

# Character Education and Ethical Development: A Bibliometric Study of Youth Education

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## ABSTRACT

This study employs a bibliometric analysis to explore the scholarly landscape of character education and ethical development, focusing on trends, influential contributors, and emerging themes from 2000 to 2024. Using Scopus database, the study identifies key research areas such as moral education, virtue ethics, and interdisciplinary connections with fields like psychology, philosophy, and technology. The findings highlight the centrality of foundational figures such as Kohlberg and Dewey, while emerging themes like artificial intelligence, e-learning, and sustainable development reflect the field's evolving focus. The analysis reveals geographic disparities, with the United States as a dominant contributor, and emphasizes the need for culturally inclusive approaches. Despite advancements, challenges remain in the variability of program implementation, lack of longitudinal studies, and ethical considerations in technology integration. This study provides valuable insights for researchers, educators, and policymakers to advance the field and address contemporary ethical challenges in education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Character education and ethical development form the backbone of educational systems that aim to produce not just academically competent individuals but also socially responsible and ethical citizens. The importance of instilling values such as integrity, honesty, responsibility, and respect from a young age cannot be overstated in

today's increasingly complex and interconnected world. As societies grapple with diverse challenges, ranging from economic inequality to cultural conflicts, the role of education in shaping the ethical compass of the youth is pivotal [1]–[3]. Schools, therefore, have a critical role in embedding character education within their curricula to foster environments that promote

positive social behaviors and skills necessary for community and global citizenship [4].

Character education programs, however, vary widely in their approach and effectiveness, influenced by cultural, social, and institutional factors. In various educational settings, these programs may focus on moral reasoning, values clarification, or direct moral instruction, each underpinned by different philosophical foundations [5], [6]. The diversity in methodologies presents a challenge in understanding which aspects of character education are most effective and under what circumstances. Moreover, the rapid evolution of digital technology introduces new dimensions to how ethical behaviors and values are taught and understood by the younger generation, thus necessitating ongoing research to keep pace with these changes [7], [8].

Despite the recognized importance and widespread implementation of character education, debates persist regarding its integration into the formal education system. Critics argue that the effectiveness of character education programs is often diminished by a lack of consistency in program delivery and evaluation, as well as by conflicting values between educational policies and community or familial beliefs [9]. Furthermore, the increasing pressure on educational outcomes related to standardized testing can sideline the non-academic objectives of character education, leading to under-prioritization in school agendas [10], [11].

The need to analyze the extensive body of research on character education and ethical development in youth education is imperative. This bibliometric study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the field's developmental trajectory, key contributors, prevailing themes, and gaps in the literature. By mapping out the scholarly landscape, this study aims to highlight trends, concentrations of research, and potential areas for future investigation. The objective is to synthesize the existing body of knowledge, providing a foundational resource that can inform educators, policymakers, and

researchers interested in the effective integration of character and ethical education within school curricula.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *Theoretical Foundations of Character Education*

Character education is anchored in a rich theoretical framework that draws from both psychological and philosophical perspectives. Prominent among these are the theories of moral development proposed by [12] and [5], which suggest that children progress through specific stages of moral reasoning as they mature. Piaget posited that younger children think in terms of consequences rather than intentions, while older children begin to understand the principles behind rules [12]. Kohlberg expanded on this by outlining six stages of moral development, emphasizing the progression from obedience to universal ethical principles. These theories underscore the developmental nature of morality and suggest educational practices that can foster higher levels of moral reasoning [5].

### 2.2 *Approaches to Character Education*

Various models of character education address the complexity of moral development. The virtue ethics approach, rooted in Aristotelian philosophy, emphasizes the cultivation of good character traits or virtues such as courage, justice, and temperance. This approach has been widely adopted in educational settings, aiming to habituate students to good actions through repetitive

practice [1]. On the other hand, the cognitive-developmental approach, influenced by Kohlberg, focuses on moral reasoning and decision-making skills, advocating for classroom discussions and ethical dilemmas to enhance students' moral cognition [13].

### 2.3 Effectiveness and Critiques

Despite widespread implementation, the effectiveness of character education programs has been a topic of debate. Research indicates that well-implemented programs can lead to improvements in students' behavior, academic performance, and interpersonal skills [4]. However, these outcomes are not universally observed, with variations depending on the program's alignment with the school's ethos, the consistency of delivery, and the socio-cultural context [14]. Critics also raise concerns about the potential imposition of specific moral values, which may not align with diverse cultural beliefs within the school community [6]. This highlights the challenge of designing character education programs that respect cultural diversity while promoting universally accepted ethical principles.

### 2.4 Role of Technology in Character Education

The advent of digital technology has introduced new dynamics to character education. Online platforms and social media have become integral to young people's lives, shaping their interactions and social norms. While technology can facilitate innovative educational

practices, such as digital storytelling or simulations for ethical dilemmas, it also poses challenges such as cyberbullying and digital cheating [7]. Studies exploring the integration of digital citizenship within character education underscore the necessity to address ethical behavior both online and offline, suggesting a holistic approach to modern character education [15].

### 2.5 Global Perspectives and Comparative Studies

Character education also varies significantly across global contexts, influenced by cultural values and educational policies. Comparative studies offer insights into how different countries integrate character education within their curricula. For example, in East Asian cultures, where collectivism is emphasized, character education often focuses on community harmony and respect for authority. In contrast, Western models may emphasize individual moral autonomy and critical thinking [16], [17]. Understanding these differences is crucial for developing programs that are culturally sensitive and effective in diverse educational environments.

## 3. METHODS

This study employs a bibliometric analysis to explore the scholarly landscape of character education and ethical development in youth education. Using Scopus as primary database, the research identifies and analyzes relevant articles published between 2000 and 2024. Keywords such as "character education," "ethical development," "youth education," and "moral education" were utilized to extract articles, ensuring a comprehensive dataset. Bibliometric tool such

as VOSviewer was employed to map citation networks, co-authorship patterns, and thematic clusters. Additionally, descriptive statistics were used to identify publication

trends, key authors, influential works, and dominant research themes.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

#### Documents by year

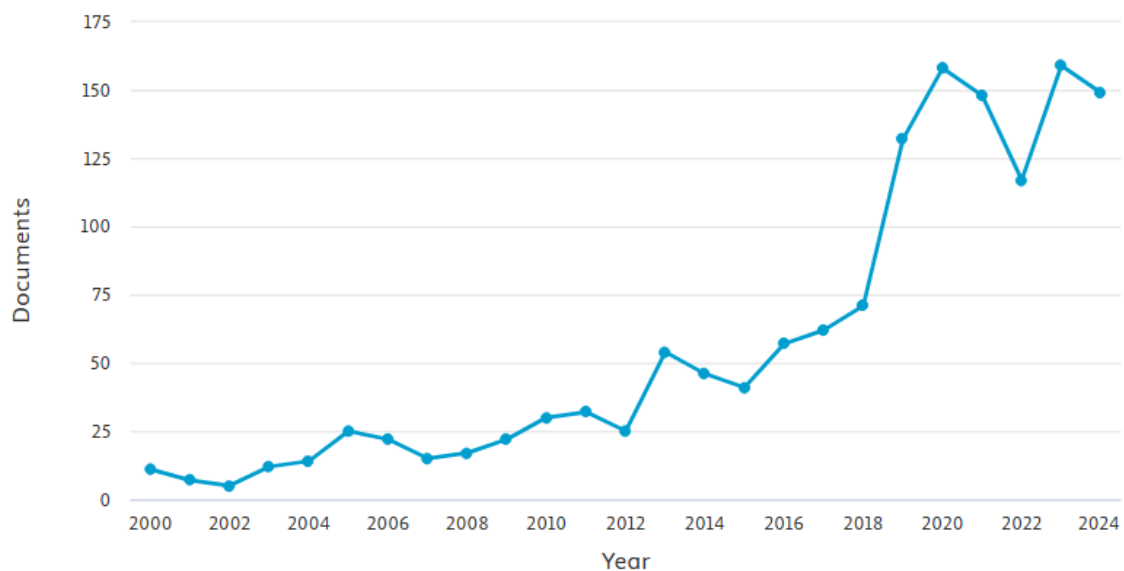


Figure 1. Documents by Year

Source: Scopus, 2024

The line chart illustrates the number of documents published annually on character education and ethical development from 2000 to 2024. The data indicates a relatively low and stable publication rate from 2000 to around 2016, with yearly outputs ranging between 0 and 50 documents. A noticeable upward trend begins in 2017, showing a significant surge in publications, particularly from 2018 onward. This rapid growth peaks in 2021 with over 170

documents published, reflecting heightened research interest in this field. Although there is a slight dip in 2022, the overall publication rate remains high, indicating sustained scholarly engagement. This pattern suggests increasing global recognition of the importance of ethical and character education, possibly driven by contemporary societal challenges and the integration of emerging themes such as technology and sustainability.

### Documents by affiliation

Compare the document counts for up to 15 affiliations.

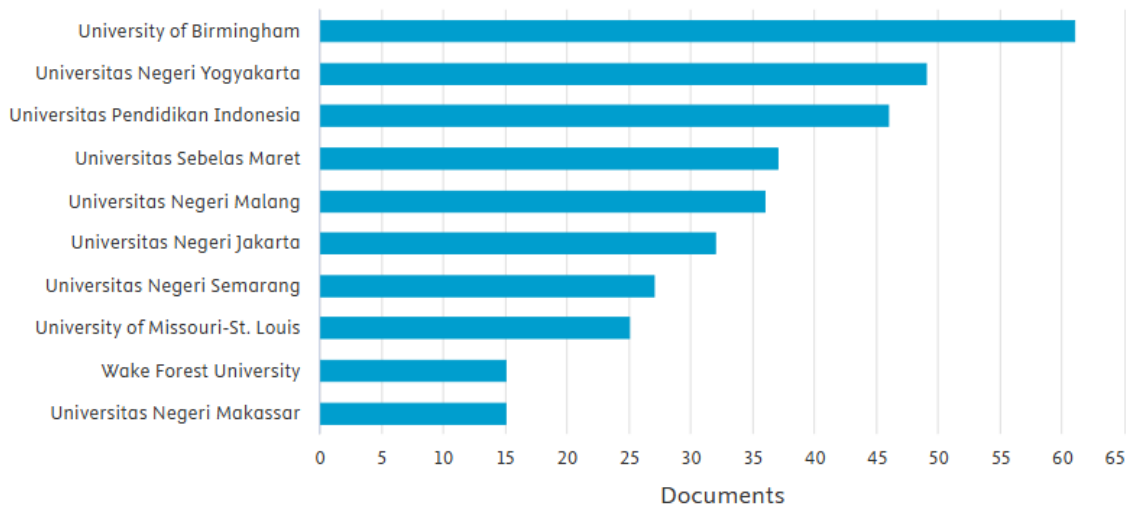


Figure 2. Documents by Affiliations

Source: Scopus, 2024

The bar chart displays the number of documents published on character education and ethical development by various academic affiliations. The University of Birmingham leads with the highest number of publications, exceeding 60 documents, indicating its significant contribution to the field. It is followed by Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta and Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, both of which have produced over 50 documents, showcasing strong scholarly activity in Indonesia. Other prominent Indonesian universities, such as Universitas Sebelas Maret, Universitas Negeri Malang, and

Universitas Negeri Jakarta, also feature prominently, contributing between 35 and 45 documents each. Internationally, the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Wake Forest University are notable contributors, alongside Universitas Negeri Makassar, which rounds out the list with around 25 documents. The dominance of Indonesian institutions highlights their active engagement in this research domain, while the presence of universities from the UK and the US underscores the global interest in character education.

4.2 Citation Analysis

Table 1. Top Cited Research

Citations	Authors and year	Title
280	[18]	Aristotelian character education
192	[19]	Moral education and character education: Their relationship and roles in citizenship education
131	[20]	Eleven principles of effective character education
127	[21]	Research Based Character Education
124	[22]	The meaning of role modelling in moral and character education
89	[23]	Evaluation of the all stars character education and problem behavior prevention program: Effects on mediator and outcome variables for middle school students
74	[24]	From emotional and psychological well-being to character education: Challenging policy discourses of behavioural science and 'vulnerability'
67	[25]	The re-emergence of character education in British education policy
66	[26]	Exploring the implementation of local wisdom-based character education among indonesian higher education students
66	[27]	Politics of Character Education

Source: Scopus, 2024

4.3 Keyword Co-Occurrence Network

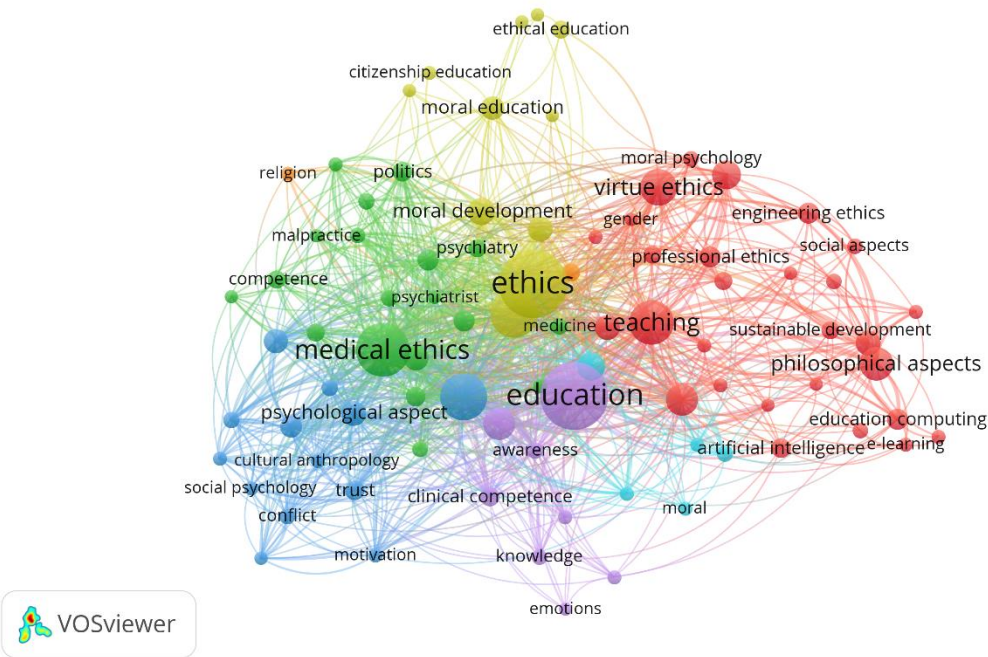


Figure 3. Network Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2024

The visualization presents a bibliometric network map, highlighting the relationships between key terms and themes in the domain of character education and

ethical development. The map consists of multiple clusters represented by nodes and connecting lines. Each node corresponds to a specific keyword or concept, with the size of

the node indicating its relative frequency or importance in the dataset. The proximity of nodes reflects their co-occurrence in the literature, with closer nodes representing concepts that frequently appear together. The connecting lines signify the strength of the relationships, where thicker lines denote stronger associations.

Several distinct clusters can be identified, each representing a thematic grouping within the literature. The green cluster focuses on "medical ethics" and related terms such as "clinical competence," "trust," and "psychological aspects," suggesting significant research attention to ethical education in medical and healthcare contexts. The red cluster centers on "teaching," "virtue ethics," and "philosophical aspects," highlighting discussions about pedagogical strategies and the theoretical foundations of ethics in education. The yellow cluster includes "moral education" and "citizenship education," indicating a focus on broader societal and political implications of character education.

The visualization reveals strong interdisciplinary connections between fields, particularly between education, medicine, philosophy, and social sciences. For example,

terms like "artificial intelligence" and "e-learning" in the light blue cluster suggest emerging intersections between ethics and technology. This reflects a growing trend in integrating digital tools into character education. Additionally, connections between "politics," "religion," and "moral development" in the green and yellow clusters point to the interplay between cultural, religious, and political factors in shaping ethical education frameworks.

The network also highlights potential gaps and underexplored areas. For instance, while "moral education" and "virtue ethics" appear central, their connections to technology-related terms like "artificial intelligence" and "e-learning" are less robust, suggesting an opportunity to expand research into how digital environments influence ethical development. Similarly, the relatively smaller size of nodes such as "gender" and "social aspects" indicates that these topics may not yet be as extensively covered in the literature, presenting avenues for future research. This map provides a comprehensive overview of the field while underscoring the necessity for interdisciplinary exploration and addressing emerging challenges in ethical education.

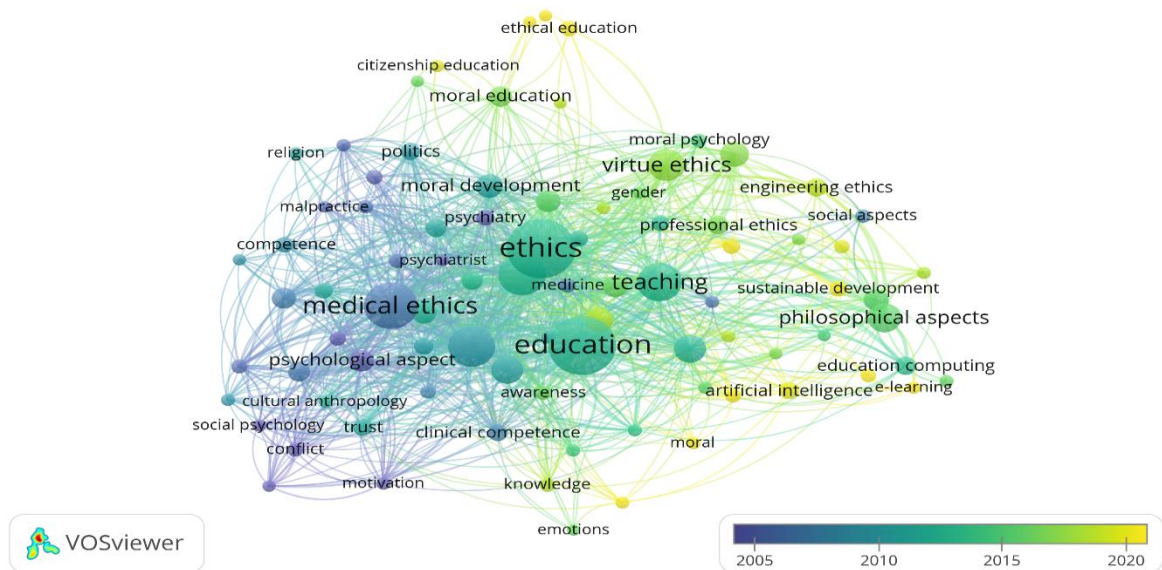


Figure 4. Overlay Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2024



This bibliometric visualization introduces a temporal dimension to the relationships among key terms, represented by a gradient color scale from blue (older publications, circa 2005) to yellow (recent publications, circa 2020). Central terms such as "ethics," "education," and "teaching" dominate the map, indicating sustained interest over time. However, newer topics like "artificial intelligence," "e-learning," and "sustainable development" are marked in yellow, reflecting the growing prominence of these emerging themes in recent years. This shift highlights how advancements in technology and global challenges have influenced the evolution of ethical and character education discourse.

The visualization reveals a clear distinction between traditional themes and emerging research areas. Established topics such as "medical ethics," "psychological aspects," and "moral education" are situated in clusters shaded predominantly in blue and green, indicating their foundational role in the literature. In contrast, concepts like "artificial intelligence," "education computing," and "sustainable development," appearing in shades closer to yellow, suggest an increasing

focus on integrating technological innovations and addressing contemporary ethical challenges within educational frameworks. This demonstrates how the field has expanded to incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives, particularly in response to digital transformation and sustainability concerns.

The map provides insights into the trajectory of research within character education and ethics, showing how traditional and emerging themes intersect. For instance, the connection between "philosophical aspects" and "artificial intelligence" signifies growing interest in addressing ethical implications of AI in education. Meanwhile, terms like "moral development" and "citizenship education," rooted in traditional ethical discourse, remain integral but show potential for integration with modern pedagogical tools. The visualization emphasizes the need for further exploration of how technology and ethics intersect in character education, suggesting that future research may benefit from focusing on these underexplored intersections.

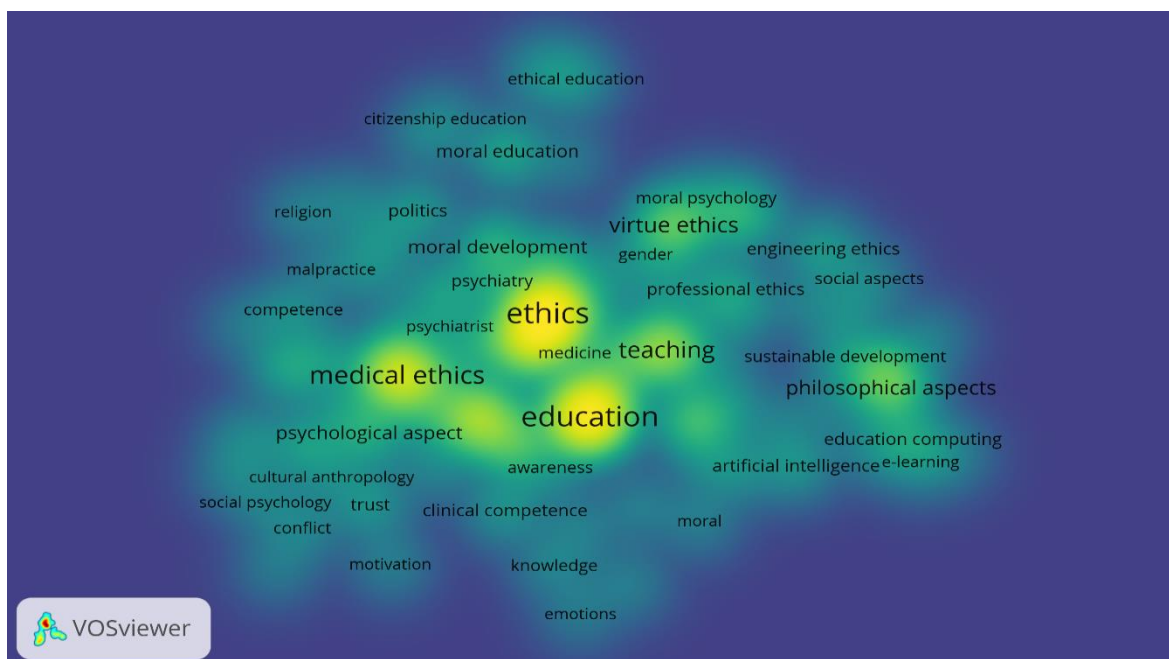


Figure 5. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis, 2024



This heatmap visualization highlights the intensity of research focus on various themes in character education and ethical development. Central terms such as "ethics," "education," and "teaching" appear in the brightest yellow areas, indicating their dominant role as the most frequently studied and interconnected topics in the literature. These terms serve as foundational pillars in the discourse surrounding ethical education. Other prominent areas include "medical ethics," "virtue ethics," and "philosophical aspects," which are moderately bright, reflecting their substantial yet slightly less central presence in scholarly discussions. The concentration of brightness in the center suggests that these core topics form the basis of most research, while the outer regions, with dimmer colors, represent more peripheral or emerging areas of interest.

The dimmer green areas on the heatmap, such as "artificial intelligence," "e-learning," and "sustainable development," indicate topics that are emerging but not yet as extensively explored. These terms, located on the fringes of the central nodes, signify growing interest in how contemporary issues like technology and sustainability intersect with ethical education. Similarly, topics such as "citizenship education" and "social psychology," which appear less brightly highlighted, suggest that while they are recognized as relevant, they might be underrepresented in the current body of literature. This visualization underscores the opportunity for further research to bridge these emerging areas with the more established core themes, enriching the field's scope and addressing modern challenges in character education.

#### 4.4 Co-Authorship Network

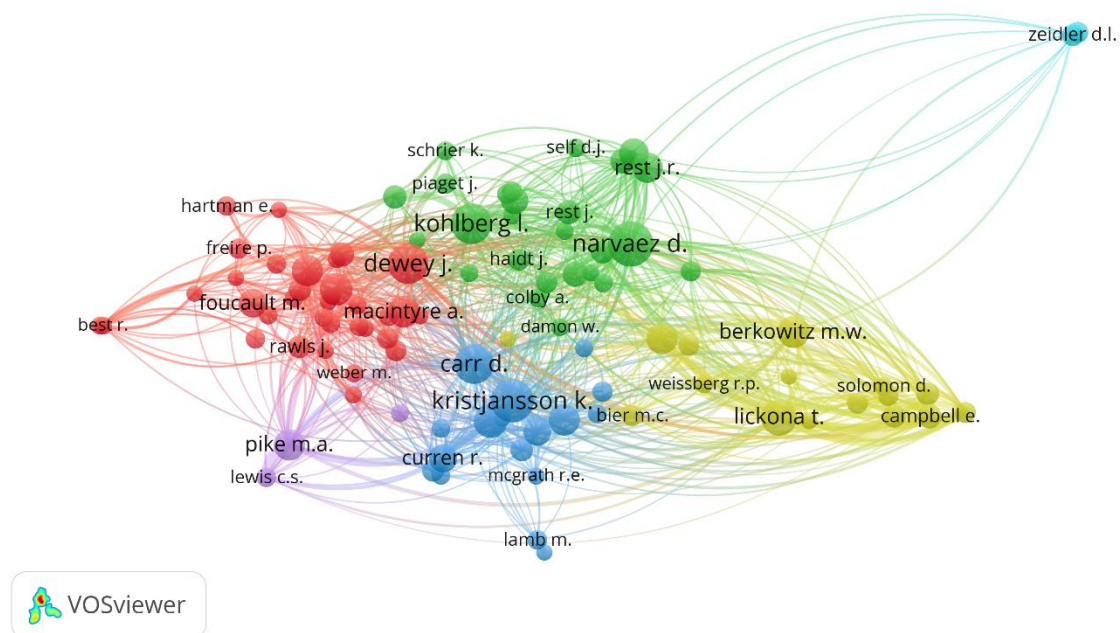


Figure 6. Author Collaboration Visualization

Source: Data Analysis, 2024

This co-authorship and citation network visualization maps the key contributors to research on character education and ethical development, with nodes representing authors and lines

denoting collaboration or citation relationships. Larger nodes, such as those for "Kohlberg," "Dewey," "MacIntyre," and "Narvaez," indicate highly influential authors frequently cited or central to discussions in

the field. The clusters, color-coded for thematic grouping, suggest distinct research traditions or areas of focus: the red cluster highlights foundational philosophical contributors like Dewey and MacIntyre, while the green cluster emphasizes moral psychology, with figures such as Kohlberg and Narvaez leading studies on moral development. The yellow cluster includes practitioners like Berkowitz and Lickona,

focusing on applied character education programs. Notably, the isolated node for Zeidler (blue-green) reflects a more specialized focus, possibly on an emerging or niche area within the broader field. This visualization underscores the interdisciplinary nature of character education research, bridging philosophy, psychology, and applied pedagogy.

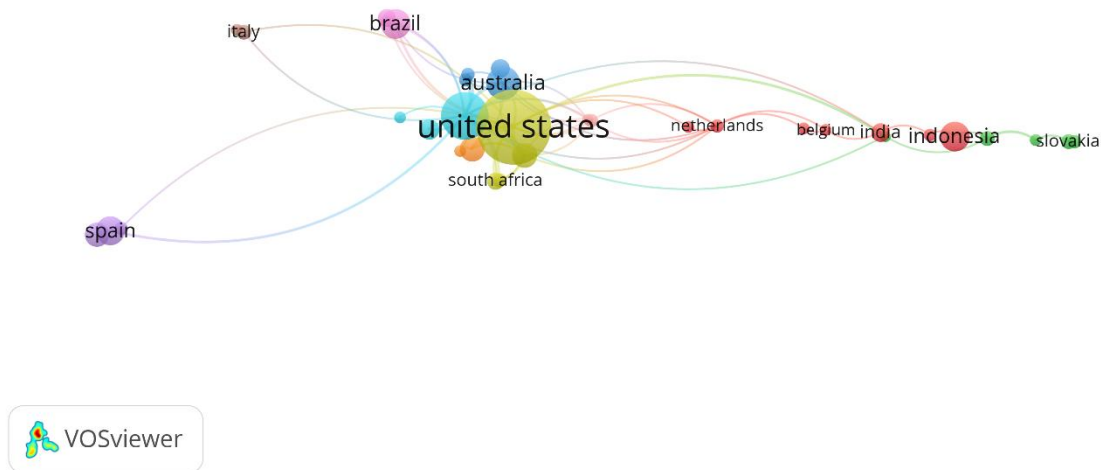


Figure 7. Country Collaboration Visualization

Source: Data Analysis, 2024

This visualization represents the network of countries contributing to research on character education and ethical development, with the size of the nodes reflecting the volume of research output and the lines indicating collaborative relationships between countries. The United States emerges as the central hub with the largest node, signifying its dominant role in the field and extensive international collaborations. Countries like Australia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom have strong links to the U.S., reflecting frequent co-authorships and shared research interests. Emerging contributors such as India, Indonesia, and Slovakia are also connected to the global

network, indicating growing participation from diverse regions. Peripheral nodes like Spain, Brazil, and South Africa highlight their contributions but with fewer collaborative ties compared to the central players. This visualization underscores the global yet uneven distribution of research, with significant opportunities for expanding collaborations in underrepresented regions.

## Discussion

### 1. Core Themes and Intellectual Foundations

The results of the bibliometric analysis highlight the centrality of "ethics," "education," and "teaching" as foundational

pillars in the field of character education. These terms are strongly interconnected, reflecting the enduring focus on understanding how ethical principles can be effectively integrated into educational practices. Foundational figures such as Kohlberg, Dewey, and Lickona, identified in the co-authorship network, underscore the intellectual lineage of the field. Kohlberg's stages of moral development and Dewey's pragmatist philosophy have laid the groundwork for theoretical models and pedagogical strategies that continue to influence contemporary research [5], [28].

The prominence of moral psychology within the thematic clusters also indicates a significant emphasis on understanding the cognitive and emotional processes that underpin ethical decision-making and behavior. For example, terms such as "virtue ethics," "moral development," and "moral psychology" suggest that the field remains deeply rooted in psychological and philosophical inquiries. This is further evidenced by the clustering of influential authors such as [11], who have advanced our understanding of the relationship between moral reasoning, social-emotional learning, and ethical behavior in educational settings.

## **2. Emerging Trends and Innovations**

The heatmap and temporal visualization underscore the dynamic evolution of the field, with emerging areas such as "artificial intelligence," "e-learning," and "sustainable development" gaining prominence in recent years. This reflects the growing recognition of how technological advancements and global challenges shape the context of ethical education. The integration of digital tools, for instance, has opened new avenues for engaging students in ethical dilemmas through simulations, digital storytelling, and gamification. However, the relatively small nodes and peripheral positioning of these terms indicate that these areas remain underexplored. Future research could investigate the potential of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in

fostering ethical awareness and decision-making, particularly among digitally native generations.

The inclusion of "sustainable development" within the thematic network also suggests an increasing alignment of character education with global imperatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The emphasis on citizenship education and ethical education indicates a shift towards preparing students to address complex global issues such as climate change, social justice, and economic inequality. This trend aligns with the broader educational aim of cultivating not only individual character but also social responsibility and global citizenship.

## **3. Geographic and Cultural Contributions**

The country collaboration network reveals the dominance of the United States as a central hub in the research landscape, with significant contributions from countries like Australia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. This geographic concentration highlights the disproportionate influence of Western perspectives on character education, which may not fully capture the diversity of cultural and contextual approaches to ethics. For example, collectivist cultures in Asia may emphasize community-oriented values and interdependence, while individualist cultures in the West may prioritize autonomy and personal moral reasoning [21].

Emerging contributors such as India and Indonesia highlight the growing interest in character education within developing regions, where socio-economic and cultural factors uniquely shape educational priorities. Future research should seek to amplify these diverse voices, exploring how cultural norms, religious traditions, and socio-political contexts influence ethical development. Comparative studies could provide valuable insights into how different educational systems approach the integration of character education, offering lessons that could be adapted across contexts.

#### 4. Interdisciplinary Connections

The co-authorship network and thematic clusters reveal the interdisciplinary nature of character education, drawing on fields such as psychology, philosophy, education, and social sciences. The connections between terms such as "medical ethics," "engineering ethics," and "social aspects" reflect the application of ethical principles across professional and academic domains. For instance, medical ethics emphasizes clinical competence and trust, while engineering ethics addresses the ethical implications of technological innovations. This interdisciplinary breadth underscores the relevance of character education beyond traditional K-12 or higher education settings, extending into professional training and workplace ethics. As ethical dilemmas become increasingly complex in a globalized and technologically advanced world, the integration of character education into diverse domains is imperative. Future research could explore how interdisciplinary collaborations can enrich ethical education, drawing on best practices and insights from multiple fields.

#### 5. Challenges and Gaps

Despite the progress in the field, the bibliometric analysis also reveals several gaps and challenges that warrant attention. One major limitation is the underrepresentation of longitudinal studies that track the long-term impact of character education programs on students' ethical development. While numerous studies document short-term improvements in behavior or moral reasoning, there is a lack of evidence on whether these effects persist over time and translate into ethical behavior in adulthood [4]. Another challenge is the variability in the implementation and evaluation of character education programs. The co-occurrence of terms such as "teaching," "awareness," and "competence" suggests an ongoing focus on pedagogical practices, but the effectiveness of these practices often depends on contextual factors such as school culture, teacher training, and community involvement. Moreover, the alignment of character

education with standardized curricula and assessment frameworks remains inconsistent, particularly in regions where academic performance is prioritized over holistic development. The role of technology, while promising, also raises ethical concerns, such as data privacy, digital divides, and the potential for misuse of artificial intelligence in educational settings. Future research should address these challenges, exploring how digital tools can be ethically designed and implemented to support character education without exacerbating inequalities or compromising students' autonomy.

#### 6. Future Directions

Based on the findings, several future research directions can be proposed to advance the field of character education and ethical development:

- 1) Technology Integration

Research should investigate how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and gamification can enhance character education. This includes exploring the ethical implications of these technologies and developing guidelines for their responsible use in educational contexts.

- 2) Cultural Diversity

Comparative studies should examine how character education is conceptualized and implemented across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. This would provide a more holistic understanding of the field and inform the development of culturally sensitive and inclusive programs.

- 3) Longitudinal Impact

Long-term studies are needed to assess the durability of character education outcomes and their influence on students' ethical behavior in adulthood. This would provide robust evidence

to guide the design and evaluation of programs.

- 4) Interdisciplinary Collaboration  
Future research should foster collaborations between disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, education, and technology, leveraging their unique perspectives to address complex ethical challenges in education and society.
- 5) Policy Alignment  
Studies should explore how character education can be better integrated into educational policies and standards, ensuring its alignment with broader goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global citizenship education.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of the scholarly landscape surrounding character education and ethical development, shedding light on its theoretical foundations, evolving trends, and interdisciplinary connections. The findings underscore the centrality of ethics, teaching, and moral development in the discourse, while highlighting emerging themes such as the integration of technology and sustainable development. Despite significant advancements, challenges such as the variability in program implementation, the underrepresentation of diverse cultural perspectives, and the limited focus on long-term outcomes persist. As the field evolves, future research must address these gaps, emphasizing longitudinal impact, culturally inclusive practices, and the ethical integration of technological tools. By doing so, character education can remain a vital component of preparing students to navigate the ethical complexities of an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

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