Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan dan Keislaman

Vol. 14 No. 3, November 2025

P-ISSN: 2252-6099; E-ISSN: 2721-2483 OOI: https://doi.org/10.54437/juw

Journal Page: https://jurnal.stituwjombang.ac.id/index.php/UrwatulWutsqo

# Family Involvement in Strengthening Character Education: **Integrating Sundanese Values and the Merdeka Curriculum**

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze family involvement in strengthening character education through the integration of Sundanese cultural values within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 2 Cibodas, Cimahi City. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and an intrinsic case study design, the research involved four months of participant observation, in-depth interviews with 15 parents, 6 teachers, and 10 students, as well as document analysis from school and community sources. The findings reveal that family involvement in character education remains limited due to economic constraints -41.2% of parents earn IDR 1-2 million per month – and long working hours, resulting in a 34% rate of student indiscipline. Sundanese values such as silih asih, silih asah, and silih asuh serve as moral anchors but have declined by 40% due to digital media exposure. The integration of the Merdeka Curriculum through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project offers an opportunity to revitalize local wisdom via a hybrid collaboration model between families and schools. Theoretically, this study extends Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory by incorporating digital literacy and school infrastructure as mediating variables, while practically proposing a local-culture-based family-school synergy model to reinforce students' character development in urban settings.

Keyword: family involvement, character education, Sundanese values, Merdeka Curriculum

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis keterlibatan keluarga dalam penguatan pendidikan karakter melalui integrasi nilai-nilai budaya Sunda dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di SDN 2 Cibodas Kota Cimahi. Pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan desain studi kasus intrinsik, melibatkan observasi partisipan selama empat bulan, wawancara mendalam terhadap 15 orang tua, 6 guru, dan 10 siswa, serta analisis dokumen sekolah dan komunitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan keluarga dalam pendidikan karakter masih terbatas akibat tekanan ekonomi (41,2% orang tua berpenghasilan Rp1-2 juta/bulan) dan jam kerja panjang, yang berdampak pada lemahnya disiplin belajar (34%). Nilai-nilai budaya Sunda seperti silih asih, silih asah, dan silih asuh tetap berperan sebagai jangkar moral, namun intensitas penerapannya menurun hingga 40% akibat penetrasi media digital. Integrasi Kurikulum Merdeka melalui Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila berpotensi merevitalisasi nilai-nilai lokal melalui model kolaborasi hibrida antara keluarga dan sekolah. Penelitian ini memperluas teori ekologi Bronfenbrenner dengan memasukkan literasi digital dan infrastruktur sekolah sebagai faktor mediasi, serta menawarkan model sinergi keluarga-sekolah berbasis budaya lokal untuk memperkuat karakter peserta didik di lingkungan perkotaan.

Kata kunci : keterlibatan keluarga, pendidikan karakter, nilai Sunda, Kurikulum Merdeka

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### **Introductions**

Character development in primary school children occupies a strategic position in global education discourse, especially in the digital age, which has significantly reduced the frequency and quality of face-to-face interactions within families (Pertamaningtias and Listyaningsih 2018). In Indonesia, families as the primary institution for character education face multidimensional challenges, including disparities in parenting patterns, massive technology penetration, and shifts in socio-cultural values (Tabroni and Khair 2022). SDN 2 Cibodas, Cimahi City, was selected as the study site because it reflects the complexity of the educational ecosystem in an urban area, with 216 students from heterogeneous economic backgrounds, where 41.2% of parents have an income of Rp1-2 million/month (Hayati and Fadriati 2023a). Despite adopting the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes the development of the Pancasila Student Profile Mustoip (2023) and Mardiana and Emmiyati (2024), initial data indicates that 34% of students lack discipline in completing assignments Murtiningsih (2023), suggesting a mismatch between policy ideals and real-world practices. The main contributing factor is the limited time available to parents 63% of whom admit that they have found it difficult to support their children academically due to work demands even though educational theory places the family as the pillar for instilling values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy (Sulastri et al. 2022; Wardani and Aliyyah 2024).

Strategic responses require the integration of character education programs, such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project as Angga et al. (2022) studied, which demands intensive collaboration among teachers as role models and solid partnerships between families, schools, and communities (Azzahrah & Marpaung, 2025; Fahriansyah et al., 2025; Masrufa et al., 2023). Nurasiah et al. (2022) and Gusteti, Jamna, and Marsidin (2023), told in line with the thematic-integrative principle that accommodates the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum. The phenomenon of "academic anxiety" emerging among primary school students reflects the dissonance between the ideal role of the family as formulated in primary socialization theory which places parents as the primary agents of moral value internalization and actual limitations in the field (Framanta 2020; Witasari 2021). The absence of adequate educational interaction at home has the potential to create a "moral vacuum," where values are merely memorized without being experienced, thereby weakening character formation and raising concerns about the effectiveness of character education (Ansori 2023; Mary 2020). Addressing this issue requires cross-sectoral interventions: labor policy reforms to protect parenting time, strengthening parenting literacy, and institutional support for schools in guiding families (Sari and Nofriadi 2019; Suryani 2017). Studies indicate that active parental involvement both in learning assistance and as role models is positively correlated with academic achievement and character

formation as studies of Ansori (2023) and Prima and Andisa (2021), while supportive and cooperative parenting patterns develop discipline and a sense of responsibility. Schools can facilitate diversity in parenting styles through parent education programs and learning that is responsive to learning modalities and character values (Fitrianingtyas and Jumiatmoko 2023; Handayani, Kriyantono, and Rahmiati 2022). The integration of formal and informal education, with synergistic collaboration between teachers, parents, and students is key to shaping social-emotional competencies that are relevant to the demands of the 21st century (Zahrah, Hendracipta, and Rokmanah 2023; Zurriyati and Mudjiran 2021).

Previous research has confirmed that families are the primary agents in shaping children's characters through role modeling, habit formation, and dialogic communication. Consistency in parents' implementation of religious values and independence has been proven to significantly influence the internalization of character in primary schoolchildren (Ramdani 2018; Setiardi 2017; Wiono and Siregar 2024). Pedagogical literacy is a key determinant of the effectiveness of this role, while quantitative studies show a positive correlation between parental involvement in school activities and improvements in students' responsibility character, including aspects of attendance, active participation, and pedagogical support (Wibowo and Hidayat 2022). However, contemporary research remains limited in examining the dynamics of family-school interactions in urban contexts, where negotiations between work demands and parenting involvement are extremely difficult, and teachers must optimize digital media for communication (Rohmawati and Watini 2022). Informal forms of interaction, such as WhatsApp groups or brief conversations at the school gate, shape collective understanding but are rarely explored through ethnographic methods (Samrin 2021). Local values such as 5S (smile, greet, say hello, be polite, be respectful) offer strategic potential in character education (Rosad 2019), although empirical studies on their implementation remain limited. Therefore, a contextual research approach is needed that integrates socio-cultural variables, enhances pedagogical literacy, establishes regular communication forums, and implements policies that enable parental participation without structural barriers (Afriansyah 2024; Putri, Dewi, and Furnamasari 2022). Schools can serve as resource centers for parents (Pratomo, Sundawa, and Kurniati 2022) and initiate community-based programs to strengthen multistakeholder synergy, creating a sustainable character education system that is adaptive to the demands of the times (Fatmah 2018).

Although prior studies have confirmed the pivotal role of families in shaping primary school students' character through role modeling, habit formation, and dialogic communication (Ramdani 2018; Setiardi 2017; Wiono and Siregar 2024), several gaps remain, particularly in urban educational contexts. First, at the micro level, while parental involvement has been shown to positively influence character formation (Ansori 2023; Prima and Andisa 2021), there is limited qualitative evidence on how families in economically and culturally heterogeneous urban areas negotiate traditional values such as honesty, responsibility, and mutual aid alongside modern academic demands. The processes of value transmission within neighborhood communities, as well as the division

of educational roles between working parents and teachers through digital platforms, remain underexplored. Second, at the meso level, research on character education has often focused on curriculum implementation or teacher practices, with insufficient attention to how school infrastructure and resources affect family engagement. At SDN 2 Cibodas, for example, damaged classroom facilities hinder active learning and limit opportunities for parental participation, yet adaptive strategies such as community-based classroom redesign or utilization of public spaces to support learning have rarely been studied. Third, at the macro level, the influence of school organizational factors such as teacher capacity, qualifications, workload, and teacher-student ratio on the effectiveness of family-school interactions is largely overlooked.

Data from SDN 2 Cibodas (24 teachers, 58% certified, teacher-student ratio 1:9) indicate that these structural factors could moderate the success of family-based character education if not systematically addressed. These gaps highlight the need for a contextual, multi-level approach that examines the interplay of family strategies, school infrastructure, and organizational capacity in shaping character education in urban primary schools. This study addresses these gaps by investigating adaptive family strategies to support the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, exploring the integration of Sundanese cultural values such as silih asih and silih asuh as a moral framework for character development, and evaluating the influence of school organizational structures and resources on sustaining effective family-school collaboration

This study investigates the ways in which families adapt their strategies to support the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, including scheduling home learning according to competency indicators, utilizing learning technology, establishing crossneighborhood learning communities, and formalizing learning agreements between parents and children. In parallel, the research explores the integration of Sundanese cultural values such as *silih asih* and *silih asuh*, which serve as a moral framework for character development by merging indigenous knowledge with the principles of Pancasila and Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the study evaluates how the organizational structure of the school and the availability of supporting resources influence the sustainability and effectiveness of family-school collaboration in promoting character education.

The main assumption of this study is that the dynamics of family roles in urban environments such as Cimahi are shaped by the simultaneous interaction between economic factors (15% of families earn less than Rp500,000/month), physical limitations, and the intensity of digital exposure. Strategic collaboration between experienced educators such as school principal Dian Anggraeni and families is considered capable of compensating for facility shortages. The objectives of this study are to formulate a conceptual model for integrating Sundanese family values into urban character education, to develop evidence-based policy recommendations for strengthening digital parenting programs, and to develop a qualitative database that maps the factors that support and hinder family-school collaboration. We expect this approach to significantly contribute to the development of family-based character education policies in Indonesia's urban areas

#### Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design (Creswell 2013). The qualitative approach is suitable because the research aims to explore complex social phenomena rather than measure predefined variables, allowing for nuanced insights into interactions, strategies, and cultural influences. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of collaboration between families and schools in shaping students' character in Cimahi City, an urban area with high socio-demographic complexity and SDN 2 Cibodas was choosen with presents unique characteristics that exemplify the challenges and opportunities of character education in a heterogeneous urban environment, making it an ideal case for in-depth, contextualized analysis. The intrinsic case study design is considered relevant because the cases studied have unique characteristics and strategic value in the development of character education in a heterogeneous urban environment, thereby enabling more contextual and comprehensive analysis (Susilowati 2022).

The research context encompasses the socio-economic backgrounds of families, the physical conditions of the school, the availability of learning facilities, and local cultural values that shape interactions between families and schools. Cimahi's high population mobility and cultural diversity influence how partnerships between families and schools are formed, including the strategies used to support student character development (Yin 2018). Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participatory observation, conducted over four months in six learning groups, captured the subtleties of teacher-parent interactions and the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (Hayati and Fadriati 2023b). In-depth interviews involved fifteen parents, six teachers, and ten students selected purposively to ensure participants had relevant experiences and perspectives (Patton 2015). Document analysis of school committee records, integrated learning schedules, and student progress reports Bowen (2009) complemented the other methods, enriching contextual understanding and validating observational and interview data.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach using NVivo 12 software and the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), including open coding to identify initial categories, axial coding to link related categories, and theme development relevant to the research focus. Triangulation was applied by comparing observations, interviews, and documents to enhance credibility, and member checking and peer debriefing ensured the validity of interpretations (Ningsih et al. 2024). For example, observation data were compared with school profile documents, such as records of a 2018 block grant for toilet facility rehabilitation worth Rp27.4 million, revealing the role of community involvement and external support in strengthening family-school collaboration. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical approval from relevant authorities (Witasari 2021). This comprehensive methodological framework allows for an in-depth and credible analysis of the factors shaping student character in an urban primary school context.

# Result and Discussion Result

In-depth interviews with 15 parents revealed that 73% adopted an authoritative parenting style, balancing control, structure, and emotional warmth. While this approach is theoretically optimal for fostering discipline and mutual respect, many parents expressed that the demands of long working hours, commuting, and side jobs severely limited its consistent application. One parent shared, "By the time I get home from work, I am too tired to help my child with homework, even though I want to" (Interview, Parent 7). This limited presence manifested in student behavior: 34% of children exhibited patterns of indiscipline, including incomplete assignments, inattention in class, and procrastination. These results align with Bronfenbrenner's exosystem theory, which emphasizes how external socio-economic conditions for example, 15% of parents earning less than Rp500,000 per month indirectly affect a child's immediate environment.

Cultural heritage, however, emerged as a stabilizing force. A total of 92% of students identified with Sundanese traditions such as silih asih (mutual love) and ngabuburit (social gatherings before sunset). Despite reports of a 40% decline in the practice of these traditions over the past decade largely attributed to increased gadget use they continue to reinforce respect, empathy, and community bonds. Observation of a school cultural event illustrated this resilience, where students eagerly participated in angklung performances while parents shared traditional snacks, showcasing the role of cultural rituals in strengthening social values.

Over four months of participatory observation, the school integrated silih asah (mutual knowledge sharing) into the Merdeka Curriculum through excursions, cultural workshops, and heritage-based projects. For instance, during a heritage art workshop, students collaboratively painted Sundanese folklore scenes while teachers explained the moral lessons embedded in the stories. Yet, parental participation remained low only 30% actively engaged. One teacher explained, "Parents often appreciate these programs but rarely come, as many are occupied with work" (Interview, Teacher 3). Moreover, 52% of families failed to consistently model cultural and moral values at home, reinforcing the gap between school initiatives and family practices.

The socio-economic diversity of the school community further shaped these dynamics. Families earning Rp2–5 million per month (43%) tended to provide structured mentoring, such as supervising homework, while less formally educated parents relied entirely on teachers. This divergence occasionally sparked tension in online parent forums. For example, WhatsApp group discussions often reflected contrasting expectations, with some parents pushing for strict discipline and others advocating for a more flexible approach.

Observation and document review revealed that SDN 2 Cibodas maintained a teacher-student ratio of 1:9, enabling close attention to individual students. However,

physical limitations crowded classrooms, insufficient ventilation, and inadequate sanitation restricted collaboration. School documents showed that a 2018 block grant of IDR 27.4 million improved toilets but had little impact on strengthening parent-school partnerships. Interestingly, when parents directly contributed to infrastructure projects through voluntary labor, donations, or planning their engagement in school life increased significantly. As one parent noted, "When I helped fix the classroom chairs, I felt more connected to the school and wanted to join other activities" (Interview, Parent 4). This suggests that bottom-up approaches to infrastructure development can cultivate a stronger sense of ownership and collaboration among families.

Digital communication primarily relied on WhatsApp, with 68% of parents using it to monitor academic progress. Only 12% engaged with more structured platforms such as Google Sites, limiting the broader application of Social Learning Theory in online environments. Students reported an average of three hours of daily screen time, often reducing opportunities for direct family interaction. During observation, several students were seen scrolling on their phones while waiting for parents, rather than engaging in conversation. Teachers responded with innovations such as Sundanese-language video lessons promoting cultural values and character education. Nevertheless, access disparities persisted: only half of the students had personal devices. To address inclusivity, the school experimented with offline alternatives, such as distributing printed character-based learning kits and collaborating with community radio for educational broadcasts. A review of program schedules confirmed that these approaches were designed to accommodate families with limited digital access, ensuring broader participation in character education.

### Discussion

The results of this study indicate that socioeconomic pressures and high job demands on parents at SDN 2 Cibodas have a significant influence on their involvement in their children's character education. These findings are consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, which asserts that factors at the exosystem level such as low income, long working hours, and limited school facilities can indirectly reduce the quality of value-laden interactions between parents and children in the microsystem. Research data revealed that 41.2% of parents earn between Rp1–2 million per month, while 15% earn less than Rp500,000 per month. This condition implies low intensity of academic support at home, reflected in 34% of students showing indiscipline in completing assignments, which in turn affects the achievement of character competencies. Comparable studies in other urban areas, such as Rohmawati and Watini (2022), also found that parents with long working hours tend to minimize involvement in school programs, reinforcing that this phenomenon is not unique to Cimahi but part of a wider urban challenge.

Amidst these conditions, Sundanese cultural values such as *silih asih* and *silih asuh* still function as moral pillars that maintain social cohesion and a sense of togetherness in schools and families. However, the 40% decline in the frequency of cultural rituals such as *ngabuburit* due to the penetration of gadgets reflects a shift in intergenerational values.

Similar findings have been reported by Rosad (2019), who noted the weakening of 5S-based character education practices in urban schools, showing that the erosion of local cultural practices is a widespread issue. This phenomenon not only affects social routines but also the potential for the transmission of noble values from older to younger generations. If this loss persists, it could erode collective identity and weaken the moral foundation of the younger generation, necessitating strategic interventions that integrate technology and culture.

This study has not explicitly described the differentiation of roles between fathers and mothers in parenting. Analysis of gender role distribution is important because it has direct implications for the consistency of value instillation, academic supervision, and character building in children. The theories of role strain and gendered parenting can be used to explain the double burden often experienced by working mothers, differences in parenting styles between fathers and mothers, and how this affects children's interactions with both parents. Wiono and Siregar (2024) found that paternal involvement in primary education tends to increase children's confidence and discipline, suggesting that the absence of such analysis limits the comprehensiveness of the present study. A more indepth discussion of this aspect could also reveal the socio-cultural factors that influence the division of roles within the family.

The reduction of cultural practices not only affects the quality of social interactions but can also reduce the effectiveness of internalizing values such as empathy, mutual cooperation, and respect. Previous studies have shown that the gradual loss of cultural rituals can create a "moral void" that is difficult to fill through formal education alone. This aligns with Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and is supported by Setiardi (2017), who emphasized that cultural practices shape long-term behavioral dispositions in children. Further discussion could link these findings to how local rituals contribute to social capital and identity formation, which remain underexplored in Indonesian urban contexts.

The low utilization rate of Google Sites (12%) indicates that the digital literacy gap is not merely a technical skills issue but also encompasses aspects of trust, perceived relevance, and readiness to adopt technology among parents. Wibowo and Hidayat (2022) found that rural parents were more likely to adopt WhatsApp for school communication than structured platforms, mirroring the findings in Cimahi and suggesting that socioeconomic background and convenience outweigh formal digital tools in parental engagement. Expanding the discussion could explore the potential of technology-based learning that leverages popular social media or instant messaging apps while integrating local cultural values to reduce resistance and enhance engagement.

Damage to 50% of the desks in one of the classrooms has resulted in low motivation among parents to actively participate in school activities. The co-design approach, which involves parents from the planning stage of facility improvements, has been proven in the literature to increase a sense of ownership, collective responsibility, and long-term commitment to the sustainability of school programs. Afriansyah (2024) also highlighted that parental involvement in school infrastructure projects fosters stronger collaboration, which directly translates into better student discipline outcomes. This approach can serve

as a model for community-based participation that strengthens emotional and social bonds between families and schools.

A proposed hybrid collaboration model that combines digital platforms with local cultural values can be implemented within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum through mechanisms such as learning contracts, periodic family-teacher communication forums, and the development of interactive Sundanese culture-based learning media. This implementation requires teacher training, adequate technological support, and technical guidelines to ensure that the integration is not merely a formality but truly supports character development (Azizah & Usman, 2023; Hasan, 2024; Hasan & Azizah, 2022). Such hybrid models have also been piloted in other Indonesian schools (Prima and Andisa, 2021), where combining digital engagement with cultural immersion improved both academic performance and character outcomes.

The findings of this study have enormous potential as a basis for public policy advocacy. Recommendations may include the allocation of special funds for school facility rehabilitation, the development of culture-based parenting programs, and integration with work-life balance policies for workers. Structured policies will encourage synergy among families, schools, and local governments, while ensuring the sustainability of character education in a challenging digital age. This contributes to the expansion of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory by highlighting the need for macro-level interventions through labor policies, digital equity initiatives, and cultural revitalization programs.

With this elaboration and deepening, the discussion not only presents empirical relationships between socioeconomic, cultural, and character education factors, but also offers a conceptual and operational framework that can be used as a practical reference for elementary schools in urban areas to strengthen family involvement in a sustainable manner. Theoretically, the study enriches the application of Ecological Theory and Cultural Capital in the Indonesian urban education context, while practically, it provides actionable strategies for schools and policymakers to bridge the gap between families, culture, and digital adaptation.

### Conclusion

This study affirms that family involvement plays a central role in strengthening students' character education within the Merdeka Curriculum era. However, the socio-economic conditions of urban families—such as low income, long working hours, and limited time to assist children—restrict the intensity of educational interactions at home. Sundanese cultural values such as silih asih (mutual love), silih asah (mutual guidance), and silih asuh (mutual care) continue to serve as moral anchors that sustain harmony between families and schools, although their practice has declined due to the growing influence of digital media.

Integrating these local cultural values into the Merdeka Curriculum through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project revitalizes the family's role as a primary partner of the school in shaping students' character. The hybrid collaboration that combines digital platforms with local wisdom has proven effective in strengthening communication, discipline, and empathy among students. Theoretically, this research extends Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory by introducing digital literacy and school infrastructure as mediating factors influencing the effectiveness of family involvement. Practically, the findings recommend developing a local culture-based family-school synergy model as a sustainable strategy to reinforce students' character formation in urban contexts, particularly in responding to digital disruption and shifting social values.

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