

STRENGTHENING CHARACTER VALUES THROUGH CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT STATE MIDDLE SCHOOL 2 GORONTALO

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ABSTRACT

Character development among students remains a significant challenge, as participation in educational activities does not always lead to the expected behavioral changes. Previous studies on co-curricular activities have primarily focused on the types of character values developed, while explanations regarding the process of character formation and the factors influencing its effectiveness remain limited. This study aims to analyze the process of character strengthening through co-curricular activities and to identify the factors affecting its effectiveness at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings reveal that responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance are developed through repeated social experiences, including role sharing, negotiation, conflict resolution, and collective decision-making, rather than through mere participation in activities. The effectiveness of this process is influenced by the integration of school commitment, teacher role modeling, the quality of student participation, and the prevailing school culture. The contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that character strengthening in co-curricular activities is determined more by the quality of student engagement and the dynamics of social interaction than by the mere existence of the program itself. These findings enrich the literature on character education by positioning co-curricular activities as a dynamic and contextual social process embedded in students' everyday learning experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed how students learn, interact, and build social relationships in their daily lives. Easy access to information allows students to acquire knowledge more quickly than previous generations (Made et al., 2024). However, this progress is not always accompanied by corresponding character development. Various phenomena in the educational environment indicate the continued presence of undisciplined behavior, low responsibility toward tasks, weak social awareness, and a decline in the ability to collaborate and respect differing opinions (Juliza et al., 2024; Mukhlisin et al., 2022). This situation indicates that current educational challenges are not only related to improving academic competencies but also concern schools' ability to shape students' character as preparation for navigating an increasingly complex societal life.

Awareness of the importance of character has prompted the government to prioritize character development as a key component of national education policy. Through the Merdeka Curriculum, schools are encouraged to develop the Pancasila Student Profile, which encompasses dimensions of faith, independence, cooperation, creativity, critical thinking, and respect for diversity (Solehuddin et al., 2024). The existence of this policy indicates that character development is not viewed as an additional activity outside of learning but rather as a goal that must be integrated into the entire educational process.

In character education studies, character development is understood as a continuous process that unfolds through the learning experiences of students (Wahyuni, 2021). Lickona explains that character develops through the integration of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*, so that students not only understand good values but are also able to internalize and apply them in real actions (Nggilu et al., 2026). This perspective is reinforced by *experiential learning* theory, which places direct experience as a crucial element in learning (Windayani et al., 2025). Through these experiences, students have the opportunity to develop attitudes, habits, and behaviors that reflect the character values they have learned.

Based on this understanding, character development cannot rely solely on classroom learning. Character building requires a learning environment that allows students to interact, collaborate, make decisions, solve problems, and directly face various social situations (Sumar et al., 2025). Co-curricular activities serve as one form of learning that embodies these characteristics, as they provide students with opportunities to apply knowledge gained in the classroom through various contextual and collaborative activities (Wahyuningsih et al., 2025). Through project-based activities, group discussions, presentations, social activities, and problem-solving-based activities, students not only learn to understand the subject matter but also develop responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, leadership, and communication skills.

The strategic role of co-curricular activities in character development is increasingly relevant in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning and authentic learning experiences. Activities that place students as the primary agents of learning are believed to foster a stronger internalization of values compared to learning that is solely focused on mastering subject matter (Sartika et al., 2022; Samudra et al., 2025). Therefore, co-curricular activities have the potential to serve as an effective means of supporting the strengthening of students' character if designed and implemented appropriately.

This potential has not yet been fully realized in the conditions observed at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo. Initial observations during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year indicate that various co-curricular activities have been conducted as part of the learning process. However, several indicators of student character still reveal existing issues. Regarding responsibility, approximately 30% of students still exhibit undisciplined behavior when participating in activities. In the aspect of cooperation, approximately 36% of students appeared less active in participating within groups and tended to delegate tasks to specific members. Meanwhile, in the aspect of tolerance, approximately 23% of students were still found to struggle with accepting differing opinions during discussions. These findings suggest that student engagement in co-curricular activities does not always correlate directly with the development of the desired character traits.

This situation warrants further examination as it highlights a gap between the ideal objectives of co-curricular activities and their actual implementation in schools. The existence of co-curricular activities does not automatically

result in the strengthening of students' character. This indicates that certain factors influence the success of the character-building process, including the activity design, teachers' mentoring approaches, student engagement, and a school environment that supports the implementation of these activities.

Previous studies have demonstrated that character education can be developed through classroom instruction, school culture, habit formation, and extracurricular activities (Aldi et al., 2025; Djafar et al., 2026). Other studies also indicate that project-based learning and collaborative activities contribute to the development of students' responsibility, cooperation, and social skills (Mohi et al., 2024). However, these studies generally focus on the specific program formats implemented or the character traits successfully developed. Explanations regarding how the character-building process unfolds within co-curricular activities remain relatively limited. Furthermore, research specifically examining the relationship between the implementation of co-curricular activities and the factors that support or hinder character development at the junior high school level is still scarce.

Previous studies have demonstrated that co-curricular activities contribute to the development of various character values among students. However, most of these studies have focused primarily on the types of character traits developed or the forms of activities implemented, while explanations of how the character-strengthening process occurs and the factors influencing its effectiveness remain relatively limited, particularly at the junior secondary school level. This limitation has resulted in an incomplete understanding of the mechanisms through which character development is fostered through co-curricular activities. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by explaining the process of character strengthening within co-curricular activities and identifying the factors that support and hinder the effectiveness of their implementation at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply understand the process of strengthening students' character values through co-curricular activities at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo. The case study design was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon within a real-world context in a specific setting (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The location was selected using purposive sampling, considering that the school actively implements co-curricular activities as part of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the strengthening of students' character. Additionally, initial observations indicated that there were still character-related issues among students, particularly regarding responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance.

Research informants were selected using *purposive sampling*, which involves selecting participants based on their involvement and knowledge regarding the phenomenon under study (Sugiyono, 2018). There were five informants, consisting of the school principal, the vice principal for student affairs, a teacher of Pancasila and Civic Education, a teacher supervising co-curricular activities, and a student actively participating in co-curricular activities. They were selected because they play a role in planning, implementing, and supervising co-curricular activities, as well as having direct experience in them.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted directly during the implementation of co-curricular activities to examine the types of activities, patterns of student interaction, teacher involvement, and behaviors reflecting the values of responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face using an interview guide developed based on the research objectives. Each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure data completeness and accuracy. Document analysis was employed to complement and verify the field findings through the examination of co-curricular program documents, activity schedules, implementation reports, photographs, and other relevant documents related to student character development.

Data analysis utilized the interactive analysis model (Miles & Huberman, 1992), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. The data analysis process began

when the first data were collected in the field and continued throughout the study. All interview recordings were transcribed and reviewed repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. The analysis then proceeded through a coding process, in which codes were assigned to data segments relevant to the research focus. Codes with similar meanings were grouped into categories, including forms of character strengthening, emerging character values, supporting factors, and inhibiting factors. These categories were subsequently developed into broader themes that described the process of character strengthening through co-curricular activities. Data interpretation was conducted by comparing findings across different data sources to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from the principal, vice principal for student affairs, teachers, activity supervisors, and students. Methodological triangulation was conducted by cross-checking findings derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was carried out by confirming the researchers' interpretations with participants to ensure the accuracy of meaning and representation. In addition, peer debriefing was undertaken to review the coding process, categories, and emerging themes, thereby enhancing the consistency and credibility of data interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were obtained through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo. Data analysis indicates that co-curricular activities serve not only as a means of supporting learning but also as a social space that enables students to develop various character values through direct learning experiences. Character development occurs through students' involvement in various activities that require active participation, communication, responsibility, and interaction with peers and teachers. Additionally, the study found that the success of character development through co-curricular activities is influenced by several factors stemming from the school environment as well as student characteristics. These research findings are presented in the following discussion.

Strengthening Character Values Through Co-curricular Activities at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo

Based on the research results, the co-curricular activities conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo serve as an effective medium for building students' character. This is evident from the various activities designed to actively engage students in the learning process. Through these activities, students not only gain academic experiences but also learn to develop attitudes and behaviors that support character development. The research findings indicate that the character values that develop most prominently through co-curricular activities are responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance.

To provide a more systematic overview of the research findings, the results of the identification of character strengthening through co-curricular activities are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Strengthening of Character Values Through Co-curricular Activities at SMPN 2 Gorontalo

Character Values	Forms of Strengthening in Co-curricular Activities	Findings Indicators
Responsibility	Group task assignments, implementation of learning projects, environmental cleanup activities, and collaborative task completion	Students carry out tasks according to their roles, complete work on time, and take responsibility for the results of the activities
Collaboration	Group discussions, collaborative projects, social activities, and group-based activities	Students are able to coordinate, help one another, share tasks, and work toward a common goal

Tolerance	Group deliberations, class discussions, and joint decision-making	Students respect differing opinions, accept feedback from peers, and maintain harmonious relationships within the group
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Source: Research Data (2026)

Research findings indicate that co-curricular activities at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo contribute to strengthening students' values of responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance. These three values develop through students' engagement in various group activities, learning projects, discussions, and other collaborative activities. These findings indicate that character development does not occur through the direct transmission of values, but rather through learning experiences that provide students with opportunities to practice these values in real-life situations. The higher the students' involvement in these activities, the greater the likelihood of character internalization in their daily lives.

These findings align with the character education theory proposed by Lickona, which explains that character develops through the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Darwanti et al., 2025). From this perspective, students are not only required to understand good values but also need opportunities to internalize and practice them directly (Damariswara et al., 2021). Through co-curricular activities, students gain the space to apply the value of responsibility when completing group tasks, develop cooperation through collaborative activities, and build tolerance through interactions with peers who hold different views and possess distinct character traits. Thus, co-curricular activities serve as a means to facilitate the transformation of values from the cognitive domain into tangible behavior.

The findings of this study can also be explained through Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura (in Irama et al., 2024). This theory states that individual behavior develops through the processes of observation, imitation, and reinforcement from the social environment. Students learn certain values by observing the behavior of others whom they regard as role models, and then imitating them in real-life situations. The research findings indicate that during co-curricular activities, students have the opportunity to observe the discipline of their instructors, cooperation among peers, mutual respect, and responsibility in completing group tasks. These interactions encourage students to adopt positive behaviors that are appreciated by the school community. Co-curricular activities serve not only as a venue for student activities but also as a social environment that facilitates character development through the processes of modeling and behavioral reinforcement.

The findings of this study are consistent with various previous studies indicating that collaborative activities in a school setting influence students' character development. Previous research has found that project-based activities can enhance students' sense of responsibility and independence because they are required to actively complete tasks (Fikri et al., 2021). Other studies also indicate that group activities can strengthen students' cooperation, communication, and social awareness skills (Marfuah, 2017). Furthermore, several studies report that social interactions occurring during learning activities can foster the development of tolerance and appreciation for diversity (Adiansha et al., 2018; Nulwelen et al., 2024). Thus, the findings of this study reinforce previous research on the importance of collaborative learning experiences in character education.

This occurs because co-curricular activities provide a broader space for interaction compared to classroom learning. In formal learning, students generally focus more on achieving academic goals, whereas in co-curricular activities they have the opportunity to actively engage in various activities that require communication, coordination, and collaborative problem-solving (Sinaga et al., 2025; Nguyen & Oanh, 2025). This situation creates a learning experience that enables students to develop habits of responsibility, cooperation, and respect for differences in a sustainable manner. The more frequently students engage in such experiences, the stronger the character values that are formed.

These findings indicate that character strengthening through co-curricular activities is shaped by continuous social interactions embedded in learning activities. Responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance develop through repeated experiences of task completion, collaboration, conflict resolution, and collective decision-making, suggesting

that character formation is a process that emerges from participation in meaningful social practices rather than from value transmission alone.

Supporting and Hindering Factors in Strengthening Character Values Through Co-curricular Activities

In addition to identifying the forms of character development fostered through co-curricular activities, this study also identified several factors influencing the success of their implementation. These factors consist of supporting factors that strengthen the character development process and inhibiting factors that may reduce the effectiveness of the activities.

Table 2. Supporting Factors for Strengthening Character Values Through Co-curricular Activities at SMPN 2 Gorontalo

Supporting Factors	Form of Support	Contribution to Character Building
School Commitment	School policies, provision of schedules, facilities, and program support	Ensuring the continuity of co-curricular activities
Teacher's Role	Guidance, supervision, motivation, and setting a good example	Helping students internalize character values
Student participation	Active involvement in activities and group work	Encouraging character development through direct experience
School environment	A school culture that supports collaboration and discipline	Strengthening the application of character values in daily life

Source: Research Data (2026)

Research findings indicate that the success of character values reinforcement through co-curricular activities at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo is influenced by four key factors: school commitment, the role of teachers, student participation, and a supportive school environment. These four factors are interrelated and form an educational ecosystem that enables the process of character value internalization to occur sustainably. Conversely, the research also found that low participation among some students, varying levels of motivation, suboptimal discipline, and time constraints for implementing activities are factors that can hinder the effectiveness of character strengthening.

These findings indicate that the success of character education is not determined solely by the programs or activities implemented but also by a school environment that supports the process of internalizing character values among students. This aligns with the concept of school culture (*school culture*), which views the school as a system of values, norms, habits, and patterns of interaction that continuously influence the attitudes and behaviors of the school community (Sukadari, 2020). A positive school culture is characterized by exemplary behavior, habit formation, mutually respectful relationships, and a shared commitment to instilling the values held dear (Huda et al., 2021). In such an environment, students not only gain an understanding of character values but also observe, experience, and practice them in various school activities. Therefore, co-curricular activities will have a more optimal impact if supported by consistent school policies, teacher role modeling, and a conducive school climate.

These findings are supported by the research by Ramdayana et al. (2023), which shows that the implementation of character education at the junior high school level occurs through the involvement of the entire school community in creating a supportive learning environment, both through curricular and co-curricular activities. Furthermore, Septiningrum et al. (2024) emphasize that teachers' exemplary behavior, consistent practice, and a positive school culture are crucial factors in the process of developing students' character. This means that co-curricular activities cannot be viewed as standalone initiatives but rather as integral components of the school culture that collectively contribute to the formation of students' character.

The findings of this study are also consistent with various previous studies indicating that institutional support from schools has a significant influence on the success of character education. Several studies report that schools with a strong commitment to character development tend to be able to create a learning environment more conducive to

fostering positive student behavior (Sabila et al., 2024; Welianti & Sartono, 2025). Other research indicates that teacher involvement in the learning process contributes to the successful internalization of values because students find it easier to imitate behaviors they observe directly rather than merely receiving theoretical explanations (Sutisna et al., 2019). Similar findings were also identified in a study explaining that a positive school culture can reinforce character development because the values taught in learning activities are reinforced through daily practices within the school environment (Mussyaffa et al., 2026).

Although this study presents more specific findings compared to previous research. While most prior studies treated schools, teachers, and the environment as independent factors, the results of this study indicate that these four factors operate simultaneously and reinforce one another. The school's commitment provides a policy framework and facilities that support co-curricular activities. The role of teachers ensures that character values are translated into learning practices. Student participation serves as the primary medium for the internalization of values, while the school environment functions as a space that reinforces the habit formation of learned behaviors. Thus, the effectiveness of character development cannot be explained by a single factor alone but through the mutually supportive relationships among these factors.

These findings indicate that character development is strengthened when positive experiences gained through co-curricular activities are consistently reinforced by teachers and the school environment. Consequently, student participation becomes a crucial factor because active involvement provides more opportunities to practice responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance.

On the other hand, this study also identified several inhibiting factors affecting the effectiveness of character-building through co-curricular activities. Low discipline among some students, uneven participation, varying levels of motivation, and time constraints for implementing activities present challenges faced by schools. This finding is noteworthy as it indicates that the existence of a character-building program does not automatically result in behavioral changes among all students. The success of the program depends heavily on the quality of student engagement in each activity conducted.

These findings differ from the assumptions often made in various character education programs, which assume that student participation in an activity is sufficient to shape character. The results of this study indicate that physical presence in an activity does not necessarily entail deep psychological and social engagement. Students who actively discuss, collaborate, and take on roles within a group tend to gain stronger character-building experiences compared to those who merely participate in activities as a formality. The quality of participation is more important than mere attendance in co-curricular activities.

Although these various supporting factors contribute positively to the implementation of co-curricular activities, the character-building process does not always proceed without obstacles. The research results indicate that the effectiveness of these activities is still influenced by several constraints stemming from student characteristics as well as technical aspects of activity implementation. The presence of these factors not only affects the level of student engagement in the activities but also impacts the process of internalizing the values of responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance—which are the primary objectives of co-curricular activities. The inhibiting factors identified in this study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Hindering Factors in Strengthening Character Values Through Co-curricular Activities

Barriers	Form of Obstacle	Impact on Activity Implementation
Student discipline	Tardiness and inconsistency in completing tasks	Hinders the development of a sense of responsibility
Uneven participation	Some students are less active in groups	Reduces the effectiveness of collaboration
Differences in motivation	Students' levels of engagement vary	Character building is not happening evenly

Time constraints

Activity implementation must align with the academic schedule

The intensity of character development is limited

Source: Research Data (2026)

The research findings in Table 3 indicate that the effectiveness of reinforcing character values through co-curricular activities is influenced not only by factors that support their implementation but also by various obstacles that arise during the activities. The most prominent obstacles include low discipline among some students, uneven participation in group activities, differences in motivation among students, and time constraints for carrying out the activities. These findings indicate that the success of character building cannot be separated from students' readiness to actively engage in the learning process and the school's ability to manage various obstacles that arise during the activities.

These findings can be explained through the theory of meaningful learning proposed by Ausubel(in Hamida et al., 2022) . This theory asserts that the learning process will yield deeper changes if students are able to connect the experiences and information they acquire with the knowledge structures they already possess. In co-curricular activities, values such as responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and tolerance will not be internalized merely through formal participation but require active student engagement in understanding the activity's objectives, carrying out tasks, and reflecting on the meaning of the experiences gained. When students demonstrate low participation, lack discipline, or participate in activities merely to fulfill obligations, meaningful learning becomes less optimal. Consequently, the character values expected to develop through co-curricular activities are not fully internalized in students' daily behavior.

The results of this study align with various previous studies indicating that the level of student engagement is a key factor in the success of character education (Wahyuni, 2021) . Other studies have also found that learning motivation influences the success of value internalization because students with high motivation are more open to new experiences and more easily develop positive behaviors (Yeni et al., 2022) . These findings reinforce the results of this study, which indicate that the quality of student participation has a close relationship with the effectiveness of character development through co-curricular activities.

This study highlights more specific aspects compared to previous research. While most prior studies only identified general inhibiting factors, this study demonstrates how these barriers directly influence the character-building process. Low discipline causes students to miss opportunities to fully engage in activities. Uneven participation results in varying learning experiences for each student. Differences in motivation result in an unbalanced level of internalization of character values, while time constraints limit the intensity of guidance that teachers can provide. Thus, the identified barriers not only impact program implementation but also affect the quality of the learning experience, which is the core of character building.

This situation arises because character development is fundamentally a process that requires active engagement, repetition, and continuous practice. When students are not optimally engaged in activities, the practice process becomes less effective. Similarly, when the time allocated for activities is limited, students have fewer opportunities to experience, reflect on, and internalize the values of character- . This situation indicates that the success of character-building depends not only on the design of activities but also on the quality of implementation and the level of student engagement in each activity conducted (Zubaedi, 2011) .

These findings indicate that the effectiveness of character strengthening is influenced not only by the availability of co-curricular programs but also by the quality of student engagement throughout the learning process. Barriers such as low discipline, uneven participation, limited motivation, and time constraints reduce opportunities for students to experience and internalize character values in meaningful ways.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that co-curricular activities at SMP Negeri 2 Gorontalo contribute to strengthening students' character, particularly responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance. The strengthening process occurs through students' active participation in collaborative activities that require task completion, interaction, collective decision-

making, and problem-solving. These findings indicate that character development is fostered through meaningful learning experiences and direct social engagement during co-curricular activities.

The effectiveness of character strengthening is supported by school commitment, teacher involvement, student participation, and a positive school culture. Conversely, low discipline, uneven participation, differences in motivation, and limited implementation time remain challenges that may reduce the effectiveness of character development efforts.

The findings imply that schools need to optimize co-curricular activities as an integral component of character education by increasing student participation, strengthening teacher role modelling, and fostering a school culture that consistently reinforces positive values in everyday practice. Attention to these aspects is essential to ensure that character education is not limited to program implementation but is reflected in students' daily behaviour.

This study was conducted in a single school setting and focused on the values of responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance. Future studies are recommended to involve schools with different characteristics and examine a broader range of character values to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of co-curricular activities in character education.

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