphasized that sustainable curriculum reform depends not merely on policy dissemination but on continuous professional learning that enables teachers to redesign instruction according to evolving educational needs.

The review also identifies unequal digital infrastructure as a significant obstacle to implementing Global Citizenship Education effectively. Contemporary GCE increasingly relies on digital technologies that facilitate access to global information, intercultural communication, collaborative learning, and international perspectives (Agus et al., 2025). Consequently, disparities in technological infrastructure may create unequal opportunities for students to develop global competencies. This finding supports previous international research suggesting that digital learning environments have become essential components of twenty-first-century education because they expand students' opportunities for collaboration, critical inquiry, and participation in global knowledge networks (Ouahi et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2023). Therefore, improving digital infrastructure should be considered an educational equity issue rather than merely a technological investment.

Another challenge identified in this review concerns balancing global perspectives with local identity. Some educators perceive Global Citizenship Education as potentially weakening nationalism; however, the reviewed evidence suggests the opposite. Global competence becomes more meaningful when interpreted through local wisdom and national values. In the Indonesian context, Pancasila provides a normative framework that enables students to understand universal values such as justice, human dignity, cooperation, democracy, and sustainability while maintaining their cultural identity (Wedhatami et al., 2024). These findings support Kusdarini et al (2020), who demonstrated that experiential learning grounded in Pancasila values strengthens civic identity through direct engagement with community life. Similar arguments have also been advanced in international scholarship, which emphasizes that Global Citizenship Education should encourage learners to appreciate cultural diversity while remaining rooted in their own cultural contexts (Kasa et al., 2022).

Collectively, the findings indicate that strengthening character education and Global Citizenship Education requires systemic educational support rather than isolated curriculum reform. Continuous teacher professional development, equitable digital infrastructure, contextual teaching materials, authentic assessment, and project-based learning should be implemented simultaneously to achieve sustainable curriculum transformation. The principal contribution of this review lies in demonstrating that character education, Pancasila values, and Global Citizenship Education should be understood as interconnected elements within a single educational ecosystem. Unlike previous studies that have generally examined these concepts separately, this review proposes an integrated framework showing how national identity, moral character, and global competence can be developed simultaneously through contextual, culturally responsive, and learner-centered educational practices within the Merdeka Curriculum.

E. Implication

The findings of this systematic review have important theoretical, practical, and policy implications for strengthening the implementation of character education and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) within the Merdeka Curriculum. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that character education and GCE are complementary educational dimensions in which Pancasila values provide the ethical foundation for developing global competencies, thereby reinforcing rather than conflicting with national identity. Practically, the findings emphasize the need for continuous teacher professional development in project-based learning, contextual pedagogy, authentic assessment (Komalasari & Indrawadi, 2023), and the integration of global issues into local learning contexts to foster students' moral character, critical thinking, collaboration, and global responsibility. At the policy level, the findings indicate that curriculum reform should be supported by sustained institutional commitment through strengthened teacher training, equitable digital infrastructure, improved access to contextual learning resources, clear implementation guidelines, and stronger collaboration among government, schools, universities, and local communities. Together, these efforts are expected to maximize the potential of the Merdeka Curriculum in preparing Indonesian learners who possess strong character, maintain their national identity, and demonstrate the competencies needed to participate responsibly in an increasingly interconnected global society.

F. Limitation and Suggestion for Further Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the review was limited to Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, which may have excluded relevant evidence from other databases such as Web of Science, ERIC, Dimensions, or high-quality national journals. Second, the synthesis focused on ten selected studies within the Indonesian educational context; therefore, the findings primarily reflect the implementation of character education and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in the Merdeka Curriculum and may not be fully

generalizable to other curriculum systems or educational settings. In addition, as a systematic literature review, this study relied on secondary data and did not provide direct empirical evidence from teachers, students, or schools.

Future research is encouraged to complement these findings through empirical investigations involving multiple educational stakeholders to examine how character education and GCE are implemented in classroom practice across different educational levels and regions. Mixed-method and longitudinal studies are also needed to evaluate the long-term impact of integrating the Pancasila Student Profile, project-based learning, and Global Citizenship Education on students' character development and global competencies. Furthermore, comparative studies involving different countries or curriculum systems would provide broader insights into how local cultural values can be integrated with global citizenship education, thereby contributing to the development of more contextual, inclusive, and internationally relevant curriculum models.

G. Conclusion

This systematic literature review examined how character education and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) are integrated within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum and identified the major challenges and strategic responses reported in recent studies. The findings indicate that both educational dimensions are integrated through the Pancasila Student Profile, project-based learning, and contextual learning experiences that connect local values with global issues. Rather than functioning as separate educational agendas, character education provides the ethical foundation for learners, while GCE expands students' global awareness, critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and social responsibility. The review also reveals that successful implementation depends not only on curriculum design but also on teacher readiness, equitable digital infrastructure, contextual learning resources, and sustained institutional support.

This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive synthesis that positions character education, Pancasila values, and Global Citizenship Education as interconnected components of a single educational ecosystem within the Merdeka Curriculum. By integrating these dimensions, the review offers a broader conceptual perspective on how Indonesian education can simultaneously strengthen students' moral character, preserve national identity, and develop the competencies required to participate responsibly in an increasingly interconnected global society. These findings provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to implement more contextual, inclusive, and future-oriented educational practices while maintaining the distinctive values of Indonesian education.

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Author's Biography

	Ariani Songli, S.Pd.  She was born in Samarinda, Indonesia, on October 2, 2002. She earned her Bachelor's degree (S1) in Civic Education from Universitas Mulawarman (UNMUL), Samarinda, in 2025. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Civic Education at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY). Email: arianisongli.2025@student.uny.ac.id
	Prof. Dr. Suyato, M.Pd.  He was born on June 16, 1967. He is a Professor at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (Yogyakarta State University), Indonesia. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PMP-KN) from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta in 1993, followed by a Master's degree in Social Studies Education from the same university in 2006. He received his Doctoral degree from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta in 2022 and was subsequently appointed as a Professor. Email: suyato@uny.ac.id
	Ranita Eka Desti Rahmawati, S.Pd.  She was born in Bantul, Indonesia, on December 8, 2001. She received her Bachelor's degree in Civic Education from Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta (UPY), Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2025. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Civic Education at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), Indonesia. Email: ranitaeka.2025@student.uny.ac.id
	Maria Antoneta Karbeka, S.Pd.  She was born in Malangwi, Indonesia, on June 27, 2001. She received her Bachelor's degree in Civic Education from Universitas Nusa Cendana (UNDANA), Kupang, Indonesia, in 2023. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Civic Education at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), Indonesia. Email: mariaantoneta.2025@student.uny.ac.id
	Dra. Hj. Wingkolatin, M.Si.  She was born on May 12, 1964. She is a Lecturer in the Department of Civic Education at Universitas Mulawarman, Indonesia. She received her Bachelor's degree in Pancasila and Civic Education from Universitas Mulawarman and earned her Master of Science (M.Si.) degree from Universitas Gadjah Mada in 2000. Email: wingkolatin2525@gmail.com