



Journal of Educational Sciences

Journal homepage: <https://jes.ejournal.unri.ac.id/index.php/JES>



P-ISSN
2581-1657

E-ISSN
2581-2203

The Shifting Narrative of Character Education in Catholic Schools (2010–2025): A Systematic Literature Review Based on the Lickona Framework

Ambrosius Tode Peya Nia Do*, Sugiarto, Desi Rahmawati, Syafa'at Ariful Huda

Department of Educational Management, Jakarta State University, Jakarta, 13220, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 13 Dec 2025

Revised: 03 March 2026

Accepted: 05 March 2026

Published online: 15 March 2026

Keywords:

Character Education,
Moral Knowing,
Moral Feeling,
Moral Action,
Systematic Literature Review

* Corresponding author:

E-mail: ambrosius.tode@mhs.unj.ac.id

Article Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.10.3.p.988-1004>

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license.



ABSTRACT

This literature-based study describes shifts in character education narratives in Catholic schools from 2010 to 2025 using Lickona's moral framework of knowing–feeling–action. Within conditions of technological disruption and growing social complexity, Catholic schools are portrayed as institutions facing challenges in sustaining moral and spiritual formation while responding to contemporary demands. The review applies a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, encompassing identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. A total of 43 articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science are examined through descriptive and qualitative thematic analysis, with study quality evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). The synthesis indicates a discernible paradigm shift from a mainly cognitive orientation toward moral knowing (2010–2014) to increased attention to moral feeling and moral action (2015–2025). Values such as service, empathy, integrity, solidarity, and love appear as dominant themes. This shift reflects the reorientation of Catholic education from a dogmatic stance toward a reflective and transformative social practice, with important implications for curriculum development and character formation in pluralistic and secular contexts.

1. Introduction

Education is fundamentally aimed at developing the whole person, including intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions, to shape character grounded in universal human values (Perrigo et al., 2024). In the contemporary era marked by technological disruption and social complexity, education is increasingly required to move beyond knowledge transmission toward fostering moral responsibility and social engagement (Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2020). Research by Hardiman et al. (2025) emphasizes that effective character

education must integrate cognitive development with affective and behavioral dimensions to create holistic learners capable of navigating complex moral landscapes. This shift positions character education as a critical foundation for cultivating honesty, empathy, responsibility, and solidarity as core elements of human development. Furthermore, studies in Indonesian educational contexts reveal that character formation requires systematic integration across curriculum, school culture, and community engagement (Wulandari et al., 2020).

Within this broader educational context, Catholic education occupies a distinctive position due to its explicit moral and spiritual mission. Catholic schools function as faith-based communities that emphasize the formation of students who are intellectually competent, spiritually grounded, and committed to service and social justice (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017). According to Ritonga and Hasibuan (2021), values-based education in religious schools provides a distinct framework for moral development that differs from secular approaches by integrating spiritual practices with ethical reasoning.

These values are traditionally nurtured through habituation, integrated learning, and communal life (Hyde, 2013; Wodon, 2019). In the Indonesian context, Purwanto (2020) found that religious-based character education demonstrates stronger persistence in moral behavior when supported by consistent school culture and parental involvement. However, cultural pluralism, secularization, and digitalization increasingly challenge the transmission and internalization of these values among younger generations (Anderson, 2020; Han, 2014). Samiha and Fauzi (2025) argue that contemporary educators must balance tradition with innovation, particularly in addressing digital literacy and moral reasoning in virtual environments.

As a result, Catholic character education is currently situated within a dual dynamic: maintaining fidelity to its moral and spiritual mission while adapting to the demands of modern society. This tension is evident in research by Simanjuntak et al. (2023), who documented how faith-based schools navigate between preserving religious identity and responding to pluralistic student populations. This tension has encouraged a shift from a predominantly dogmatic model toward a more reflective, humanistic, and socially engaged approach that integrates rationality, spirituality, and social justice (Bryk et al., 2021). Empirical studies suggest that school climate, teacher spirituality, and community practices rooted in love and solidarity play a decisive role in supporting this transformation (Sanderse, 2020; D'Agostino et al., 2019). Ayuni and Ritonga (2025) demonstrated that teacher moral exemplarity significantly influences students' character development, particularly in dimensions of empathy and social responsibility. Similarly, Pizzaballa (2012) found that integrated character education programs incorporating local wisdom and religious values produce more meaningful moral engagement among elementary students.

Recent scholarship further indicates that the identity and mission of Catholic education are being redefined in response to globalization and market-driven educational pressures (Frabutt et al., 2013; Rossiter, 2010). Yeni et al. (2026) observed that faith-based schools increasingly adopt hybrid models that integrate

traditional moral frameworks with contemporary pedagogical innovations to remain relevant in competitive educational markets. Character education is no longer treated as an ancillary component but as the core of Catholic schooling, integrating moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in line with Lickona's framework (Lickona, 1991; Nucci & Narvaez, 2020). Research by Saputra and Hafidz (2025) confirms that holistic character education requires simultaneous attention to cognitive understanding, emotional engagement, and behavioral practice, aligning with Lickona's triadic model. This orientation aligns with contemporary theological perspectives emphasizing the integration of faith-based rationality and lived social love (Grace, 2023). Yudistira et al. (2025) further suggest that values education must be contextualized within student's lived experiences to foster authentic moral transformation rather than superficial compliance.

Despite the growing body of literature, existing studies on character education in Catholic schools remain largely descriptive and fragmented. Few studies systematically examine the interaction between moral knowing, feeling, and action over time, and even fewer adopt a longitudinal perspective to capture shifts in moral narratives (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014; Han, 2014). Permadi and Achadi (2025) note that much of the existing research focuses on isolated interventions rather than examining systemic patterns of moral development across extended periods. Moreover, no prior research has comprehensively mapped these shifts from 2010 to 2025 using a Systematic Literature Review guided by PRISMA 2020 and CASP quality standards, leaving a significant gap in understanding the evolution of Catholic character education. Additionally, Dewi et al. (2025) emphasizes the need for methodologically rigorous reviews that can synthesize diverse empirical findings into coherent theoretical frameworks applicable across educational contexts.

Positioned within this gap, the present study adopts a Systematic Literature Review to analyze research trends, moral orientations, and dominant values in Catholic character education literature from 2010 to 2025. Specifically, this study aims to examine publication trends, analyze the distribution of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, and identify shifts in dominant moral narratives over time, thereby contributing theoretically to Catholic education scholarship and practically to curriculum development and character formation strategies responsive to pluralistic and secular contexts.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method by strictly adhering to the 2020 PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor and transparency. The PRISMA framework was selected because it offers a clear, systematic, and replicable procedure for identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant scientific

literature, thereby minimizing bias and enhancing the credibility of the review process (Hardiman et al., 2025). Following this framework, the review was conducted through four sequential stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Dewi et al., 2025). These stages enabled a structured filtering of studies, beginning with the comprehensive identification of potential articles, followed by the screening of titles and abstracts, detailed eligibility assessment based on predefined criteria, and final inclusion of studies that met both methodological and thematic requirements. This structured process ensured that only relevant, high-quality studies were included in the final synthesis, providing a robust empirical foundation for analyzing trends and patterns in the reviewed literature.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted through two primary databases: Scopus via Publish or Perish and Web of Science. The search strategy used the Boolean formula: ("Catholic school*" AND "character education" OR "moral education" AND "service learning" AND "Lickona"). The publication period was limited to 2010–2025, as this period reflects significant developments in Catholic character education, including shifts in global educational policies, pedagogical approaches, and spiritual perspectives. This time span is sufficiently long to capture longitudinal changes in moral paradigms while remaining methodologically comparable. Duplicate records were identified and removed using Mendeley reference management software.

Screening and Eligibility Process

In the screening stage, titles and abstracts of the retrieved articles were systematically reviewed to determine their relevance to the focus of this study, namely character and moral education in Catholic schools. Articles were excluded at this stage if they were not situated within the Catholic school context, focused primarily on higher education or theological institutions, or did not explicitly address issues of character or moral education. Following this initial screening, the remaining articles proceeded to the eligibility stage, where full-text versions were examined in greater detail using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This stage involved a more rigorous assessment of the articles' educational context, theoretical framework, and relevance to Lickona's moral dimensions. Only studies that met all eligibility requirements were retained for the final analysis, ensuring that the selected literature was both methodologically appropriate and closely aligned with the research objectives. The following table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type of Publication	Peer-reviewed scientific journal articles indexed in Scopus or Web of Science	Books, proceedings, reports, magazines, or non-peer-reviewed articles
Publication Period	Published within the range of 2010–2025	Published outside the specified period

Publication Language	Articles written in English	Articles written in languages other than English
Educational Context	Focus on Catholic schools at the primary and secondary levels	Studies on higher education, theological institutions, parish communities, or non-Catholic institutions
Focus of Study	Examines character/moral education and discusses at least one dimension of Lickona's model: moral knowing, moral feeling, or moral action	Does not discuss character education; only discusses school management, general curriculum, administration, or academic issues without moral dimensions
Theoretical Framework	Uses or explicitly refers to Lickona's framework	Does not include the knowing–feeling–action concept in moral analysis

Data Extraction

Data extraction was systematically conducted using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to ensure consistency and accuracy across all included studies. The extracted data covered key bibliographic and analytical variables, including publication year, author(s), country of study, research design, moral dimensions examined, dominant moral values, principal findings, and indicators of methodological quality. This structured extraction process enabled a comprehensive comparison of studies across different contexts and time periods. In addition, the methodological quality and potential risk of bias of each study were critically appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). The CASP assessment focused on several criteria, including the clarity of research objectives, the appropriateness of the research design and methodology, the reliability and rigor of data collection procedures, the transparency of thematic analysis, and the relevance of the findings to the field of character education. This quality assessment ensured that the synthesis was grounded in methodologically sound and trustworthy evidence.

Validation and Trustworthiness

Validation in this study was carried out through a process of internal verification and source triangulation to ensure the credibility and robustness of the synthesized findings. Internal verification involved repeated cross-checking of extracted data, thematic codes, and interpretations to minimize researcher bias and maintain analytical consistency throughout the review process. Source triangulation was achieved by systematically comparing findings from studies conducted in different geographical contexts, publication periods, and methodological approaches (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods). By examining similarities and differences across these diverse sources, the analysis was able to identify recurring patterns while also accounting for contextual variations in character education practices within Catholic schools. This triangulation process strengthened the dependability and confirmability of the results, ensuring that conclusions were not based on isolated or context-specific evidence. Overall, the validation procedures applied in this study align with the principles of transparency, rigor, and scientific consistency advocated by the PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

3. Results and Discussion

Result

Study Selection

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, consisting of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification stage, 196 articles were retrieved from Scopus via Publish or Perish ($n = 154$) and Web of Science ($n = 42$). After removing 10 duplicate records using Mendeley, 186 unique articles remained. In the screening stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed. Eighty-six articles were excluded because they were not relevant to the Catholic school context, focused on higher education, or did not address character or moral education. Consequently, 100 articles proceeded to the eligibility stage.

During the eligibility stage, a total of 70 full-text articles were retrieved and examined in detail to assess their alignment with the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This evaluation focused on the relevance of each study to the context of character education in Catholic primary and secondary schools, as well as the presence of explicit moral dimensions consistent with the analytical framework used in this review. As a result of this assessment, 27 articles were excluded because they did not explicitly address moral or character education, relied solely on theoretical or conceptual discussion without empirical evidence, or concentrated on theological or higher education settings outside the scope of this study. Consequently, 43 articles fulfilled all eligibility requirements and were included in the final systematic review, forming the empirical basis for the subsequent descriptive and thematic analysis. An overview of this selection process across all stages is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram presented in Figure 1.

The results of the study selection process show that, out of the 196 articles initially identified, only 43 articles fulfilled all the methodological and thematic inclusion criteria and were therefore included in the final synthesis. As illustrated in Figure 1, the systematic selection process followed four main stages: identification ($n = 196$), screening ($n = 142$ after duplicate removal), eligibility assessment ($n = 78$ after title and abstract screening), and final inclusion ($n = 43$ after full-text evaluation). This means that approximately 22% of the available literature met the specific requirements of focusing on Catholic schools while explicitly engaging with Lickona's moral framework of knowing, feeling, and action. Figure 1 demonstrates that the largest reduction occurred during the eligibility stage, where 64 articles were excluded due to insufficient alignment with Lickona's framework or lack of focus on Catholic school contexts.

The relatively small proportion of eligible studies indicates that the majority of research on character education either addresses general educational contexts, focuses on non-Catholic institutions, or discusses moral education without a clear theoretical grounding in Lickona's framework. This pattern suggests that empirical

and theoretically aligned studies on Catholic values-based character education remain limited within the broader field of character education research.

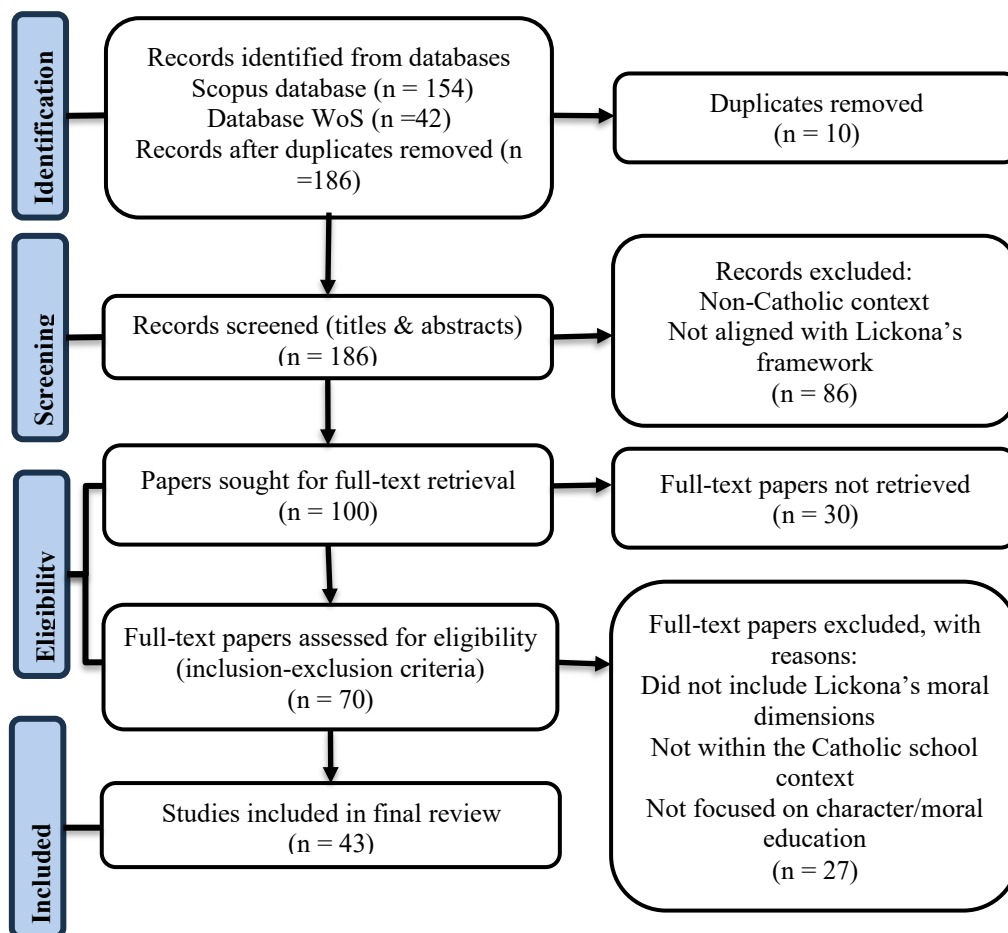


Figure 1. Prisma Flowchart

The PRISMA flow diagram presented in Figure 1 provides transparency regarding the systematic and rigorous nature of the article selection process, ensuring that only high-quality, relevant studies were included in the final corpus. Consequently, the 43 selected studies provide a focused and representative corpus for examining publication trends, dominant moral dimensions, and shifts in character education narratives in Catholic schools, which form the basis for the subsequent analysis and discussion.

Study Characteristics

Analysis of publication years indicates a clear variation in research output on character education in Catholic schools across the reviewed period. During the early phase of 2010–2014, a relatively small number of studies were published, with only 9 articles (21%), reflecting limited scholarly attention to this topic at that time. The number of publications increased substantially in the 2015–2019 period, reaching 17 articles (40%), which suggests growing academic interest alongside broader

developments in values-based education and curricular reforms in Catholic schooling. This level of publication was sustained in the 2020–2025 period, with 17 articles (39%), indicating continued and stable research engagement rather than a temporary surge. Overall, this distribution demonstrates a noticeable expansion and consolidation of scholarly work on Catholic character education after 2015.

Demographic Distribution and School Level

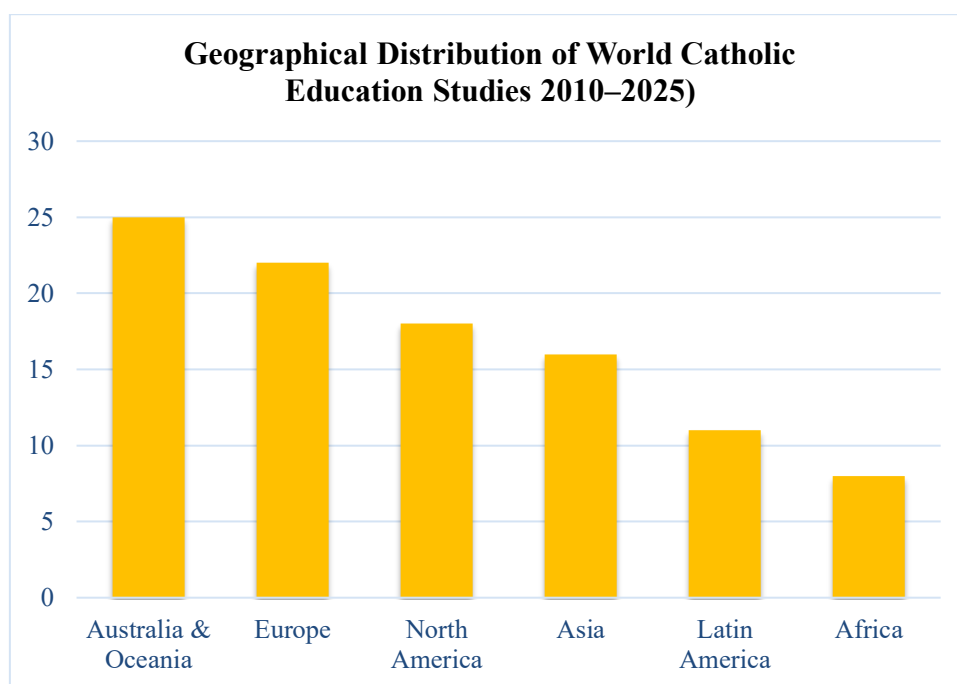


Figure 2. Geographical Distribution of World Catholic Education Studies 2010–2025)

Based on the figure 2 above, it can be seen that, geographic distribution confirms that Catholic character education has both universal and contextual dimensions. On the one hand, Catholic moral principles such as love, service, and solidarity remain core values that transcend cultural and national boundaries. However, on the other hand, each region articulates these values in an inculturative manner, adapting to its respective social, political, and spiritual context. The dominance of developed regions such as Australia and Europe reflects a reflective and institutional approach to moral education, while the increasing contributions from Asia, Latin America, and Africa demonstrate the transformative movement and social praxis of Catholic education in developing world contexts. Thus, these findings confirm that Catholic character education is developing as an adaptive and global moral system, rooted in faith tradition but oriented to contemporary moral and humanitarian needs. In addition to geographical patterns, it is also important to examine the educational levels at which Catholic character education research is concentrated. The distribution of studies across primary, secondary, and teacher education contexts is presented in Figure 3.

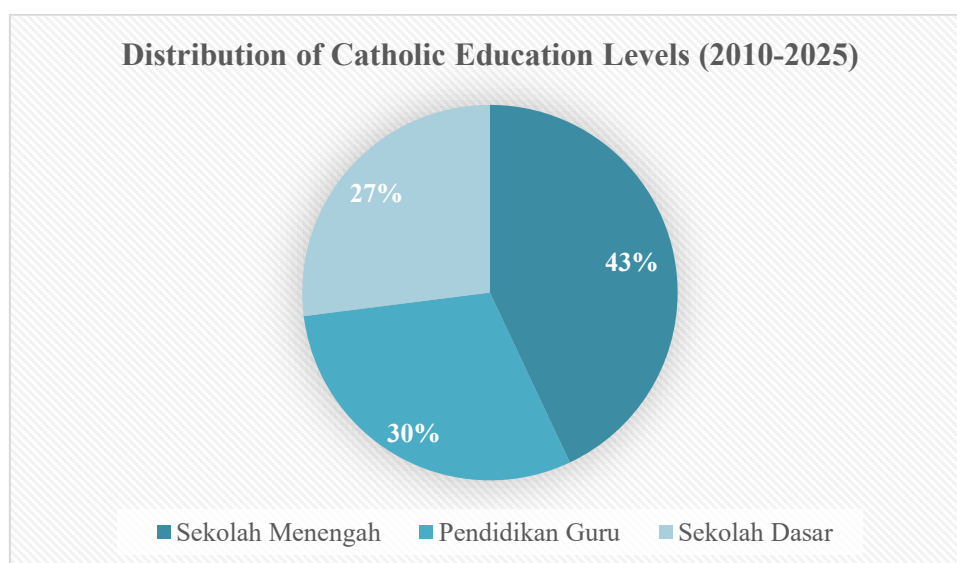


Figure 3. Distribution of Catholic Education Levels

Based on the figure 3, it can be seen this distribution demonstrates that Catholic secondary education is a key focal point in the global discourse on character education, as adolescence is considered the most crucial period for moral and spiritual identity formation. Catholic schools, in this context, are not only a place for the transfer of values, but also a space for moral and social transformation, where faith is embodied in concrete actions through service and social responsibility. Furthermore, findings on Catholic teacher education emphasize the crucial role of educators as "moral and spiritual agents" within the Catholic education system. Teachers are viewed not merely as facilitators of learning, but as moral exemplars who shape students' character through exemplary living, faith reflection, and social awareness. Thus, Catholic character education is not focused on a single level, but rather forms a continuous chain of values learning, from primary education, which instills a moral foundation, to secondary education, which fosters reflective awareness, and finally to teacher education, which strengthens the role of educators as conscience-shapers and moral leaders.

Research Approach and Design

Research design analysis demonstrates an epistemological convergence between Catholic tradition and modern character education theory. Studies from Australia and Canada stand out for their integrative application of Lickona's framework (moral knowing, feeling, action) with Ignatian spirituality and Aristotelian virtue ethics, resulting in a model of moral education that balances rationality, affectivity, and ethical action. Conversely, research from Asia and Latin America broadens the scope by adding a communitarian social dimension, emphasizing that Catholic values such as love, solidarity, and social service must be embodied in concrete social action. This approach demonstrates an epistemic shift from doctrine-based moral education to practice-based moral education, where faith is translated into social responsibility. To further clarify the methodological orientation of the reviewed studies, the distribution of research approaches and designs is summarized

in Figure 4, illustrating the dominant methodological patterns underpinning Catholic character education research during the review period.

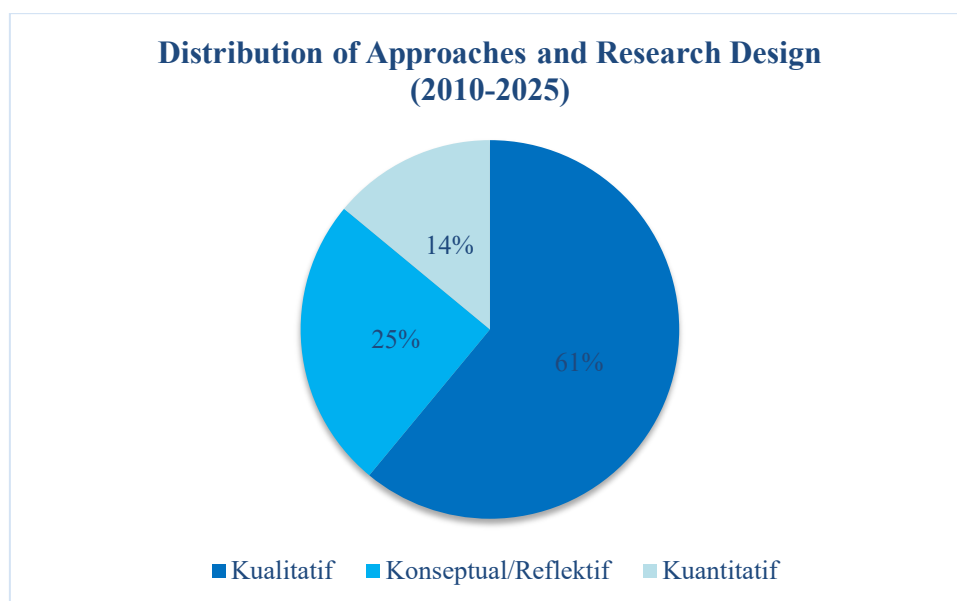


Figure 4. Distribution of Approaches and Research Design

Assessment of Quality and Risk of Bias (CASP)

CASP item analysis highlighted the following pattern of methodological strengths and weaknesses: Key strengths: The majority of studies demonstrated clarity of research objectives (Item 1), appropriateness of design to objectives (Items 2-3), and relevance of results to moral and spiritual contexts (Items 9-10). This was reflected in the consistency of theoretical arguments and the relevance of pedagogical applications across Catholic school contexts. Consistent weaknesses: Some studies, particularly those conceptual in nature or those using secondary data, lacked adequate description of the researcher-participant relationship (Item 5) and ethical considerations (Item 6). This lack of explanation of researcher self-reflection and documentation of the ethical process creates a potential risk of bias that needs to be considered when interpreting specific findings. The overall results of the methodological quality assessment using the CASP criteria are summarized in Table 2, which presents the distribution of studies across different levels of quality and potential risk of bias.

Table 2. Risk Assessment and Risk of Bias

Quality Category	Number of Studies	Percentage
High (8–10)	35	81%
Moderate (5–7)	8	19%
Low (0–4)	0	0%
Total	43	100%

The application of CASP to this collection of studies demonstrates that the literature on character education in Catholic schools during 2010–2025 has a strong

methodological foundation. The majority of qualitative studies report adequate data collection and analysis procedures (in-depth interviews, document triangulation, thematic analysis), making the resulting findings reliable as a basis for argumentation in the thematic synthesis. However, limitations related to researcher reflexivity and ethical transparency in some studies should be noted: these aspects can affect confirmability and require caution in assigning weight to certain findings, especially in conceptual or document-based studies alone. Therefore, in developing an interpretation of the thematic synthesis (the shift from moral knowing to moral feeling–action), the methodological recommendations that emerge are: (1) placing the findings of high-quality studies as the main basis for the argument; (2) reviewing or interpreting findings from moderate-quality studies in the context of their methodological limitations; and (3) suggesting the need for future research to be more explicit in reporting the research ethics process.

Thematic Analysis Based on Lickona's Framework

The thematic classification of the reviewed studies was conducted using Lickona's moral framework, which categorizes character education into three interconnected dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Analysis of the publication periods reveals a clear variation in thematic emphasis over time. Studies published during the 2010–2014 period predominantly focused on the moral knowing dimension, emphasizing cognitive understanding of moral values, faith-based principles, and ethical reasoning. In contrast, publications from the 2015–2019 period showed a broader thematic scope, addressing both moral feeling and moral action, with attention given to affective internalization of values, empathy development, and the initial integration of values into practice. Furthermore, studies published between 2020 and 2025 were mainly oriented toward the moral action dimension, highlighting concrete moral practices such as service, leadership, and social engagement. The distribution of these dominant moral dimensions across the three periods is presented in Table 3, illustrating the temporal variation in thematic focus among the reviewed studies.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis Based on Lickona's Framework

Period	Dominant Moral Focus	Key Values	Character Education Narrative
2010–2014	<i>Moral Knowing</i>	Faith, Reflection, Rationality	Focus on developing understanding of faith and Catholic identity through cognitive learning. Character education emphasizes intellectual dimensions and understanding of moral teachings. (Rossiter, 2010; Rymarz, 2012)
2015–2019	<i>Moral Feeling & Action</i>	Empathy, Service, Solidarity	A shift occurs toward formation of conscience and social action. Character education begins to emphasize community service and the development of social awareness. (Wodon, 2019; Hyde, 2013)
2020–2025	<i>Moral Action</i>	Integrity, Leadership, Global Compassion	Catholic education becomes increasingly praxis-oriented, emphasizing faith reflection and concrete actions as

expressions of universal love. (Kowalski et al., 2020)

The shift in the narrative of Catholic character education from moral knowing to moral action reflects a profound epistemological and pedagogical transformation. In its early stages (2010–2014), Catholic education remained dogmatic and cognitive, oriented toward understanding teachings and developing moral rationality. However, after 2015, a paradigm shift occurred toward reflective and empathetic education, where inner experience and social relationships became the core of the moral formation process. Entering the final decade (2020–2025), this paradigm has evolved into a moral education based on the practice of love and moral leadership. Catholic schools are no longer understood merely as institutions for teaching values, but as ethical learning communities that foster personal integrity, social responsibility, and cross-cultural solidarity.

Discussion

Shifts in Catholic Character Education Narratives (2010–2025)

The results indicate a clear longitudinal shift in the narrative of character education in Catholic schools over the 2010–2025 period, beginning with a strong emphasis on moral knowing in the early phase. Studies published between 2010 and 2014 predominantly focused on the cognitive dimension of morality, particularly the development of students' understanding of faith, doctrinal knowledge, and the transmission of official Church teachings. Character education during this period was largely framed as an instructional process aimed at strengthening Catholic identity through rational explanation, catechetical instruction, and adherence to normative moral principles. This orientation reflects an earlier model of Catholic education in which moral formation was closely associated with intellectual mastery of religious content and conformity to established moral norms (Rossiter, 2010; Rymarz, 2012). While this approach contributed to clarity of belief and doctrinal coherence, it tended to position students primarily as recipients of moral knowledge, with limited emphasis on affective engagement or practical moral application. Consequently, moral formation was often understood as knowing what is right rather than experiencing and enacting moral values in lived social contexts, a limitation that later studies began to address as Catholic education responded to changing social and pedagogical demands.

From 2015 onward, the literature increasingly emphasized the dimension of moral feeling, marking an important transition in the orientation of Catholic character education. During this period, character formation was no longer viewed primarily as the transmission of moral knowledge, but rather as a process of conscience formation and affective internalization of values. Empathy, compassion, and emotional awareness became central elements in helping students relate faith principles to their personal and social experiences. Catholic character education began to be framed as a formative journey that connects faith with lived experience, in which students are encouraged to reflect on their actions, engage in meaningful dialogue, and develop authentic relationships with others. Studies by Hyde (2010)

and Wodon (2019) illustrate that this shift aligns with a broader movement toward values-based and humanistic education, where learning is grounded in personal meaning-making rather than doctrinal instruction alone. This development is strongly influenced by Ignatian pedagogy, which emphasizes reflection, discernment, and the integration of experience with faith, as well as reflective learning approaches that position students as active participants in their own moral and spiritual growth.

In the most recent period (2020–2025), the dominant narrative of Catholic character education shifted decisively toward the moral action dimension. Studies from this period increasingly highlight concrete expressions of faith manifested through social service initiatives, ethical and values-based leadership, and commitments to global solidarity and social justice (Kowalski et al., 2020). Rather than positioning moral formation as an abstract or purely reflective process, these studies emphasize the embodiment of faith in real-life practices that respond to social, cultural, and humanitarian challenges. Within this context, Catholic schools are portrayed not merely as institutions for transmitting moral values, but as moral learning communities in which faith is actively lived through service learning, community engagement, and compassionate action toward others. This orientation reflects a broader pedagogical transformation in which character education is understood as a process of forming socially responsible individuals capable of translating moral convictions into ethical action. Consequently, the shift toward moral action signifies a movement away from a predominantly cognitive or doctrinal approach toward a praxis-oriented model of character education, where moral understanding, affective commitment, and social engagement are integrated in addressing contemporary global realities.

The overall synthesis indicates that Catholic character education has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a predominantly cognitive paradigm toward a praxis of love that emphasizes lived experience and social engagement. This shift from a dogmatic-instructional approach to an empathetic and social-action-oriented model is not merely a change in pedagogical methods, but reflects a deeper theological and anthropological reorientation within Catholic education. Faith is no longer understood solely as a body of knowledge to be taught and mastered, but as a lived reality that shapes personal conscience, relational attitudes, and concrete moral commitments. Consequently, moral formation moves away from reliance on external authority and normative instruction toward the cultivation of an internal moral calling rooted in empathy, reflection, and responsibility for others. This transformation highlights a movement from the mere transmission of moral teachings to the formation of the whole person, where values are internalized and expressed through compassionate action, social responsibility, and active participation in the pursuit of justice and the common good.

Relevance to the Lickona Framework

The thematic patterns identified in this review align closely with Lickona's three-dimensional moral framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, confirming its relevance and applicability within the context of Catholic education.

The early dominance of moral knowing reflects the long-standing tradition of Catholic schooling that emphasizes rational faith formation, doctrinal understanding, and the transmission of moral principles as the foundation of character education. This approach positions moral knowledge as a prerequisite for ethical behavior, reinforcing students' cognitive awareness of religious teachings and moral norms. However, the growing attention to moral feeling in studies published after 2015 indicates an increasing recognition that moral knowledge alone is insufficient to foster authentic character development. Later research highlights the importance of affective internalization, such as empathy, compassion, conscience formation, and moral sensitivity, as essential elements that enable students to connect moral values with their personal experiences and social relationships. This shift suggests a broader understanding of character education in Catholic schools, where emotional engagement and reflective awareness function as critical processes in transforming moral understanding into meaningful and lived moral commitments.

The findings further indicate that moral feeling functions as a transitional dimension connecting moral knowledge to moral action, suggesting that ethical behavior emerges not merely from cognitive understanding but from the emotional internalization of values. When moral principles are felt deeply, actions arise as authentic expressions of lived faith rather than mere adherence to rules. In Catholic education, this connection is nurtured through experiences such as service learning, which cultivates empathy and compassion by engaging students directly with communities in need, as well as through practices of solidarity and commitment to social justice, which encourage critical reflection on societal structures and active contribution to transformative solutions. Daily practices of reflection, prayer, and communal dialogue further reinforce the integration of knowledge, feeling, and action, enabling students to align their moral understanding with personal experience and spiritual values. Consequently, moral action in this context is intentional and affectively grounded, demonstrating that the development of moral feeling is essential for translating abstract ethical knowledge into meaningful, faith-driven engagement in the world.

Thus, the relevance of Lickona's framework for Catholic education lies in its ability to reconcile faith and social action in an integral moral unity. This model functions not only as a theory of moral psychology but also as a transformative pedagogical approach that enables students to internalize the values of faith in the form of concrete concern for others. In conclusion, moral feeling is the affective axis that drives the transition from knowing to action, and it is here that Catholic education finds its most authentic moral identity: faith that drives love and justice (faith in action).

4. Conclusion

This research concludes that the narrative of character education in Catholic schools has undergone a fundamental paradigm shift, moving from an emphasis on moral knowing the cognitive transmission of doctrine to a focus on moral action, which

promotes the praxis of faith through acts of love and social responsibility. This evolution transcends mere pedagogical adjustment; it reflects a profound theological and anthropological transformation in how Catholic schools understand faith, humanity, and education. Values such as empathy, integrity, solidarity, and universal love now form the core of moral formation, positioning schools not as transmitters of doctrine, but as agents of moral transformation that nurture a spirituality which is lived, not just taught.

Consequently, this demands a holistic reform integrating reflective curricula, teacher formation rooted in service spirituality, and learning based on social action and interfaith dialogue. The success of Catholic education is now measured not by conceptual mastery, but by the ability of students to embody their faith through concrete acts of justice and compassion. Ultimately, this repositioning is crucial for Catholic schools to remain relevant in a pluralistic and secular world, forming generations that are not only knowledgeable but also deeply faithful, reflective, and socially engaged. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies on character development and the creation of more comprehensive assessment tools that capture the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of moral growth, thereby strengthening the theoretical and practical foundations of Catholic character education for the 21st century.

References

- Anderson, R. B. (2020). To Save a Soul: Catholic Mission Schools, Apartheid, and the 1953 Bantu Education Act. *Journal of Religious History*, 44(2), 149–167. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12664>
- Ayuni, A., & Ritonga, A. A. (2025). The Role of Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliyah Awaliyah (Mdta) Al-Furqon in Improving Al-Qur'an Reading and Writing Literacy for Students in Pematangsiantar. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(5), 4058-4068. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.5.p.4058-4068>
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2020). *Character Education and Moral Development: Building a Moral Foundation for Education*. Routledge.
- Bryk, A. S., Lee, V. E., & Holland, P. B. (2021). *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*. Harvard University Press.
- Congregation for Catholic Education. (2017). *Educating to Fraternal Humanism: Building a Civilization of Love*. Vatican Press.
- D'Agostino, T. J., Dowd, R., & Mugo, J. (2019). Faith-Based Education in Changing Social, Economic, and Political Contexts: Perspectives from Catholic Educators in Kenya. *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 17(4), 76–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1681730>
- Dewi, R. K., Harjito, H., & Nurkolis, N. (2025). The Role of the School Principal as a Manager in Instilling Character Education at SD Negeri 01 Doro, Pekalongan Regency. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(6), 6160-6173. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.6.p.6160-6173>
- Frabutt, J. M., Holter, A. C., & Nuzzi, R. J. (2013). What Are They Saying about Catholic Schools? Discourse on PK-12 Catholic Education, 2005 to 2010. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 22(1), 75–96.
-

- Grace, G. (2023). *Catholic Education and the Pursuit of the Common Good: Faith, Justice, and Human Flourishing*. Routledge.
- Han, H. (2014). Virtue Ethics, Positive Psychology, and a New Model of Science and Engineering Ethics Education. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 21(2), 441–460. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-014-9539-7>
- Hardiman, S., Nurkolis, N., & Kusumaningsih, W. (2025). The Role of the Principal in Developing a Literacy Culture: A Qualitative Study at SDN Brebes 09, Brebes Regency. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(6), 5708-5717. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.6.p.5708-5717>
- Hyde, B. (2010). A Dispositional Framework in Religious Education: Learning Dispositions and Early Years' Religious Education in Catholic Schools. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 31(3), 261–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2010.521000>
- Hyde, B. (2013). A Category Mistake: Why Contemporary Australian Religious Education in Catholic Schools May Be Doomed to Failure. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 34(1), 36–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2013.759344>
- Kowalski, M. J., Macaluso, K., & Navoa Svarovsky, G. (2020). The Alliance for Catholic Education: How This Program Supports Catholic Schools in the USA (2007–2020+). *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 12(1), 74–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2020.1705682>
- Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. Bantam Books.
- Nucci, L., & Narvaez, D. (2020). *Handbook of Moral and Character Education* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Permadi, B. D. G., & Achadi, M. W. (2025). Analysis of The Implementation of Character Education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muhammadiyah Gedongtengen Yogyakarta. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(6), 5851-5860. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.6.p.5851-5860>
- Perrigo, C., Wang, Z., & Miseliunaite, A. (2024). Holistic Education in Character Formation: Global Perspectives. *Educational Review*, 76(3), 412–428.
- Pizzaballa, P. (2012). The Holy Places as an Opportunity for Evangelisation and Education: Some Religious and Cultural Background and Resources for Teachers in Catholic Schools. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 4(2), 179–185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2012.708173>
- Purwanto, A. (2020). Persistensi Perilaku Moral dalam Pendidikan Karakter Berbasis Agama: Peran Budaya Sekolah dan Keterlibatan Orang Tua. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 10(2), 156–170.
- Ritonga, M., & Hasibuan, S. (2021). Kerangka Pendidikan Berbasis Nilai di Sekolah Agama: Integrasi Praktik Spiritual dengan Penalaran Etis. *Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam*, 6(1), 45–62.
- Rossiter, G. (2010). Perspective on Contemporary Spirituality: Implications for Religious Education in Catholic Schools. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 2(2), 129–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2010.504019>
- Rymarz, R. (2012). Faithful Dissent and Religious Education in Canadian Catholic Schools: A Response to McDonough. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 4(1), 82–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2012.650493>
-

-
- Rymarz, R., & Belmonte, A. (2014). Some Life History Narratives of Religious Education Coordinators in Catholic Schools. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 6(2), 191–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2014.929808>
- Samiha, Y. T., & Fauzi, M. (2025). Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Candidates' Strategies in Fostering Student Discipline in the Digital Age. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(3), 1326-1333. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.3.p.1326-1333>
- Sanderse, W. (2020). The Meaning of Moral Formation in Schools: Character and Virtue Education Reconsidered. *Journal of Moral Education*, 49(2), 145–161.
- Saputra, D. A. S. W. A., & Hafidz, H. (2025). The Role of the Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Al-Ikhlas in Character Formation of Children in Mojo Wetan Village, Sragen. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(4), 3031-3040. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.4.p.3031-3040>
- Simanjuntak, B., Tampubolon, H., & Siahaan, R. (2023). Navigasi Identitas Religius dalam Konteks Pluralisme: Studi Kasus Sekolah Berbasis Iman. *Edukatif: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 5(3), 1234–1248.
- Wodon, Q. (2019). Pluralism, the Public Purse, and Education: An International Estimate of Savings to State Budgets from K-12 Catholic Schools. *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 17(2), 76–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1608666>
- Wulandari, D., Suryani, E., & Hartini, P. (2020). Integrasi Sistematis Pendidikan Karakter: Kurikulum, Budaya Sekolah, dan Keterlibatan Komunitas. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 26(4), 478–493.
- Yeni, S., Elmustian, E., & Sinaga, M. (2026). Development of Anecdotal Text Writing Module Assisted by Stand-Up Comedy for Grade X Students of Madrasah Aliyah. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(1), 25-37. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.10.1.p.25-37>
- Yudistira, I., Awaliyah, S., & Rochmadi, N. W. (2025). Development of A Green Environment-Based Civic Obligation Module to Increase Students' Awareness of The Environment at Kepanjen National 1 Senior High School. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(6), 5647-5661. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.9.6.p.5647-5661>

How to cite this article:

Nia Do, A. T. P., Sugiarto., Rahmawati, D., & Huda, S. A. (2026). The Shifting Narrative of Character Education in Catholic Schools (2010–2025): A Systematic Literature Review Based on the Lickona Framework. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(3), 988-1004.
