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Reconstructing character education through the *Dharma–Prema* curriculum: A perspective on education policy

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study is motivated by structural problems in the implementation of character education in Indonesia, which tends to be normative and instructional in nature and has not yet deeply addressed the dimension of value internalization. A number of studies indicate that the dominant approach to character education remains oriented toward formal compliance, making it less effective in fostering students' ethical and affective awareness. In this context, this study aims to reconstruct character education through the *Dharma-Prema*-Based Love Curriculum as a form of policy intervention that integrates the dimensions of moral duty (*Dharma*) and universal love (*Prema*) within a transformative educational framework. **Methods**: This study employs a qualitative approach using an educational policy analysis design and a descriptive-analytical approach. Data collection techniques involved documentary analysis and phased in-depth interviews, while data analysis was conducted through data reduction, thematic categorization, interpretation of meaning, and the drawing of analytical conclusions, emphasizing the interrelationship between policy issues, curriculum design, and their strategic implications. **Findings:** The research findings indicate that the *Dharma-Prema*-Based Love Curriculum possesses the conceptual and practical capacity to address the reductionism of character education by holistically integrating cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. This model strengthens the internalization of values through reflective experiences, ethical practices, and empathetic social relationships, thereby contributing to sustainable character development. Analytically, the research results indicate that the synthesis between *Dharma* and *Prema* provides a stronger normative and practical foundation compared to administrative and fragmentary policy approaches. **Conclusion**: The study's conclusion affirms that the reconstruction of character education through the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum offers a new strategic direction in Indonesia's educational policy-one that is more integrative, reflective, and contextual, in supporting human resource development toward Indonesia Emas 2045. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The novelty/originality of this article lies in the development of a curriculum model based on the philosophical synthesis of *Dharma–Prema* as an educational character policy intervention that systematically connects conceptual, normative, and implementational dimensionsm an approach that has not been extensively studied within the context of national education policy.

KEYWORDS: character education; love curriculum; *Dharma–Prema*; education policy.

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1. Introduction

Character education is one of the strategic issues in Indonesia's human resource development, particularly in the context of advancing toward the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045. Various national education policies over the past two decades have explicitly positioned character building as a fundamental goal of education, whether through religious education, the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, or the agenda of religious moderation. However, various studies and policy reports indicate that the implementation of character education at the practical level still faces fundamental challenges, particularly a tendency toward normative-cognitive, administrative, and fragmented approaches. Moral values are often taught as declarative knowledge, without adequate pedagogical mechanisms to ensure the internalization of these values into students' actual behavior.

This gap between moral knowledge and behavioral practice is reflected in the rise of various social issues within educational settings, such as bullying, intolerance, weak digital ethics, and a decline in the social and ecological sensitivity of the younger generation. Several studies confirm that the failure of character education does not lie in the absence of values in the curriculum, but rather in the weakness of value-based learning designs capable of addressing the affective and practical dimensions of students' lives (Eksantoso, 2025). In this context, religious education including Hindu Religious Education, is called upon to undergo a paradigm shift so as not to be trapped in the mere transmission of normative teachings, but to transform into a space for character formation that is dynamic, contextual, and relevant to the challenges of the times. Despite the proliferation of character education policies, a critical question remains insufficiently addressed: why do value-rich curricula consistently fail to produce value-driven behavior? This paradox reveals a deeper epistemological problem, character education in Indonesia is constructed as a knowledge transmission system rather than a lived ethical formation process. Consequently, the policy architecture itself may be structurally incompatible with the goal it seeks to achieve.

Previous studies on religion-based character education have tended to emphasize doctrinal aspects, ritual compliance, or the reinforcement of religious identity, with relatively limited attention to the integration of universal values such as empathy, compassion, and social-ecological responsibility (Arti et al., 2024; Sudarsana & Andriyani, 2024). On the other hand, the literature on humanistic education and social-emotional learning asserts that sustainable character development requires reflective, dialogic learning experiences oriented toward the internalization of values within real social relationships (Okur-Berberoglu, 2024; Dalrymple, 2024). It is this separation between the discourse of religious education and the approach of transformative character education that constitutes a conceptual gap in previous studies.

This article positions itself at the intersection of this gap by examining the *Dharma-Prema*-Based Love Curriculum as a character education policy intervention rooted in Hindu teachings, yet formulated within the framework of universal values and public policy. *Dharma* is understood as a principle of moral duty and cosmic ethics that guides human actions to align with justice, order, and social responsibility (Nakhare, 2025), while *Prema* is interpreted as universal love that fosters empathy, compassion, and solidarity across identities. The integration of these two concepts offers a character education approach that emphasizes not only compliance with norms but also the development of students' moral consciousness and inner sensitivity (Das & Sarkar, 2025).

The urgency of addressing this theme grows stronger when linked to the challenges of human development in Indonesia amid technological disruption, the globalization of values, and ecological crises. Various policy studies indicate that technological advancement not balanced by moral maturity has the potential to exacerbate social conflict, identity polarization, and the dehumanization of human relationships, particularly in digital spaces (Aberšek et al., 2023; Hidayah, 2025). From a public policy perspective, the failure to build a strong character foundation from an early age risks turning Indonesia's demographic dividend into a long-term social burden. Therefore, a values-based curriculum model that

is preventive, formative, and sustainable is needed, not merely reactive to emerging social phenomena.

The *Dharma-Prema*-Based Love Curriculum is offered as a strategic response to this situation. Unlike partial character education approaches, this curriculum is designed holistically by integrating spiritual, social, personal, digital, and ecological dimensions into a single educational policy framework. The uniqueness of this approach lies in its position not only as a pedagogical innovation but also as a policy instrument aligned with the national agenda of character strengthening, religious moderation, and sustainable development. Thus, this study occupies an original position in the literature, as it explicitly links Hindu religious education, character education, and public policy analysis within a cohesive conceptual framework.

The primary objective of this article is to analyze the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum as a model for character education policy intervention in Indonesia, as well as to assess its relevance in supporting the achievement of the Indonesia Emas 2045 vision. Specifically, this article aims to: identify structural problems in character education within national education policy; explain the philosophical and conceptual foundations of the *Dharma-Prema* Curriculum; and map the strategic contributions of this curriculum in fostering students' character to be humanistic, moderate, and sustainable. Thus, this article is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Hindu religious education and national character education.

In addressing these issues, this article employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with an educational policy analysis perspective. The methods used include a critical review of national education policy documents, a literature review on character education, religious moderation, and humanistic education, as well as a conceptual analysis of the design of the *Dharma-Prema*-Based Love Curriculum. This approach allows the author to situate the curriculum within a broader policy context while examining its transformative potential for character education practices in Indonesia.

Through this approach, this article seeks to demonstrate that the *Dharma-Prema*-Based Love Curriculum is not merely a normative discourse but a relevant, applicable, and effective policy proposal in addressing contemporary challenges in character education. By placing love and moral duty at the core of education, this curriculum has the potential to strengthen the character foundations of Indonesia's youth so that they are not only intellectually intelligent but also morally, socially, and ecologically mature.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design using a critical educational policy analysis approach to examine the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum as a character education policy intervention in Indonesia. Rather than treating policy as a neutral regulatory framework, this study positions educational policy as a site of value construction, ideological negotiation, and pedagogical translation. Accordingly, the analysis focuses not only on descriptive interpretation but also on identifying structural inconsistencies, underlying assumptions, and normative implications within character education policy. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical strategy with an interpretive orientation, emphasizing conceptual coherence, policy relevance, and the transformative potential of values-based curriculum design within the broader agenda of human resource development toward Indonesia Emas 2045. The study was conducted over a six-month period, from May to October 2025, allowing for iterative data collection, validation, and analytical refinement. Data sources consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with purposively selected key informants, including curriculum designers, Hindu Religious Education practitioners, administrators of Hindu educational institutions, and policymakers or stakeholders involved in character education initiatives.

The purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure the selection of informants with substantive expertise and direct engagement in policy implementation and curriculum

development. Secondary data were collected from a range of authoritative sources, including national education policy documents, curriculum frameworks, instructional modules, and official reports from relevant government institutions. These documents were analyzed to trace policy narratives, identify value orientations, and examine the alignment between policy design and pedagogical practice. The research instruments included semi-structured interview protocols, document analysis matrices, and the researcher's reflective field notes. Data collection was conducted in multiple phases to ensure depth, triangulation, and contextual sensitivity. Interviews were carried out iteratively, allowing emerging themes to inform subsequent data collection.

Data analysis followed a qualitative analytical framework consisting of data reduction, thematic coding, interpretive analysis, and the development of analytical propositions. The analysis emphasized the interrelationship between policy structures, curriculum design, and character formation processes. To enhance analytical rigor, the study applied triangulation across data sources and employed iterative interpretation to ensure consistency and conceptual validity. Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to generate a critical and integrative understanding of how the *Dharma-Prema*-Based Love Curriculum operates not only as a pedagogical model but also as a systemic policy intervention capable of addressing structural limitations in character education.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Structural problems in character education within national education policy

The research findings indicate that the primary issues in character education in Indonesia are structural and paradigmatic in nature, rather than merely technical implementation issues. An analysis of various national education policy documents reveals that character building has become a strong normative agenda, whether in the national curriculum, religious education, or student character-building programs. However, the presence of values in policy does not yet correlate directly with the effectiveness of character formation at the practical level. This finding indicates a fundamental gap between the design of value-based policies and the pedagogical mechanisms for internalizing those values.

Empirically, results from interviews with teachers and administrators of Hindu educational institutions indicate that character education is still understood as a set of values that must be "taught," rather than as a lived experience that must be "lived." Values such as honesty, empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility are generally conveyed through lectures, written assignments, or administrative attitude assessments. This approach produces declarative moral knowledge but is weak in fostering students' ethical awareness and behavioral consistency. This situation aligns with critiques of cognitive and normative character education models, which tend to produce moral knowing without moral action (Purwati et al., 2024; Chu & Vu, 2022). Structural issues in character education within national education policy are outlined in the following table.

Table 1. Structural problems in character education within national education policy

Structural problems	Empirical findings	Data sources	Policy implications
Character education is predominantly normative-cognitive	Character values are delivered through memorization and lecturing, with limited reflection and social practice	Interviews with teachers and school administrators	Values are not internalized into actual behavior
Fragmentation between values and learning processes	Character education is implemented separately from subject learning and school culture	Curriculum document analysis	Character education becomes symbolic rather than substantive
Weak digital ethics	Digital literacy is primarily technical, lacking ethical and empathetic dimensions	Observation of classroom practices	Students are vulnerable to

			aggressive online behavior
Normative-doctrinal religious education	Emphasis on doctrinal compliance with limited dialogical engagement and inter-identity empathy	Interviews with religious education practitioners	Religious moderation is not optimally developed
Informative ecological education	Environmental knowledge is not translated into behavioral change	Documentation of school programs	Ecological awareness remains unsustainable

Table 1 summarizes the main findings of the study regarding structural problems in character education in Indonesia. The data indicate that the issue with character education does not lie in the absence of values in policy, but rather in the weakness of pedagogical design and policies capable of ensuring the internalization of values. This table clarifies the policy gap between the objectives of character education policies and learning practices in educational institutions, which forms the basis for the argument that policy intervention is needed through the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum.

The findings of this study reveal that the challenges of character education in Indonesia are not merely technical or implementation-related, but fundamentally structural and paradigmatic. Although character building has been consistently positioned as a central objective within national education policy through initiatives such as religious education, the Pancasila Student Profile, and religious moderation programs the operationalization of these values remains weak. This indicates a systemic contradiction: while values are normatively emphasized at the policy level, the pedagogical design fails to support their internalization in practice.

This contradiction is rooted in the dominance of a normative-cognitive paradigm, in which character education is treated primarily as the transmission of moral knowledge rather than as a process of ethical formation (Beaton et al., 2021). Empirical findings from interviews with teachers and administrators indicate that character values are commonly delivered through lectures, written assignments, and administrative assessments. Such approaches may produce declarative understanding of values, but they lack the experiential and reflective dimensions necessary for shaping moral awareness and behavioral consistency. In this sense, character education operates within a compliance-oriented framework, where students are expected to know values without being structurally supported to live them.

From a policy perspective, this condition reflects a deeper design failure. Character education is positioned as a supplementary component rather than as an organizing principle of the educational system. As a result, values remain fragmented detached from subject learning, school culture, and social practice. This fragmentation weakens the transformative potential of character education, reducing it to symbolic affirmation rather than substantive formation (Iqbal et al., 2024; Merritt et al., 2020). The findings suggest that the issue is not the absence of values, but the absence of a coherent policy architecture capable of integrating values into lived educational experiences.

A critical comparison with existing educational models further clarifies this structural gap. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), for instance, emphasizes affective competencies such as empathy and self-regulation, yet often lacks a clear ethical foundation that anchors these competencies within a broader moral framework. Conversely, religious education provides strong normative guidance but frequently remains confined to doctrinal transmission, with limited engagement in dialogical and experiential learning. The separation between ethical regulation and affective internalization results in partial and ineffective character formation (Isser et al., 2024; Ardiani, Pitriani & Jero, 2025). This study argues that the failure of character education lies precisely in this disconnection.

Moreover, the study identifies that current character education practices inadequately address emerging ethical domains, particularly in digital and ecological contexts. Digital literacy programs tend to focus on technical skills while neglecting ethical reflection, leaving students unprepared to navigate moral dilemmas in online environments. Similarly,

environmental education is often delivered as informational content without cultivating a sense of moral responsibility toward nature (Costa et al., 2024). These findings indicate that character education has not yet evolved to respond to the complexity of contemporary social challenges, where ethical decision-making is increasingly situated within digital and ecological systems.

Furthermore, this study also found weaknesses in character education's response to the ecological crisis. Environmental education in schools is generally informative and procedural, lacking adequate integration of moral and spiritual values. Students understand environmental issues conceptually but do not demonstrate sustainable behavioral changes. These findings reinforce critiques of environmental education that is not grounded in the intrinsic value of nature, thereby failing to build long-term ecological responsibility. Within the framework of UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), education should foster intergenerational awareness and sustainability ethics, not merely technical knowledge (Bonilla-Jurado et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that the fragmentation between values, policies, and learning practices hinders the realization of transformative character education. Character education has not yet been understood as a process of simultaneously changing ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Yet, according to Transformative Learning Theory, meaningful learning occurs when learners experience moral disorientation, critical reflection, and the reconstruction of life perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). The absence of a transformative approach causes character education to remain at the level of formality.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the problems of character education in Indonesia are multidimensional and demand policy interventions that go beyond conventional curriculum approaches. A character education model is needed that can systematically integrate humanistic, social-emotional, religious moderation, global competencies, ecological sustainability, and moral transformation dimensions. It is within this context that the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum is positioned as a relevant and strategic policy response, as it stands at the intersection of seven conceptual models of education and policy: Humanistic Education, Social and Emotional Learning, OECD Global Competence, Education for Sustainable Development, Character and Values-Based Education, Moderation-Based Religious Education, and Transformative Learning. The integration of these seven models provides a strong theoretical foundation for the development of holistic, contextual, and sustainable character education.

3.2 The philosophical foundation of the Dharma-Prema-based love curriculum in character education

The findings of this study indicate that the primary strength of the *Dharma–Prema* Based Love Curriculum lies in its coherent and integrative philosophical foundation, which reconfigures character education as a synthesis of ethical orientation and affective internalization. Rather than treating values as external norms to be transmitted or emotional dispositions to be cultivated in isolation, this framework positions values as lived ethical commitments formed through the interplay between moral consciousness and relational experience (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2022). In this sense, *Dharma–Prema* operates not merely as a cultural or religious construct, but as a normative-epistemic framework for character formation.

At the core of this framework is the concept of *Dharma*, which is interpreted not as rigid moral prescription, but as a dynamic ethical compass guiding human action toward justice, balance, and social responsibility. Empirical findings suggest that when *Dharma* is framed as an interpretive and reflective principle, students are able to engage in ethical reasoning rather than passive compliance. This shifts character education from rule-following toward moral agency, where individuals actively negotiate ethical decisions within complex social contexts (Zembylas, 2023; Astawa et al., 2025). Such an approach challenges dominant normative models that reduce morality to behavioral conformity.

Complementing this, *Prema* is conceptualized as an affective force that enables the internalization and enactment of ethical values. Unlike conventional emotional education frameworks that treat empathy as a psychological skill, *Prema* situates empathy within a moral relationship, transforming it into a responsibility toward others and the broader social-ecological environment (Zilva, 2023; Jamil et al., 2023). The findings indicate that this affective dimension plays a critical role in translating moral understanding into ethical action, thereby addressing a key limitation of cognition-based character education models.

The integration of *Dharma* and *Prema* produces a dual-axis framework that bridges a long-standing divide in character education: the separation between ethical regulation and emotional engagement. Existing approaches tend to privilege one dimension over the other, either emphasizing normative discipline without empathy, or promoting emotional awareness without a stable ethical foundation. This imbalance often results in fragmented character formation (Andrews, 2021). In contrast, the *Dharma–Prema* framework establishes a reciprocal relationship between moral reasoning and compassionate action, enabling values to be simultaneously understood, felt, and practiced.

From a comparative perspective, this integrative model offers a conceptual advancement beyond several dominant frameworks. While the Humanistic Education Model emphasizes holistic development, it often lacks a clearly articulated ethical structure guiding value orientation (Khongsankham et al., 2024). Similarly, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) provides robust tools for emotional development but does not consistently anchor these competencies within a normative ethical system. Conversely, traditional religious education offers strong moral doctrines but frequently remains confined to textual transmission and ritual compliance. The *Dharma–Prema* framework addresses these limitations by synthesizing ethical clarity and affective depth within a unified pedagogical philosophy.

Furthermore, the philosophical foundation of this curriculum demonstrates strong alignment with the Moderation-Based Religious Education Model, particularly in its emphasis on dialogue, inclusivity, and social harmony. By interpreting *Prema* as universal love that transcends identity boundaries, this framework repositions religious education as a source of ethical pluralism rather than identity exclusivism. This is particularly relevant in pluralistic societies, where character education must contribute to social cohesion rather than division.

The relevance of the *Dharma–Prema* philosophy also extends to global educational discourse. Within the OECD Global Competence Framework, the development of ethical global citizens requires not only intercultural understanding but also the capacity to act responsibly and empathetically. *Dharma-Prema* provides a value-based foundation that supports this goal, enabling students to engage with global challenges without losing their ethical grounding (Mezirow, 2000). Similarly, within the framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), the integration of *Dharma* (as responsibility) and *Prema* (as compassion) offers a powerful ethical basis for ecological awareness and sustainable behavior.

Importantly, the philosophical strength of this framework lies in its transformative potential. From the perspective of Transformative Learning Theory, meaningful character development occurs when individuals critically reflect on their assumptions and reconstruct their worldview. The *Dharma-Prema* framework facilitates this process by engaging students in reflective, relational, and value-oriented learning experiences. As a result, character formation is not limited to behavioral adjustment but involves a deeper reorientation of moral identity. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the *Dharma-Prema*-Based Love Curriculum provides a philosophically robust and conceptually integrative foundation for character education. By bridging ethical reasoning and affective engagement, this framework advances the discourse beyond fragmented models of character education and offers a coherent paradigm for transformative, humanistic, and sustainable value formation.

3.3 The Dharma-Prema curriculum design as a model for character education policy intervention

Research findings indicate that the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum is designed not merely as a pedagogical framework but as a systemic and operational model for character education policy intervention. Unlike previous character education approaches, which tended to be additive and fragmented, this curriculum is structured with a policy logic that emphasizes coherence among value objectives, instructional design, the roles of educational stakeholders, and evaluation mechanisms. These findings demonstrate that the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum seeks to bridge the gap between the normative discourse of character education policy and learning practices in educational institutions.

Structurally, this curriculum design employs the 4D model (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) as its primary architecture. The results of the curriculum document analysis and interviews with designers and practitioners indicate that the 4D model serves a dual function: as a pedagogical framework for values-based learning and as a policy instrument to ensure the sustainability of character internalization. This model emphasizes that character formation cannot be achieved instantly but rather through a structured, iterative, and gradual process.

The Discovery stage serves as the phase for value literacy and initial ethical awareness. At this stage, students are guided to recognize the concepts of *Dharma* and *Prema* through Hindu sacred texts, traditional values, and contemporary social issues. Research findings indicate that this approach is effective in preventing ahistorical and dogmatic understandings of values, as values are always linked to the students' lived realities. From the perspective of Character and Values-Based Education, the Discovery stage enables students to build meaningful value understanding, rather than merely memorizing moral concepts (Thuong & Untara, 2024).

The Dream stage serves as an orientation toward vision and moral imagination. Research findings indicate that this phase plays a strategic role in shifting character education from individual compliance toward collective consciousness. Students are encouraged to formulate a vision of humanity and society grounded in *Dharma* and *Prema*, so that values do not remain confined to personal awareness but become social aspirations. This finding aligns with the Humanistic Education Model, which positions education as a process of shaping students' life meanings and purposes (Sari & Ariyoga, 2023).

The Design stage constitutes the operational core of the curriculum and serves as the intersection between policy and learning practices.

At this stage, the *Dharma-Prema* values are translated into five pillars of love: *Bhakti* (love for God), *Vidyā* (love for knowledge), *Prakṛti–Ahimsa* (love for nature), *Ātman* (love for the self), and *Seva–Karma Yoga* (love for others). Research findings indicate that these five pillars function as domains of character policy, not merely as learning themes. Each pillar guides the design of instructional materials, learning strategies, character projects, and school culture.

Field findings show that the *Bhakti* and *Vidyā* pillars strengthen students' inner integrity and learning ethos, ensuring that religious education is not separated from intellectual development. The *Ātman* pillar contributes to strengthening self-awareness and mental health, which is increasingly relevant amid rising psychosocial pressures on adolescents. The *Seva–Karma Yoga* pillar fosters social engagement and empathy, while *Prakṛti–Ahimsa* serves as the ethical foundation for ecological education. The integration of these five pillars reflects a holistic approach aligned with *Social and Emotional Learning and Education for Sustainable Development* (Zilva, 2023).

The Destiny stage serves as a mechanism for institutionalizing and sustaining policies. Research findings indicate that this stage distinguishes the *Dharma-Prema* Curriculum from many character education programs that remain at the project phase. Destiny emphasizes character evaluation based on behavioral change, continuous reflection, and the strengthening of school culture. From the perspective of Transformative Learning Theory, this stage enables the values learned to become part of students' life orientation through a

process of continuous reflection and reconstruction of meaning (Mansir, 2022). The following table presents the findings of the *Dharma-Prema*-based love curriculum design.

Table 2. *Dharma–Prema*-based love curriculum design as a policy intervention model

4D Model Stage	Focus of Value Learning	Related Love Pillars	Forms of Implementation in Schools
Discovery	Value literacy and ethical awareness	*Dharma*	Reflection on sacred texts and contemporary social issues
Dream	Moral imagination and character visioning	*Prema*	Value-based discussions and formulation of personal and collective aspirations
Design	Operationalization of values into practice	Bhakti, Vidyā, *Ātman*, *Prakṛti–Ahimsa*, *Seva–Karma Yoga*	Thematic learning and character-based project implementation
Destiny	Institutionalization and sustainability of values	All pillars	Character evaluation and integration into school culture

Table 2 shows that the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum was systematically designed using the 4D model as the architectural framework for character education policy. Each stage has interconnected pedagogical and policy functions, ensuring that values do not remain merely at the normative level but are operationalized through learning, character projects, and school culture. This table reinforces the argument that the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum is policy-ready and suitable for sustainable implementation.

From an educational policy perspective, the design of the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum exhibits preventive and formative characteristics. This curriculum operates at the stage of early character formation, rather than as a reactive response to social problems that have already occurred. Research findings indicate that this approach has greater potential to yield long-term impacts compared to incidental character interventions. This aligns with OECD findings that investments in character education and global competencies yield high social returns in the long term (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2022).

Furthermore, the research results indicate that this curriculum design is compatible with the agenda of religious moderation. Hindu religious education is not positioned as a space for reinforcing exclusive identity but rather as a source of ethical values that foster harmony and social dialogue. The *Seva–Karma Yoga* pillar and the reflective approach within the 4D model reinforce students' tolerant and empathetic attitudes. These findings support the argument that socially experiential religious education is more effective in fostering social cohesion than normative-doctrinal approaches (Rumahuru & Talupun, 2021).

Furthermore, this study found that the design of the *Dharma-Prema* Curriculum facilitates the teacher's role as an agent of value policy. Teachers are no longer positioned as conveyors of normative teachings but as facilitators of moral reflection and ethical role models. This finding is significant because many character education programs fail due to reliance on individual teacher competencies without the support of a clear policy framework. The *Dharma-Prema* Curriculum provides a structure that enables teachers to fulfill this role consistently and measurably.

Thus, the results and discussion in this subsection confirm that the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum has a pedagogically sound and policy-robust design. The 4D model and the five pillars of love allow *Dharma–Prema* values to be operationalized systematically in learning, school culture, and character assessment. This design positions character education as the core of educational policy, not merely an add-on, thereby holding the potential to make a significant contribution to strengthening national character education toward Indonesia Emas 2045.

3.4 The impact of the Dharma–Prema curriculum on student character development

Research findings indicate that the implementation of the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum has a significant impact on student character development, particularly in the affective, social, and ethical dimensions areas that have historically been relatively neglected by conventional character education approaches. These impacts are not only evident at the level of individual attitudes but are also beginning to manifest in patterns of social relationships and learning culture within the educational environment.

Table 3. Impact of the *Dharma–Prema* curriculum on students' character development

Character Domain	Indicators of Change	Data Sources	Observed Forms of Impact
Self-awareness (*Ātman*)	Moral reflective capacity	Teacher interviews	Students demonstrate an increased ability to evaluate their actions critically
Social empathy (*Prema*)	Responses to conflict situations	Classroom observations	Conflict resolution becomes more dialogical and empathetic
Digital ethics	Online attitudes and behaviors	Observations and reflective records	Students exhibit more responsible behavior on social media
Ecological awareness (*Prakṛti–Ahimsa*)	Environmentally responsible behavior	Activity documentation	Increased active participation in environmental initiatives
Social solidarity (*Seva–Karma Yoga*)	Social engagement	Project portfolios	Enhanced participation in community service activities

Table 3 presents the main empirical findings regarding the impact of the *Dharma-Prema* Curriculum on students' character development. The observed changes are not limited to individual attitudes but are also reflected in patterns of social interaction and daily practices. This table supports the claim that the *Dharma-Prema* Curriculum is capable of producing formative and sustainable changes in character.

Affectively, students demonstrate increased self-awareness and moral reflection skills. Interviews with teachers and school administrators revealed that students have become better able to identify emotions, understand the motivations behind actions, and reflect on the moral consequences of the choices they make. The *Ātman* pillar of the curriculum plays a crucial role in fostering this self-awareness, as students are encouraged to recognize themselves as responsible moral agents. These findings align with the principles of Social and Emotional Learning, which emphasize self-awareness and emotional regulation as the foundation of ethical behavior (Khongsankham et al., 2024).

In the social dimension, this study found an increase in empathy and the quality of relationships among students. Teachers reported a decrease in interpersonal conflicts and an increased tendency for students to resolve differences through dialogue. The *Prema* and *Seva–Karma Yoga* pillars encourage students to view social relationships as spaces for practicing values, not merely functional interactions. These findings reinforce the view that empathy and social solidarity cannot be fostered through moral instruction alone, but through reflective and meaningful social experiences (Jamil et al., 2023).

Another notable impact is on the development of digital ethics. Results from observations and interviews indicate that students engaged in *Dharma-Prema*-based learning began to demonstrate more cautious and responsible attitudes toward the use of digital media. Students not only understood the rules for using technology but were also able to reflect on the social and moral impacts of online interactions. This finding is significant given that various studies indicate that failures in character education are often most evident in digital spaces, where anonymity weakens individual moral control (Surpi & Ardana, 2022). The integration of *Dharma* as a principle of moral responsibility and *Prema* as digital empathy transforms virtual spaces into an integral part of the educational ethical framework.

In the ecological dimension, the *Prakṛti–Ahimsa* pillar contributes to the development of a deeper environmental awareness. Students not only understand environmental issues conceptually but also begin to demonstrate behavioral changes, such as concern for cleanliness, waste reduction, and participation in school environmental activities. These findings indicate that environmental education grounded in values and spirituality is more likely to yield long-term behavioral changes compared to purely informative-procedural approaches.

From the perspective of Transformative Learning Theory, the impact of the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum can be understood as a process of shifting students' moral orientation. The structured value-reflection process within the 4D model enables students to experience moral dissonance, reflect on old assumptions, and build new perspectives that are more ethical and compassionate. Thus, the character changes that occur are not superficial or situational but rather formative and sustainable (Singer-Brodowski, 2023). The *Dharma–Prema* curriculum supports the development of ethical global citizens, as emphasized in the OECD Global Competence Framework. Students are trained to understand other perspectives, act responsibly, and make ethical decisions in both local and global contexts. The integration of local Hindu values with global competencies demonstrates that globalization need not erase cultural identity but can be enriched by local wisdom (Moyer & Sinclair, 2020). Within the framework of Education for Sustainable Development, this curriculum contributes to sustainable development by fostering ecological awareness and intergenerational responsibility. Education is not merely understood as a means of social mobility but as a mechanism for shaping responsible citizens committed to the sustainability of life. These findings affirm that character education grounded in spiritual values and ethics plays a key role in addressing the global environmental crisis (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022).

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum generates substantive and multidimensional impacts on student character development, particularly in domains that are often underdeveloped in conventional character education frameworks. These impacts are not limited to observable behavioral changes but extend to shifts in moral orientation, relational patterns, and learning culture within the educational environment.

At the individual level, the most significant transformation is observed in the development of self-awareness (*Ātman*) and reflective moral capacity. Interviews with teachers indicate that students increasingly demonstrate the ability to evaluate their actions, recognize emotional triggers, and consider the ethical implications of their decisions. This suggests a shift from reactive behavior toward reflective agency. The findings indicate that this transformation is facilitated by structured reflective practices embedded within the curriculum, which enable students to move beyond moral cognition toward moral consciousness. In contrast to conventional approaches that emphasize rule compliance, the *Dharma–Prema* framework cultivates an internal ethical compass that guides behavior across contexts.

In the social domain, the curriculum contributes to a measurable enhancement of empathy and relational ethics (*Prema* and *Seva–Karma Yoga*). Classroom observations and teacher reports reveal a reduction in conflict escalation and an increased tendency among students to engage in dialogical conflict resolution. Rather than responding defensively, students demonstrate a growing capacity to understand multiple perspectives and to negotiate differences constructively. This indicates that empathy is not merely developed as an emotional response but as a socially embedded ethical practice. The findings reinforce the argument that meaningful character formation requires relational experiences through which values are enacted and negotiated.

A particularly significant impact is observed in the domain of digital ethics, which has emerged as a critical gap in existing character education models. The study finds that students exposed to the *Dharma–Prema* framework exhibit greater awareness of the ethical implications of their online behavior, including issues related to cyberbullying, misinformation, and digital responsibility. This transformation can be explained through

the integration of *Dharma* as a principle of accountability and *Prema* as a form of digital empathy. By extending ethical reflection into virtual spaces, the curriculum redefines digital environments as moral spaces rather than neutral technological platforms.

In the ecological domain, the integration of *Prakṛti–Ahimsa* contributes to the development of sustained environmental awareness and responsibility. Students not only demonstrate increased knowledge of environmental issues but also engage in concrete actions such as waste reduction, participation in environmental programs, and the adoption of sustainable habits. The findings suggest that this behavioral change is driven by the internalization of ecological values as moral obligations rather than as external rules. This confirms that values-based environmental education, when grounded in ethical and spiritual principles, is more effective in fostering long-term behavioral transformation than purely informational approaches.

From an analytical perspective, the impact of the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum can be understood through a transformation mechanism that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The curriculum operates by embedding values within iterative cycles of reflection, relational engagement, and practical application. This process enables the transition from moral knowledge to moral embodiment, addressing a critical limitation in conventional character education models that fail to translate values into sustained behavior.

These findings are consistent with the principles of Transformative Learning Theory, which emphasize that meaningful learning involves shifts in perspective, identity, and worldview. The *Dharma–Prema* framework facilitates such transformation by creating conditions for moral dissonance, critical reflection, and value reconstruction. As a result, character development is not limited to surface-level behavioral change but involves a deeper reconfiguration of students' ethical orientation.

Furthermore, the observed impacts align with global educational frameworks, particularly the OECD Global Competence Framework and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The development of empathy, ethical responsibility, and ecological awareness reflects competencies required for responsible global citizenship. Importantly, the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum demonstrates that local philosophical traditions can serve as effective foundations for global competencies, challenging the assumption that global education must be culturally neutral or detached from local values.

However, it is important to note that the impact of the curriculum is not uniform across all contexts and is influenced by factors such as teacher capacity, institutional support, and the consistency of implementation. This indicates that while the *Dharma–Prema* framework provides a robust model, its effectiveness depends on the strength of the surrounding educational ecosystem. Overall, the findings suggest that the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum offers a transformative approach to character education, capable of producing sustained changes in students' moral orientation, social behavior, and ethical awareness across multiple domains. By integrating values into lived experience, this curriculum moves beyond symbolic character education toward a model of deep and systemic character formation.

This study offers a substantive contribution to the theoretical development of character education by advancing a reconceptualization of how values are formed, internalized, and enacted within educational systems. Rather than treating character education as the transmission of moral knowledge or the cultivation of isolated emotional competencies, this research proposes a dual-integrative framework that positions ethical orientation (*Dharma*) and affective internalization (*Prema*) as mutually constitutive dimensions of character formation

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that the fundamental limitation of character education in Indonesia does not stem from the absence of values within educational policy, but from the inadequacy of policy frameworks in enabling the systemic and sustainable internalization

of those values. Character education continues to be dominated by normative-cognitive and administrative approaches, which produce a persistent gap between moral knowledge and actual behavior. This condition reflects a structural and epistemological problem, indicating the need for a paradigm shift, from treating character education as a supplementary component to positioning it as the foundational core of educational policy.

Within this context, the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum offers a coherent and transformative policy framework for character education. By integrating *Dharma* as an ethical compass and *Prema* as the principle of universal love, this model redefines values as lived ethical commitments rather than abstract norms. The five pillars of love-Bhakti, Vidyā, *Prakṛti–Ahimsa*, *Ātman*, and *Seva–Karma Yoga*, function as domains of policy intervention that enable the holistic operationalization of values across learning processes, school culture, and the broader educational ecosystem.

The findings further demonstrate that the 4D curriculum design (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) provides a structured and effective mechanism for bridging the gap between policy intentions and educational practice. Through iterative processes of reflection, moral imagination, practical engagement, and institutionalization, values are translated into lived experiences and social praxis. This transformation is reflected in measurable improvements in students' self-awareness, social empathy, digital ethics, and ecological responsibility, indicating that values-based character education can address complex challenges in contemporary education.

From a policy perspective, this study affirms that the *Dharma–Prema* Curriculum represents a strategic and long-term investment in human development toward Indonesia Emas 2045. By grounding character education in spiritual values and universal compassion, this model contributes to strengthening moral integrity, fostering social cohesion, and promoting ecological sustainability. At the same time, it aligns with broader national and global agendas, including religious moderation and the development of responsible global citizenship. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that the reform of character education in Indonesia requires not incremental adjustment, but a paradigmatic reconstruction of its policy and pedagogical foundations. In this regard, the *Dharma–Prema*-Based Love Curriculum offers a viable and policy-ready model for developing an inclusive, humanistic, and future-oriented character education system.

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Author Contribution

Conceptualization, I.K.D., and S.T.; Methodology, I.K.W; Software, I.K.D; Validation, I.K.D., S.T., and I.K.W.; Formal Analysis, S.T.; Investigation, I.K.W; Resources, S.T.; Data Curation, S.T.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, I.K.D.; Writing – Review & Editing, S.T.; Visualization, S.T.; Supervision, S.T.; Project Administration, I.K.D.; Funding Acquisition, P.D.M.

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Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because it involved non-invasive data collection through interviews and did not pose any risk to participants. All participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Informed Consent Statement
Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement
The data presented in this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI Use
During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly to assist in improving grammar, clarity, and the academic tone of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors carefully reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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