

Institutionalizing Character Education: An Ecological Framework for Indonesia's Seven Habits Movement

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HOW TO CITE: ABSTRACT:

Aminullah, Ach. Rasyad, M. Ishaq,
Sri Wahyuni (2026).
Institutionalizing Character
Education: An Ecological
Framework for Indonesia's Seven
Habits Movement.
International Journal of Special
Education, 41(18s), 258-276

Character education has become a strategic priority in Indonesia's educational reform agenda. However, its implementation remains fragmented, program-oriented, and insufficiently institutionalized within school governance and organizational culture. This article aims to develop a conceptual framework for institutionalizing the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (G7KAIH) by integrating Institutional Theory, the Whole-School Approach, Ecological Systems Theory, and the perspective of Nonformal Education. This study employs a conceptual paper design using an integrative literature review to synthesize contemporary scholarly literature, major theories of character education, national education policies, and official documents related to G7KAIH. The review proposes the Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF), which conceptualizes character education as a sustainable ecosystem rather than a school-based intervention. The framework demonstrates that effective institutionalization requires the integration of leadership, organizational culture, curriculum, character habituation, family engagement, and community participation within a lifelong learning system. It further emphasizes the strategic role of Nonformal Education in connecting formal, nonformal, and informal learning through community-based participation and family empowerment. This study contributes to the literature by introducing an institutional–ecological framework that expands the theoretical perspective on character education while offering practical guidance for implementing G7KAIH in a systematic, participatory, and sustainable manner within Indonesian schools.

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Keywords: character education; institutionalization; ecological framework; nonformal education; Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (G7KAIH)

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies, accelerating social transformation, and

increasingly complex global challenges of the twenty-first century have fundamentally reshaped the orientation of education from the mere acquisition of academic knowledge toward

the holistic development of human capabilities. Across many countries, educational systems are no longer evaluated solely by students' academic achievement but also by their capacity to cultivate character, ethical judgment, social responsibility, and competencies required for sustainable development. In its *Reimagining Our Futures Together* report, UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that education should prepare learners to live together peacefully, exercise critical thinking, demonstrate empathy, and make responsible decisions grounded in shared human values. Similarly, the OECD Learning Compass 2030 identifies agency, responsibility, well-being, and transformative competencies as essential learning outcomes for future citizens (OECD, 2019). These global policy shifts indicate that character education has become a strategic component of educational reform (Faure et al., 1972; Delors, 1996; UNESCO, 2021), positioning character formation not as a complementary objective but as a fundamental pillar of quality education and sustainable human development.

Despite this growing international commitment, the implementation of character education continues to face substantial challenges. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that character education is frequently reduced to moral instruction or isolated school programs that remain disconnected from school governance, organizational culture, and students' everyday learning experiences (Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Such program-oriented approaches often produce temporary behavioral compliance rather than the long-term internalization of values (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Contemporary scholarship on the whole-school approach argues that character formation emerges through continuous interactions among school leadership, organizational culture, curriculum, interpersonal relationships, student participation, and partnerships with families and local communities (Langford et al., 2014). From this perspective, character develops through repeated social experiences within an educational ecosystem rather than through

classroom instruction alone. Consequently, successful character education depends upon the coherence of institutional values across all dimensions of school life, where what students experience is as influential as what they are formally taught.

Within the Indonesian context, strengthening character education has become a central priority of national educational reform aimed at improving human capital quality. Recent policy transformation positions character development as a fundamental objective of education through graduate competency standards, school culture enhancement, and stronger collaboration among schools, families, and communities. One of the most significant recent initiatives is the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (*Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—G7KAIH*) introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2025). Rather than functioning as an additional school program, G7KAIH is designed as a nationwide character habituation movement that promotes seven daily habits—waking up early, worship, physical exercise, healthy eating, lifelong learning, social engagement, and early bedtime—as foundations for developing discipline, independence, healthy lifestyles, and the Graduate Profile. By emphasizing continuous habituation across schools, families, and communities, the initiative reflects a broader shift toward ecosystem-based character development.

Nevertheless, translating national policy into sustainable educational practice remains a major challenge. Existing evidence suggests that character education in Indonesian schools continues to rely heavily on ceremonial activities, curriculum integration, or teacher-centered initiatives without fundamentally transforming institutional governance and organizational culture. Character education is often perceived as the responsibility of particular teachers rather than as a shared institutional commitment, making implementation highly dependent on individual motivation rather than

organizational systems capable of sustaining long-term practice. Consequently, many character values remain symbolic and fail to evolve into deeply embedded habits or collective school identity (Scott, 2014; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This situation indicates that the principal challenge lies not in the absence of educational policies but in the limited institutionalization of character education within school leadership, governance structures, teaching practices, organizational culture, and partnerships with families and local communities.

Institutional Theory offers a useful perspective for understanding this challenge. Institutionalization refers to the process through which values, norms, and practices become embedded within organizational structures and gradually evolve into taken-for-granted patterns of collective behavior (Scott, 2014; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Sustainable educational reform therefore requires more than policy implementation; it requires embedding new values into institutional routines, organizational culture, leadership practices, and stakeholder interactions. From this perspective, the success of G7KAIH should not be measured merely by the number of habituation activities conducted but by the extent to which its seven habits become integrated into school vision, instructional practice, student support systems, leadership, evaluation mechanisms, and school–family–community partnerships. Habituation functions as the pedagogical mechanism, whereas institutionalization provides the organizational process that ensures continuity, legitimacy, and sustainability.

This institutional perspective closely aligns with the whole-school approach, which views character education as the cumulative outcome of students' experiences throughout school life (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). School climate, organizational culture, leadership, teacher–student relationships, peer interactions, and parental engagement collectively shape students' moral development. The stronger the coherence among institutional

values, pedagogical practices, behavioral expectations, and lived experiences, the greater the likelihood that desirable values will become internalized as enduring habits. Accordingly, character education should be conceptualized as an organizational process rather than merely an instructional intervention.

However, a school-centered perspective alone remains insufficient. Character development extends beyond formal education because learners spend much of their time within families, peer groups, religious organizations, youth associations, community organizations, and increasingly within digital environments. Ecological perspectives on human development suggest that these multiple contexts interact dynamically, and inconsistencies across learning environments may weaken value internalization (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Consequently, the effectiveness of G7KAIH depends upon the continuity of character experiences across formal, nonformal, and informal learning settings. Habits cultivated at school become sustainable only when reinforced through daily practices at home and active participation within community life.

This argument highlights the strategic contribution of Nonformal Education. Unlike formal schooling, Nonformal Education emphasizes lifelong, participatory, experiential, and community-based learning (Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984; Freire, 1970; Wenger, 1998). Families, community learning centers, youth organizations, religious institutions, libraries, scouting movements, and civic organizations provide authentic environments where learners practice responsibility, leadership, collaboration, social service, and reflective learning. Character, therefore, is developed not simply through moral instruction but through meaningful participation in real social contexts. Viewed from this perspective, G7KAIH should be understood as a community-based character movement integrating formal, nonformal, and informal education within a lifelong learning ecosystem.

Although research on character education has expanded considerably, recent literature reveals several important gaps. Most previous studies concentrate on instructional strategies, curriculum implementation, school culture, or program evaluation while continuing to position schools as the primary site of intervention. Consequently, relatively little attention has been given to explaining how character initiatives become institutionalized as sustainable organizational practices. Recent systematic reviews indicate that effective character education requires integrating curriculum, school culture, leadership, and family engagement within coherent institutional systems. Likewise, high-performing schools demonstrate that successful character education depends not merely on implementing programs but on embedding shared values into organizational culture and everyday institutional practices. These findings suggest that the contemporary challenge is no longer how to implement character education but how to institutionalize it sustainably (Sartika et al., 2026).

Furthermore, the literature indicates that character development cannot be adequately explained solely through formal educational perspectives. While the whole-school approach has broadened attention toward school culture and leadership, relatively limited consideration has been given to the contribution of families, communities, religious institutions, youth organizations, and other forms of Nonformal Education in shaping sustainable character development. This gap is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where Nonformal Education has traditionally focused on community empowerment, adult education, and lifelong learning rather than institutionalizing character education within schools. Consequently, there remains a need for an integrative theoretical framework capable of conceptualizing schools as components of a broader lifelong learning ecosystem.

Responding to these gaps, this article develops an Integrated Institutional–Ecological

Framework for Embedding the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children in Indonesian Schools by synthesizing Institutional Theory, the Whole-School Approach, Ecological Systems Theory, and the perspective of Nonformal Education. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine program implementation or evaluate educational practices, this article conceptualizes institutionalization as the mechanism linking educational policy, organizational culture, leadership, teaching and learning, habituation, family engagement, and community participation within an integrated educational ecosystem. The proposed framework contributes theoretically by bridging Institutional Theory and Nonformal Education—two perspectives that have rarely been integrated in character education scholarship—and practically by providing policymakers, school leaders, and educators with a conceptual foundation for implementing G7KAIH in a more systematic, participatory, and sustainable manner.

Methods

This study was designed as a conceptual paper employing an integrative literature review to develop a conceptual framework for institutionalizing character education through the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—G7KAIH) in Indonesian schools. Unlike a systematic literature review, which primarily synthesizes empirical evidence to address narrowly defined research questions, an integrative literature review enables the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, policy documents, and implementation practices to generate broader conceptual understanding and theory development (Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Snyder, 2019). This approach was considered appropriate because the present study does not seek to empirically examine causal relationships among variables; rather, it aims to construct a theoretical framework explaining the institutionalization of

G7KAIH through the integration of Institutional Theory, the Whole-School Approach, Ecological Systems Theory, and the perspective of Nonformal Education.

The sources of evidence were categorized into two principal groups. The first consisted of scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed national and international journal articles, academic books, and reports published by international organizations addressing character education, institutionalization of educational policies, the Whole-School Approach, Ecological Systems Theory, lifelong learning, experiential learning, community-based education, and Nonformal Education. To capture recent conceptual developments, priority was given to publications published between 2021 and 2026. Nevertheless, seminal works by leading scholars—including Bronfenbrenner, Lickona, Dewey, Kolb, Knowles, Wenger, and Freire—were retained because of their foundational contributions to the theoretical framework. The second category comprised Indonesian national policy documents and official publications related to the implementation of G7KAIH issued by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia. These documents included policy guidelines, implementation manuals, and official dissemination materials that served as primary sources for understanding the objectives, guiding principles, and implementation mechanisms of the movement. In addition, two official presentation materials describing G7KAIH were incorporated to enrich the conceptual interpretation of the policy, particularly regarding the relationships among character habituation, school culture, family–community partnerships, and scouting activities as experiential learning platforms. These materials were treated as conceptual references rather than empirical evidence.

The literature search was conducted across several internationally recognized academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar as a

complementary source for relevant Indonesian publications. Searches employed combinations of English and Indonesian keywords, including character education, institutionalization, whole-school approach, school culture, ecological systems theory, lifelong learning, nonformal education, community-based learning, experiential learning, family engagement, Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat, and character education. Retrieved publications were screened according to four inclusion criteria: (1) addressing character education or habit formation; (2) examining school culture, educational leadership, or policy institutionalization; (3) discussing Nonformal Education, lifelong learning, or community-based education; and/or (4) demonstrating conceptual relevance to the development of an institutional framework for G7KAIH. Publications that merely reported educational activities without providing theoretical justification or conceptual relevance to the study were excluded from the synthesis.

Data were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach comprising four sequential stages (Whittemore & Knafl (2005). The first stage, literature familiarization, involved intensive and critical reading of all selected documents to identify key concepts, theoretical assumptions, and practical implications related to character education and habit formation. The second stage, open coding, categorized conceptually similar ideas into preliminary themes, including school leadership, organizational culture, habituation, role modelling, family engagement, experiential learning, community empowerment, and lifelong learning. The third stage, thematic integration, linked these emerging themes with Institutional Theory, the Whole-School Approach, Ecological Systems Theory, and Nonformal Education to establish conceptual relationships among the major constructs. Finally, the framework development stage synthesized these relationships into a conceptual model explaining how G7KAIH becomes institutionalized through interactions among school governance, organizational culture, teaching and learning processes, character

habituation, family engagement, and community participation within a sustainable educational ecosystem.

To enhance conceptual rigor and trustworthiness, the synthesis process adopted the principle of constant comparative analysis, whereby concepts derived from theoretical perspectives, empirical studies, and policy documents were continuously compared and refined until coherent and internally consistent conceptual patterns emerged. The resulting framework is not intended as an empirically validated model but rather as a theoretical

proposition that provides a foundation for future empirical investigation while offering conceptual guidance for policymakers, school leaders, and educators in designing and implementing G7KAIH across diverse educational settings. Accordingly, this article proposes an interdisciplinary conceptual model integrating Institutional Theory, character education, Ecological Systems Theory, and Nonformal Education to explain the institutionalization of character development within Indonesia's lifelong educational ecosystem.

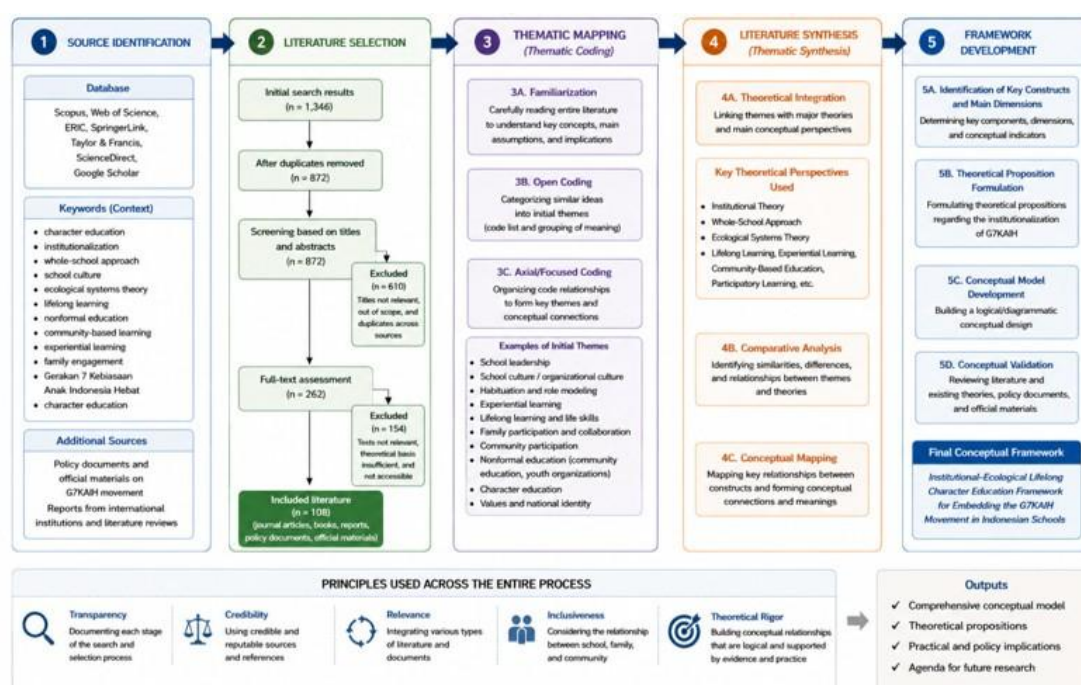


Figure 1. Flow of Literature Synthesis Process and Conceptual Framework Development (*Integrative Literature Review*)

Result

Theoretical Synthesis for Developing an Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework

The conceptual framework proposed in this study was developed through the synthesis of five complementary theoretical perspectives: Character Education Theory, Institutional Theory, the Whole-School Approach, Ecological Systems Theory, and Nonformal Education. Each perspective contributes a

distinct analytical lens for understanding how the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—G7KAIH) can evolve from a national policy initiative into a sustainable educational culture embedded in students' everyday lives. Rather than functioning independently, these theoretical perspectives collectively explain the multidimensional processes through which character education is institutionalized across educational settings.

Their integration enables a more comprehensive understanding of how values, organizational structures, learning experiences, and social environments interact to support long-term character formation.

The theoretical synthesis suggests that the successful institutionalization of G7KAIH depends not merely on the effectiveness of classroom instruction or curriculum implementation. Instead, sustainable character development requires the coherent interaction of multiple institutional and ecological components, including school governance, organizational culture, experiential learning,

family engagement, community participation, and lifelong learning opportunities. From this perspective, character education is conceptualized as a systemic and continuous process operating across formal, nonformal, and informal learning environments. Consequently, the institutionalization of G7KAIH should be understood as the collective outcome of coordinated interactions among educational institutions, families, communities, and broader social systems, forming an integrated lifelong educational ecosystem that supports the development of positive character and responsible citizenship.

Table 1. Theoretical Synthesis Matrix Underpinning the Development of the Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF)

Theoretical Perspective	Key Concepts	Strengths of the Perspective	Limitations When Applied Independently	Rationale for Integration	Contribution to the IELCEF Framework
Character Education Theory (Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Nucci, 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004)	Moral knowing; moral feeling; moral action; character habituation (Lally et al. 2010; Wood & R�nger, 2016); role modelling; moral community	Explains the goals of character education, the processes of value internalization, character habituation, and the development of students' moral identity	Primarily focuses on individual moral development and therefore provides limited explanation of how character values become institutionalized within educational organizations or are shaped by broader social and institutional networks.	Integrated as the normative foundation for explaining why character education is essential, while complementing organizational and ecological perspectives to explain how character values can be institutionalized and sustained within educational systems	Provides the normative foundation for character development through core character values, character habituation, reflective practice, role modelling, and the internalization of moral values
Institutional Theory (Scott; 2014; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)	Regulative, normative, and cultural–cognitive pillars; institutionalization; organizational legitimacy	Explains how educational policies become institutionalized within organizational culture through regulatory mechanisms,	Primarily emphasizes organizational change and institutional processes while providing limited insight into individual	Integrated to explain how G7KAIH can be institutionalized through school vision, governance structures, organizational	Contributes the institutional mechanisms necessary for sustainable character education, including school leadership,

Theoretical Perspective	Key Concepts	Strengths of the Perspective	Limitations When Applied Independently	Rationale for Integration	Contribution to the IELCEF Framework
		normative expectations, leadership practices, and institutional legitimacy	learning, habit formation, and students' character development	culture, leadership, and evaluation systems, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of character education	governance structures, regulatory systems, organizational culture, and monitoring and evaluation
Whole-School Approach	School culture; instructional leadership; curriculum integration; whole-school collaboration; school–family partnership	Demonstrates that character education is a shared responsibility of the entire school community through the integration of curriculum, school culture, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities	Predominantly focuses on school-based implementation and therefore pays limited attention to learning processes occurring beyond the school setting and the contribution of community-based and nonformal education	Integrated to strengthen the implementation of G7KAIH at the school level while serving as a bridge toward a broader educational ecosystem that extends beyond formal schooling	Strengthens school-wide implementation through curriculum integration, school culture, teacher collaboration, student participation, and school–family partnerships
Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)	Microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; macrosystem; chronosystem	Explains that character development is shaped by dynamic interactions across multiple environmental systems influencing students' learning and development	Provides a comprehensive explanation of environmental influences on human development but offers limited guidance regarding institutional strategies and organizational mechanisms for implementing character education in	Integrated to explain that the successful institutionalization of G7KAIH depends on the coherence of values and interactions among schools, families, communities, media, and the broader policy environment	Explains the ecological dimensions of character education by promoting synergy among schools, families, communities, social networks, and supportive learning environments that ensure continuity across multiple developmental

Theoretical Perspective	Key Concepts	Strengths of the Perspective	Limitations When Applied Independently	Rationale for Integration	Contribution to the IELCEF Framework
			schools		contexts
Nonformal Education (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Knowles, 1980; Freire, 1970; Wenger, 1998; UNESCO, 2021; Delors, 1996; Faure et al. 1972)	Lifelong learning; experiential learning; participatory learning; community-based learning; community empowerment; learning society	Explains lifelong character development through experiential learning, social participation, community empowerment, and community-based learning.	Effectively explains lifelong learning processes and community empowerment but does not specifically address the institutionalization of educational policies within formal school organizations	Integrated as the overarching lifelong learning paradigm that connects formal, nonformal, and informal education, enabling character habituation to be continuously reinforced across diverse learning environments and throughout learners' everyday lives.	Expands the framework beyond formal schooling by emphasizing experiential learning, lifelong learning, family empowerment, community participation, learning communities, reflective social practice, and the reinforcement of character across diverse learning environments

The theoretical synthesis presented in Table 1 demonstrates that each theoretical perspective makes a distinctive contribution while also exhibiting inherent limitations when applied in isolation. Character Education Theory provides the normative foundation for understanding the purposes, values, and objectives of character development; however, it offers limited explanation of how these values become institutionalized within educational organizations. In contrast, Institutional Theory explains the processes through which policies, norms, and organizational cultures become institutionalized, yet it provides relatively limited insight into how learning processes and value internalization occur at the individual level. Meanwhile, the Whole-School Approach emphasizes the importance of school culture, leadership, and the collective responsibility of the entire school community in implementing character education. Nevertheless, its primary focus remains within the boundaries of formal

schooling. By comparison, Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive explanation of the multiple environmental systems influencing learners' development but offers limited operational guidance for integrating these environments into educational practice. Finally, Nonformal Education contributes a strong conceptual foundation for lifelong learning, experiential learning, community participation, and community empowerment. However, it does not explicitly explain the institutional mechanisms through which educational policies become embedded within formal school organizations.

Drawing upon this theoretical synthesis, this study argues that the institutionalization of the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—G7KAIH) cannot be adequately understood through any single theoretical perspective. Instead, a multidisciplinary synthesis is required to integrate the normative,

institutional, pedagogical, ecological, and lifelong learning dimensions into a coherent conceptual framework. This integration gives rise to the Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF), which conceptualizes institutionalization as the primary mechanism for embedding character education within educational organizations. Within this framework, the Whole-School Approach serves as the principal implementation strategy at the school level, Ecological Systems Theory explains the dynamic interactions among multiple learning environments, and Nonformal Education provides the integrative lifelong learning paradigm that sustains character development through meaningful learning experiences across schools, families, and communities. Consequently, the proposed framework represents more than a simple combination of existing theories. Rather, it offers a novel conceptual perspective that explains how G7KAIH can evolve from a national policy initiative into an institutionalized and sustainable culture of character education embedded within Indonesia's lifelong educational ecosystem.

Discussion

Institutionalizing the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children through an Integrated Educational Ecosystem

The theoretical synthesis developed in this study demonstrates that the successful implementation of the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—G7KAIH) cannot be evaluated solely by the extent to which habituation activities are implemented within schools. Rather, its long-term effectiveness depends on the institutionalization of character values and practices across the broader educational ecosystem. This finding extends the prevailing literature on character education, which has traditionally emphasized instructional strategies, curriculum integration, school culture, or program effectiveness as the primary determinants of successful character formation.

While these perspectives have significantly advanced understanding of school-based character education, they have devoted comparatively less attention to the organizational and ecological processes through which character values become embedded as enduring institutional practices. In response to this limitation, the Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF) proposed in this study conceptualizes institutionalization as the central mechanism linking national educational policy, school governance, organizational culture, students' learning experiences, family engagement, community participation, and lifelong learning (Langford et al. 2017). Within this perspective, character education is no longer viewed as a series of isolated educational interventions but as a continuous institutional process through which values are embedded (Lickona, 1991).

DiMaggio & Powell (1983), reinforced, and reproduced across multiple learning environments. Consequently, character formation is understood not merely as the outcome of individual behavioural change but as the product of sustained interactions among institutional structures, educational practices, and the diverse ecological contexts in which learners develop (Scott (2014; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

This interpretation is broadly consistent with the official G7KAIH policy framework, which identifies character habituation as the primary strategy for cultivating positive character through collaboration among schools, families, and communities. However, while the policy documents primarily articulate the objectives, principles, and implementation guidelines of the movement, they provide limited theoretical explanation of the institutional mechanisms that enable repeated habituation to evolve into sustainable organizational culture and long-term social practice. The present study addresses this conceptual gap by proposing a multidisciplinary framework that explains how character values become institutionalized rather than merely what character education programs should

implement. Specifically, the proposed framework integrates Institutional Theory to explain organizational embedding and policy sustainability, the Whole-School Approach to guide school-wide implementation, Ecological Systems Theory to explain the interconnected influence of multiple developmental environments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006), and Nonformal Education to extend character formation beyond formal schooling through lifelong, experiential, and community-based learning (Dewey, 1938). Accordingly, the IELCEF framework is not intended to replace the existing G7KAIH policy. Instead, it provides a complementary conceptual foundation that strengthens the theoretical basis of the movement by explaining how character education can be institutionalized through the coherent integration of formal, nonformal, and informal education within a connected lifelong educational ecosystem. From this perspective, G7KAIH is reconceptualized not simply as a national character education initiative but as a sustainable institutional transformation that embeds character values into educational governance, organizational culture, family practices, and community life, thereby ensuring the continuity of character development across learners' entire educational journey.

Reinterpreting Institutional Theory for Character Education

From the perspective of Institutional Theory, educational organizations achieve legitimacy when their values, norms, and practices become deeply embedded within organizational structures and are collectively embraced by members of the institution. Scott (2014) conceptualizes institutionalization as a multidimensional process operating through three interrelated pillars: the regulative, normative, and cultural–cognitive pillars. While these pillars were originally developed to explain organizational stability, legitimacy, and institutional change, this study reinterprets them as an analytical framework for understanding how character education becomes institutionalized within schools. Rather than

viewing institutionalization solely as an organizational phenomenon, this article extends its application to explain how character values are embedded into educational governance, organizational culture, and everyday school practices. The theoretical synthesis indicates that these three institutional pillars collectively explain the transformation of the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—G7KAIH) from a national policy initiative into a sustainable culture of character education. This transformation is facilitated through the integration of school vision, instructional leadership, institutional governance, curriculum implementation, character habituation, and monitoring and evaluation systems, all of which reinforce the legitimacy and continuity of character education within the school environment.

Nevertheless, Institutional Theory alone is insufficient to capture the multidimensional nature of character education. Its primary concern lies in explaining organizational legitimacy, institutional stability, and policy implementation, while providing relatively limited insight into how learners construct meaning, internalize values, and develop character through lived educational experiences. Character formation is not solely the product of institutional arrangements; rather, it emerges through continuous interactions among individuals, social relationships, learning environments, and broader cultural contexts. Recognizing these limitations, this study extends Institutional Theory by integrating it with Character Education Theory, the Whole-School Approach, Ecological Systems Theory, and the perspective of Nonformal Education. Within the proposed Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF), institutionalization functions as the structural mechanism that establishes an enabling environment for sustainable character education, whereas the processes of value internalization and habit formation are explained through the complementary perspectives of moral development, ecological interactions, and

lifelong learning. Consequently, character development is conceptualized not merely as an organizational outcome but as a lifelong process sustained through the dynamic interaction of institutional structures, pedagogical practices, family engagement, community participation, and diverse learning environments. This reinterpretation substantially broadens the explanatory capacity of Institutional Theory by positioning it within an integrated institutional–ecological framework that more adequately reflects the complexity of contemporary character education.

Extending the Whole-School Approach toward a Whole-Education Ecosystem

The Whole-School Approach (WSA) has been widely recognized as one of the most influential frameworks for implementing character education by emphasizing that character development is a collective responsibility shared by the entire school community Jones & Bouffard (2012; Durlak et al. 2011; Taylor et al. (2017). Rather than viewing character education as an isolated classroom activity, this perspective highlights the importance of aligning school leadership, organizational culture, curriculum, interpersonal relationships, student participation, and family engagement within a coherent educational environment. Through this holistic orientation, the Whole-School Approach shifts the focus of character education from curriculum delivery to the cultivation of a school culture that consistently reinforces shared values and desirable behaviors. This study acknowledges the significant contribution of the Whole-School Approach as a foundational strategy for institutionalizing character education. However, it argues that the framework remains primarily centered on formal schooling and therefore provides only a partial explanation of how character is developed across the broader contexts in which learners live, interact, and grow.

This conceptual limitation becomes particularly evident in the implementation of the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—

G7KAIH). The seven habits promoted by the movement—including waking up early, maintaining healthy routines, engaging in worship, practicing social responsibility, and developing lifelong learning habits—are not formed exclusively through school-based activities. Instead, these behaviors emerge from continuous interactions among learners and the multiple social environments that shape their daily experiences. Families establish early behavioral routines and moral values, peer groups influence social norms and identity formation, community organizations provide opportunities for civic participation, religious institutions reinforce spiritual and ethical values, while extracurricular and youth organizations cultivate responsibility, leadership, and collaboration through authentic experiences. Consequently, character development cannot be adequately explained within the boundaries of formal schooling alone. Sustainable character formation requires educational continuity across diverse learning environments that collectively reinforce the same core values through consistent daily practice.

Building upon this understanding, the present study proposes a conceptual shift from the Whole-School Approach toward a Whole-Education Ecosystem perspective. Unlike the conventional school-centered model, the Whole-Education Ecosystem conceptualizes character education as the cumulative outcome of interconnected learning experiences occurring across formal, nonformal, and informal educational settings. This perspective recognizes that schools, families, communities, religious organizations, youth associations, and other community-based learning environments function as complementary components of a lifelong educational ecosystem. Rather than assigning primary responsibility to schools alone, the ecosystem perspective emphasizes shared responsibility and reciprocal collaboration among multiple educational stakeholders. Character values become sustainable when they are consistently reinforced across these diverse contexts, enabling learners to experience coherence

between what is taught at school and what is practiced within their families and communities.

From this perspective, the implementation of G7KAIH extends beyond institutional compliance with educational policy and becomes a socially embedded process of character formation. The proposed Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF) therefore positions the Whole-Education Ecosystem as a critical extension of the Whole-School Approach. Within this framework, schools remain central institutions for coordinating character education; however, their effectiveness depends upon sustained collaboration with families, community organizations, religious institutions, nonformal education providers, and broader social networks. Such collaboration creates a coherent system of lifelong learning in which character habituation is continuously strengthened through meaningful experiences across multiple social settings (Lally et al. 2010; Wood & R nger; 2016). Consequently, this study advances the theoretical discourse on character education by moving beyond school-centered implementation toward an institutional–ecological perspective that conceptualizes character development as a continuous, collaborative, and lifelong process embedded within the wider educational ecosystem. This conceptual extension represents one of the principal theoretical contributions of the proposed IELCEF framework and provides a more comprehensive foundation for understanding how national character education initiatives can be transformed into sustainable educational cultures

Ecological Systems Theory and the Continuity of Character Development Across Learning Environments

The conceptual framework proposed in this study demonstrates that the institutionalization of the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—G7KAIH) cannot be adequately understood solely through the internal dynamics of schools. Rather, sustainable

character development emerges from continuous interactions among multiple learning environments that collectively shape learners' everyday experiences. This perspective is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which conceptualizes human development as the product of reciprocal interactions across interconnected environmental systems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. From this perspective, children's character is not formed through isolated school-based interventions but through ongoing engagement with families, peers, communities, religious institutions, digital media, and educational policies that together constitute the broader social ecology of learning. Character formation is therefore best understood as a dynamic developmental process in which values are continuously reinforced, negotiated, and internalized across multiple contexts rather than transmitted through formal instruction alone.

Building upon Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, the framework developed in this article extends its application to the institutionalization of character education. While Ecological Systems Theory primarily explains how multiple environmental systems influence human development, the Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF) advances this perspective by explaining how these interconnected systems can be strategically aligned through educational governance and institutional design. Within this framework, the institutionalization of G7KAIH is conceptualized as a process of establishing value coherence across diverse learning environments, thereby enabling learners to experience consistent moral messages and behavioral expectations throughout their daily lives. For example, habits such as waking up early, maintaining healthy lifestyles, practicing religious observance, and going to bed on time are unlikely to become enduring character traits if they are reinforced only within school settings. Instead, these habits require continuous reinforcement through parenting practices,

community activities, youth organizations, religious institutions, and supportive social environments that collectively model and sustain desirable behaviors. Consequently, character education should not be viewed as a series of school-based activities but as an integrated social process supported by coherent institutional arrangements across multiple educational contexts.

The proposed framework also expands the conventional interpretation of the relationship between the microsystem and the mesosystem within Ecological Systems Theory. Previous studies have generally conceptualized school–family relationships in terms of communication, parental involvement, or institutional partnerships. By contrast, this study argues that these relationships should be understood as mechanisms for synchronizing learning experiences across different educational settings. Such synchronization enables learners to receive consistent values, expectations, and behavioral norms regardless of whether they are at school, at home, or within the wider community. Accordingly, the effectiveness of G7KAIH depends not only on the quality of implementation within schools but also on the degree of alignment among school culture, parenting practices, community engagement, religious institutions, and prevailing social norms. The greater the coherence among these interconnected systems, the greater the likelihood that repeated positive behaviors will evolve into enduring habits and ultimately become integral components of learners' character. This perspective shifts attention from isolated educational interventions toward the creation of an integrated ecosystem in which multiple institutions collectively contribute to sustainable character formation.

The ecological perspective developed in this study also carries important implications for the evaluation of character education. Existing evaluation practices frequently assess the success of character education through indicators such as program implementation, student participation, or behavioral compliance within

school settings. The IELCEF, however, proposes a broader and more comprehensive evaluation framework that emphasizes the sustainability of character practices across learners' everyday environments, including families and communities. From this perspective, institutional success should be assessed not only by students' adherence to school regulations but also by the consistency with which positive character values are demonstrated across different social contexts. Consequently, evaluation indicators should encompass behavioral consistency, reflective capacity, moral decision-making, and the long-term application of character values in everyday life. Such an ecological approach shifts the focus of assessment from measuring short-term program outcomes toward evaluating the long-term institutionalization of character education as a sustainable cultural practice embedded within learners' lifelong educational experiences. In doing so, the proposed framework offers a more comprehensive conceptual foundation for assessing the effectiveness of character education policies and reinforces the argument that the success of G7KAIH ultimately depends on the coherence and continuity of character development across the entire educational ecosystem rather than within schools alone.

Repositioning Nonformal Education as an Integrative Force for the Institutionalization of Character Education

The principal contribution of this article lies in repositioning Nonformal Education not merely as a complementary pathway to formal schooling but as an integrative force that connects multiple learning environments within the institutionalization of character education. Traditionally, Nonformal Education has been conceptualized as an alternative educational pathway providing supplementary learning opportunities for specific groups or communities. Consequently, its contribution to character development has often been confined to extracurricular activities, community learning centers (Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat), youth organizations, family education programs,

and scouting movements. Such a perspective, however, underestimates its broader epistemological significance. From a theoretical standpoint, Nonformal Education is grounded in the principles of lifelong learning (Knowles, 1980; UNESCO, 2021; Delors, 1996), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), community participation, community empowerment, and the learning society (Faure et al. 1972), all of which are intrinsically linked to the development of sustainable habits, values, and character. These principles suggest that character formation extends beyond formal instructional settings and emerges through continuous engagement in authentic social experiences across diverse educational contexts.

Within the proposed Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF), Nonformal Education is therefore conceptualized not as a separate educational institution but as a cross-sectoral learning paradigm that transcends the conventional boundaries between formal, nonformal, and informal education. This paradigm positions learning by doing, active participation, critical reflection, collaborative learning, and community empowerment as the primary mechanisms through which character is cultivated and sustained. Such an interpretation is consistent with Dewey's conception of experience as the foundation of meaningful learning, Kolb's experiential learning cycle, Freire's dialogical pedagogy and praxis, Wenger's theory of communities of practice, and UNESCO's lifelong learning framework, which collectively emphasize learning as a continuous social process embedded in everyday life. From this perspective, character education is no longer understood as the transmission of moral values from teachers to students. Rather, it is viewed as an ongoing process of meaning-making through participation, reflection, and lived experience within multiple social environments. Consequently, character becomes a socially constructed disposition that evolves through sustained interaction with families, communities, educational institutions, and broader societal contexts.

This perspective offers a new interpretation of the implementation of the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (G7KAIH). The seven habits should not be viewed merely as a prescribed list of desirable behaviours to be practiced within schools; instead, they should be understood as social practices that are learned, reinforced, and internalized through learners' active participation in everyday community life. For example, the habit of social responsibility is cultivated through participation in community service, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), youth organizations, volunteer activities, and scouting programs. Likewise, the habit of lifelong learning is strengthened through community libraries, literacy movements, peer-learning groups, digital learning communities, and independent learning initiatives. Similarly, healthy living habits are reinforced through community sports programs, family health initiatives, and local public health campaigns that encourage healthy lifestyles. These examples illustrate that each of the seven habits acquires meaning through authentic participation in real-life social contexts rather than through classroom instruction alone. As a result, character education extends beyond the physical boundaries of schools, enabling students to experience continuous value reinforcement across diverse learning environments.

From the perspective of Nonformal Education, the institutionalization of character should not be interpreted solely as embedding rules, routines, or organizational culture within schools. Rather, it should be understood as the development of a lifelong learning ecosystem in which every sector of society assumes an educational role. Within such an ecosystem, schools function as institutional anchors that coordinate and facilitate character education, while families, local communities, religious organizations, youth associations, community learning centers, and civil society organizations collectively reinforce the continuity of character habituation. Through repeated social participation, reflective practice, collaborative engagement, and meaningful lived experiences,

character formation becomes a continuous developmental process rather than a series of isolated educational interventions. Accordingly, students continue to develop and strengthen their character long after leaving the classroom, as everyday social interactions become integral components of the educational process. This interpretation significantly broadens the scope of character education by recognizing society itself as a learning environment that continuously shapes learners' moral identities and civic dispositions.

Building upon this theoretical synthesis, the present study proposes a fundamental paradigm shift from school-based character education toward a whole-education ecosystem for lifelong character formation. This shift recognizes that the long-term institutionalization of G7KAIH depends on the coherence and continuity of learning experiences across all contexts in which learners live, interact, and develop. Within this broader ecosystem, Nonformal Education serves as the conceptual bridge that integrates formal, nonformal, and informal learning into a unified lifelong educational system. Consequently, the contribution of the proposed Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF) extends beyond offering a new model for institutionalizing character education. More importantly, it re-establishes Nonformal Education as the epistemological foundation for constructing a sustainable character education ecosystem in Indonesia. By positioning lifelong learning, experiential learning, community participation, and institutional coherence as mutually reinforcing dimensions, the framework advances a more comprehensive understanding of character education—one that is not confined to schools but embedded within the broader social fabric of society. In doing so, this study contributes a novel conceptual perspective that expands existing scholarship on character education while providing a theoretical foundation for the sustainable implementation of G7KAIH across multiple educational settings.

Conclusion

This article develops a conceptual framework for supporting the institutionalization of the Seven Habits Movement of Great Indonesian Children (Gerakan 7 Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat—G7KAIH) through the integration of Character Education Theory, Institutional Theory, the Whole-School Approach, Ecological Systems Theory, and the perspective of Nonformal Education. The theoretical synthesis demonstrates that the sustainability of character education depends not merely on the implementation of character-building programs or habituation activities, but on the institutional capacity of schools to embed character values within leadership, governance, organizational culture, curriculum, teaching and learning processes, family partnerships, and community participation. Accordingly, this study proposes the Institutional–Ecological Lifelong Character Education Framework (IELCEF) as a comprehensive conceptual model explaining how a national character education policy can evolve into an institutionalized educational culture that is continuously reinforced through learners' everyday experiences across multiple learning environments. By conceptualizing character education as a dynamic interaction between institutional and ecological systems, the framework extends existing approaches beyond school-based implementation toward a sustainable lifelong learning ecosystem.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in its integration of five complementary yet previously fragmented theoretical perspectives into a coherent conceptual framework for lifelong character education. Unlike previous studies, which have predominantly focused on curriculum implementation, pedagogical strategies, or school-based character programs, this article repositions Nonformal Education as the epistemological foundation and integrative force connecting formal, nonformal, and informal education through the principles of lifelong learning, experiential learning, community participation, and community empowerment.

This perspective broadens the conceptualization of character education from a school-based intervention to a whole-education ecosystem, where character is understood as the outcome of continuous interactions among individuals, educational institutions, families, communities, and broader social systems. Consequently, IELCEF contributes not only to the advancement of character education scholarship but also to the growing discourse on institutional change, educational governance, and lifelong learning by demonstrating how institutional coherence and ecological continuity jointly shape sustainable character formation.

From a practical perspective, the proposed framework offers strategic implications for policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and practitioners of Nonformal Education. For policymakers, IELCEF provides a conceptual foundation for designing character education policies that prioritize institutional capacity building, organizational culture, cross-sector collaboration, and sustainable governance rather than isolated educational programs. For school leaders and teachers, the framework highlights the importance of embedding the seven habits into leadership practices, curriculum design, instructional processes, student support services, and continuous reflection and evaluation. Equally important, the framework recognizes families, community learning centres, youth organizations, scouting movements, religious institutions, and other community-based organizations as indispensable partners in sustaining character formation beyond school settings. These implications reinforce the notion

that meaningful character education requires coordinated efforts across multiple educational environments rather than relying exclusively on formal schooling.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. As a conceptual paper based on an integrative literature review and policy synthesis, the proposed framework has not yet been subjected to empirical validation. Consequently, the relationships among its conceptual constructs remain theoretical propositions that require further empirical examination. Future research should validate the IELCEF framework using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches across different educational levels and sociocultural contexts. In particular, future studies are encouraged to develop valid and reliable instruments for measuring the degree of character education institutionalization, examine the structural relationships among the framework's constructs through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), and explore its implementation through comparative multiple-case studies involving schools, families, community organizations, and Nonformal Education institutions. Such investigations will not only strengthen the empirical validity of the proposed framework but also facilitate its refinement as a robust theoretical model and practical reference for designing, implementing, and evaluating sustainable character education policies in Indonesia and other educational contexts facing similar challenges.

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