

## Strengthening Character Education through Javanese *Unggah-Ungguh Basa*: A Systematic Literature Review

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### Abstract

*Character education is a priority in primary education, but the decline in linguistic politeness and cultural values among younger generations highlights the need for approaches based on local wisdom. This study aims to examine the role of Javanese unggah-ungguh basa in strengthening character education through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). This study employed the PRISMA 2020 framework using data from Google Scholar, Scopus, and Dimensions, covering publications from 2020 to 2025. A total of nine empirical studies were analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by simple quantitative frequency analysis. The findings indicate that unggah-ungguh basa contributes to the development of dominant character values, particularly politeness and respect, followed by social awareness, responsibility, and patriotism. Contextual learning, habituation, and teacher modeling were found to be more effective than purely cognitive approaches. Additionally, there is a shift in research focus from language preservation to the integration of character education. This study proposes a cultural-character integration model that emphasizes the relationship between cultural values, contextual learning processes, and student character development. Overall, unggah-ungguh basa has strong potential as an effective and sustainable approach to strengthening character education in primary schools.*

**Keywords:** *character education, unggah-ungguh basa, Javanese language etiquette, local wisdom*

### Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter merupakan prioritas dalam pendidikan dasar, tetapi menurunnya kesantunan berbahasa dan nilai budaya pada generasi muda menunjukkan perlunya pendekatan berbasis kearifan lokal. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji peran unggah-ungguh basa Jawa dalam penguatan pendidikan karakter melalui *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR). Penelitian menggunakan kerangka PRISMA 2020 dengan sumber data dari Google Scholar, Scopus, dan Dimensions pada rentang tahun 2020–2025. Sebanyak sembilan artikel empiris dianalisis menggunakan *thematic analysis* dan didukung analisis kuantitatif sederhana. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa unggah-ungguh basa berkontribusi dalam pengembangan nilai kesopanan dan rasa hormat sebagai nilai dominan, diikuti kepekaan sosial, tanggung jawab, dan patriotisme. Strategi pembelajaran kontekstual, pembiasaan, dan keteladanan guru terbukti lebih efektif dibandingkan pendekatan kognitif. Selain itu, terdapat pergeseran fokus penelitian dari pelestarian bahasa menuju integrasi pendidikan karakter. Penelitian ini mengusulkan model integrasi budaya-karakter yang menekankan hubungan antara nilai budaya, proses pembelajaran kontekstual, dan pembentukan karakter siswa. Secara keseluruhan, unggah-ungguh basa berpotensi menjadi pendekatan efektif dan berkelanjutan dalam penguatan pendidikan karakter di sekolah dasar.

**Kata kunci:** *pendidikan karakter, unggah-ungguh basa, etika berbahasa Jawa, kearifan lokal*



## INTRODUCTION

Character education is one of the strategic priorities in the national education system, particularly at the elementary school level, which serves as the foundation for the development of students' personalities. This aligns with the views of Berkowitz and Bier (2005), who argue that character education is most effective when initiated during early schooling, as childhood is a critical phase in personality development. During this phase, children are at a stage of moral and social development that significantly shapes their attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives toward their surroundings. Thus, elementary school serves as the most strategic context for the internalization of character values, as this stage involves the formation of habits, the instillation of core values, and the development of long-term self-regulation.

Various social phenomena indicate a decline in the values of politeness, respect, and social concern, as well as a weakening of cultural identity among the younger generation. Simanjuntak et al. (2025) reveal that a crisis of linguistic politeness among adolescents is caused by internal factors such as emotions, the search for identity, and peer influence, as well as external factors such as the social environment and excessive use of social media. These findings underscore the importance of fostering polite language skills through both formal and informal education so that adolescents can communicate politely, ethically, and civilly in daily life as well as in the digital era. Other studies have found that social media contributes to a decline in linguistic politeness and moral values among the younger generation, while also influencing shifts in their traditional values and cultural identity (Prasanti, 2023; Nabila & Putri, 2022). Rahmawati and Kusrina (2025) reveal that technological advancements and globalization have triggered a shift in moral values among Generation Z, including a decline in empathy, a rise in individualism and a weakening of social communication ethics. In summary, these various studies point to a common trend: a degradation of character closely linked to changes in communication patterns and the weakening of the internalization of cultural values in daily life. This situation underscores the urgency of integrating character education that is not merely conceptual but also contextual and grounded in socio-cultural practices. Therefore, schools are required to focus not only on academic achievement but also on developing affective dimensions and character values in an integrated manner within the learning process.

Ideally, education should not only impart knowledge but also shape human character so that individuals can make positive contributions to society at large (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Birhan et al., 2021). Character education has become a key focus in the national education system because it plays a vital role in fostering students who are morally upright, culturally aware, and possess noble character. Elementary schools, as the foundation of formal education, play a strategic role in instilling character values and culture from an early age through teaching approaches, teachers, the school environment, and the integration of character values (Hadi et al., 2025). However, learning in schools still tends to emphasize academic aspects, while the affective dimension and local cultural values have not been optimally integrated. In fact, local culture-based learning is a crucial approach for developing students' character holistically, yet it has not become the primary approach in most school systems, which tend to focus on academic aspects (Rahmawati, 2024). This indicates an imbalance between the development of cognitive and affective aspects in educational practice, necessitating an alternative approach capable of integrating character values in a more contextual manner.

Implementation of local culture-based learning in Central Java Province is realized through the local subject matter of Javanese Language. Javanese language education instills lessons in etiquette, respect, and moral values that not only shape students' character but also support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (Natanti et al., 2023; Çoban & Selvi, 2025; Khasanah, 2025; Wiraman et al., 2025).

Javanese language serves as a bridge between the preservation of local wisdom and sustainable global development, learning that progress need not abandon cultural roots and humanistic values. Thus, Javanese language learning holds a strategic position as a medium for integrating local cultural preservation and character building within the context of modern education.

Javanese language has a system of speech levels, known as *unggah-ungguh basa*, which distinguishes it from the other. These levels are *krama* (highly polite), *madya* (intermediate), and *ngoko* (low-politeness) (Poedjosoedarmo et al., 2013). These levels of speech are norms within Javanese society regarding speech and behavior, taking into account the speaker and the addressee as well as the situation, with the aim of maintaining politeness to foster mutual respect and appreciation for others (Arfianingrum, 2020). *Unggah-ungguh basa* not only represents linguistic structure but also reflects the philosophical values of Javanese culture, which upholds etiquette, social harmony, and respect for others. Using *ngoko* and *krama* speech levels teaches students to understand their own position and that of others in social interactions (Nuryantiningih & Hidayat, 2022; Sumekto et al., 2022). *Unggah-ungguh basa* learning has great potential as a means of naturally internalizing character values through everyday language use. Values such as politeness, respect for elders, social responsibility, and self-control are instilled through the habit of speaking politely and ethically (Priyatiningih, 2019; Rahadini et al., 2025). Polite language can be viewed as a medium for the internalization of character values because it involves the direct practice of politeness, social responsibility, and empathy in communicative interactions.

Currently, Javanese language learning often faces various challenges. Globalization, the dominance of the national language and foreign languages, as well as changes in digital communication patterns have led to a decline in the use of Javanese in daily life, particularly among children (Winda et al., 2025). This situation has led to a weakening of proficiency in formal and informal Javanese and a decline in students' understanding of the cultural values embedded within the language. This is evidenced by research by Fitriati et al. (2025), which revealed that adolescents' proficiency in Javanese varies: 41.7% can use *ngoko* (informal register) adequately, while only 4.7% are proficient in *krama* (formal register). On the other hand, Javanese language instruction in schools still tends to be oriented toward cognitive aspects, such as vocabulary and language structure, while the affective dimension and character values have not received maximum attention (Ummah et al., 2025). This situation indicates a gap between the potential of *unggah-ungguh basa* as a medium for character education and its actual implementation in practice.

In fact, integrating character education into Javanese language instruction can have a positive impact on students' attitudes and behavior. Language instruction designed to be contextual, dialogic, and rooted in local culture enables students to learn character values through direct experience. Learning *unggah-ungguh basa* involves not only studying language usage rules but also practicing polite behavior, respecting differences, and fostering social awareness in daily interactions. This demonstrates that Javanese language instruction not only enhances language proficiency but can also serve as a strategic tool in character education when properly designed and implemented (Anggraini & Riyanti, 2025).

The main issue that has emerged is the suboptimal utilization of *unggah-ungguh basa* as a means of strengthening character education in elementary schools, from conceptual, pedagogical, and implementation perspectives. Studies *unggah-ungguh basa* learning and character education remain scattered and have diverse focuses. For instance, the Systematic Literature Review by Hadi et al. (2025) emphasizes character education in general without specifically examining the role of regional languages or *unggah-ungguh basa* as a cultural approach. Thus, there is a clear research gap: the absence of a Systematic Literature Review specifically examining the role of *unggah-*

*unggah basa* in strengthening character education, particularly at the elementary school level. Furthermore, there is no comprehensive synthesis mapping the character values developed or the learning strategies.

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is considered an appropriate approach for comprehensively and systematically reviewing and synthesizing relevant research findings. Through an SLR, researchers can identify research trends, the character values being developed, the learning strategies employed, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing *unggah-unggah basa* learning in character education. The publication period of 2020–2025 was selected to capture the latest research developments relevant to curriculum dynamics, educational policies, and the socio-cultural challenges currently faced by the education sector.

Based on this background, this article aims to present a comprehensive overview of the role of *unggah-unggah basa* in strengthening character education for elementary school students. The study focuses on three main aspects: character values in *unggah-unggah basa* learning, instructional strategies for integrating character education, and challenges and opportunities in implementation. This study not only fills existing research gaps but also provides theoretical and practical contributions to the development of character education based on local wisdom.

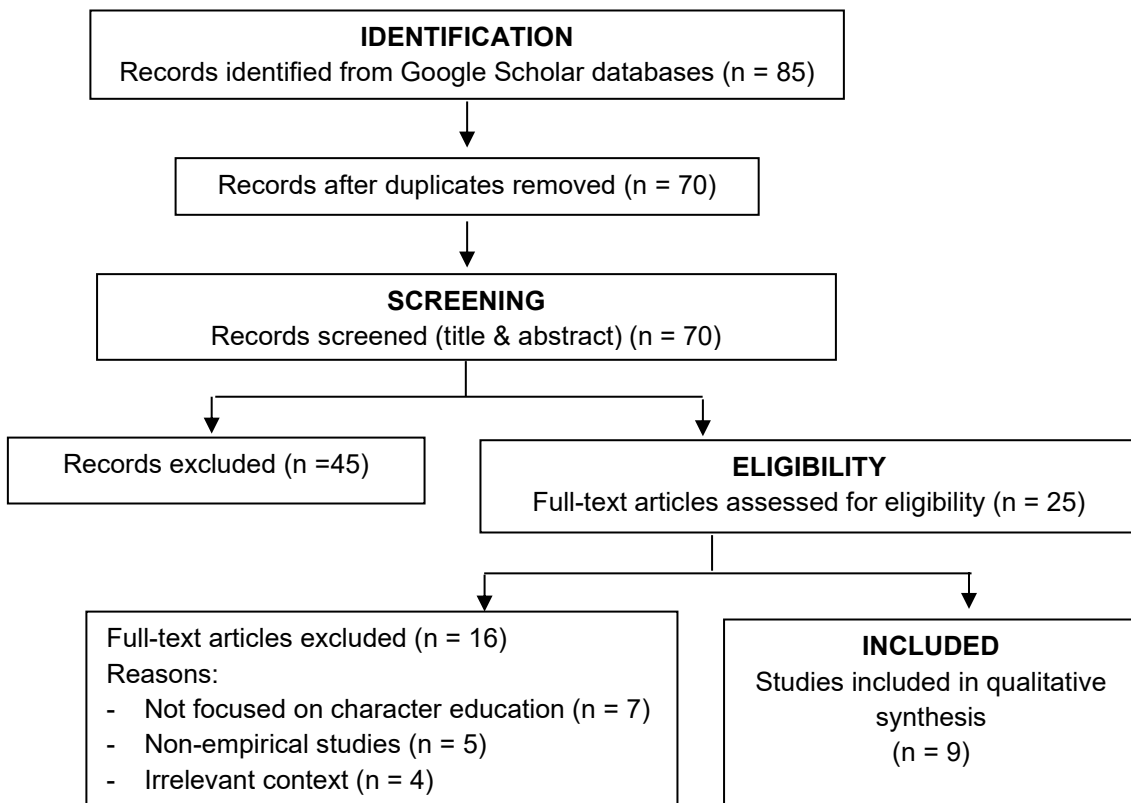
## METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine the role of *unggah-unggah basa* learning in strengthening character education among elementary school students. The review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to ensure a systematic, transparent, and replicable procedure. Data sources were obtained from several scientific databases, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, and Dimensions, to meet international standards of literature review. The literature search was conducted for publications between 2020 and 2025 using keywords in both Indonesian and English, such as character education, *unggah-unggah basa*, Javanese language learning, language politeness, and local wisdom.

The selection process followed PRISMA stages, including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. A total of 85 articles were initially identified, of which 70 remained after removing duplicates. Forty-five articles were excluded based on title and abstract screening, and 16 articles were removed during the full-text screening stage due to not meeting the inclusion criteria. As a result, 9 articles were selected for further analysis. The inclusion criteria comprised empirical studies published in reputable journals, relevant to *unggah-unggah basa* learning and character education, and focused on the primary education context. Non-empirical and irrelevant studies were excluded from the analysis.

Quality appraisal was conducted using criteria adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), including clarity of research objectives, methodological appropriateness, data validity, and the contribution of findings. Only studies that met acceptable quality standards were included in the analysis. Data were extracted using a matrix comprising author(s), year, journal index, research method, sample, and key findings. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to generate the main themes. The reliability of the analysis was ensured through the use of an audit trail, peer debriefing, and internal consistency (intra-rater reliability) by conducting repeated coding at different times to ensure the stability of the results. The study selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram



**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study analyzes nine research articles published between 2020 and 2025 that discuss *unggah-ungguh basa* learning in the context of strengthening character education in elementary schools. The analysis of data extracted from articles on *unggah-ungguh basa* and character education is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Extraction of Articles on *Unggah-ungguh Basa* Learning and Character Education (2020–2025)

No	Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Character Values Identified	Method	Key Findings
1	Nuryantiningsih & Hidayat (2022)	Javanese politeness	Social sensitivity	Descriptive qualitative	Polite language forms the basis for character development, fostering social sensitivity and embodying noble values such as tolerance, cooperation, <i>andhap asor</i> (good manners), humanity, mutual respect, and gratitude, which

					are important to preserve as pillars of character education. Someone who uses appropriate language when speaking demonstrates a high level of politeness in their behavior.
2	Natanti, et al. (2023)	Javanese language habituation	Politeness in speaking and behaving	Descriptive qualitative	Getting used to speaking Javanese <i>krama</i> teaching children to love culture and building national identity. The way to get children used to using Javanese <i>krama</i> is by getting them used in everyday communication from an early age.
3	Pamungkas & Rigianti (2023)	Javanese language habituation	Patriotism	Literature study	There is a habit of using language Javanese in elementary school can influence the character of love for the homeland and patriotism of elementary school students. In addition, character building through activities. This habit is also used as a means of preserving Javanese culture and language.
4	Asih & Nisa (2024)	Language etiquette learning	Values of Faith and devotion to God	Descriptive qualitative	Character education with understanding of <i>unggah-ungguh</i>

			Almighty, love of homeland, and appreciation for national culture		<i>basa</i> aims to provide ethical experiences through creative activities and the practice of daily etiquette. Through this character education, it is hoped that students will develop the values of faith and devotion to God Almighty, love of country, and appreciation for national culture.
5	Maghfiroh & Abduh (2024)	Language etiquette learning	Politeness	Descriptive qualitative	Learning Javanese etiquette fosters a sense of politeness and etiquette. The practice of using polite Javanese is implemented throughout the learning process, through engaging learning, and through teacher role models.
6	Khasanah, et al. (2025)	Javanese language habituation	Students' politeness, respect and social sensitivity	Literature study	Character education based on <i>unggah-ungguh basa</i> , such as manners, <i>lembah manah</i> , <i>andhap asor</i> , <i>tepa slira</i> , <i>grapyak</i> , and <i>ewuh-pekeuwuh</i> , is able to form polite attitudes, respect, and social sensitivity of students. The integration of <i>unggah-ungguh</i>

					<i>basa</i> values creates a harmonious learning atmosphere and builds a cultured personality of students.
7	Noerharyanti et al. (2025)	Speaking Javanese at the Middle Javanese level ( <i>Madya</i> )	Independence (courage, self-confidence, discipline, responsibility, and initiative)	Descriptive qualitative	Speaking Javanese at the Middle Javanese level ( <i>Madya</i> ) has a positive impact on developing a strong sense of independence, especially within the context of local wisdom. This research illustrated that languages are not only a means of communication but also a medium for strengthening character
8	Mardhiyah et al. (2025)	Use of <i>Krama</i> Inggil Javanese	Manner and respect	Descriptive qualitative	Students demonstrated improved politeness, greater respect for teachers and parents, and increased use of polite and refined language in everyday communication. Learning Javanese <i>krama</i> , can serve as a reference or guideline for implementing morals for elementary school-aged children.
9	Musyarofah, et al. (2025)	Use of <i>Krama</i>	Politeness	Descriptive qualitative	The implementation of

Inggil Javanese	<i>krama inggil</i> Javanese can influence students' character, particularly in terms of politeness. However, there are several obstacles to its implementation, stemming from the child's interests and learning styles as well as external factors such as family, school, and community.
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The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The results of the analysis indicate that three main themes consistently emerge in the literature: (1) character values in *unggah-ungguh basa* learning, (2) instructional strategies for integrating character education, and (3) challenges and opportunities in implementation. These themes were derived inductively from the coding process and recurred across various studies, indicating the presence of a strong conceptual pattern in the analyzed literature.

### 3.1. Character Values in Unggah-Ungguh Basa Learning

The results of the study indicate that *unggah-ungguh basa* significantly contributes to the development of students' character values, particularly in the areas of politeness, respect, responsibility, and empathy. The values of politeness and respect are the most prominent aspects because they are directly internalized through the use of speech registers in the Javanese language. Several studies indicate that the use of speech registers such as *ngoko* and *krama* serves not only as a communication tool but also as a means of social learning that teaches students to understand their own and others' positions in interactions (Nuryantiningsih & Hidayat, 2022; Natanti et al., 2023; Pamungkas & Rigianti, 2023; Noerharyanti et al., 2025). This strengthens students' ability to develop social awareness and communication ethics. Furthermore, the practice of using polite language in a learning context also contributes to the development of disciplined character and self-control.

In summary, these findings indicate that polite language serves a dual function: as a linguistic competency and as a medium for internalizing contextual and practical character values. This aligns with the concept of culture-based character education, which emphasizes learning through real-life practices in daily life.

### 3.2. Instructional Strategies for Integrating Character Education

The second theme explores various teaching strategies used to integrate character education into *unggah-ungguh basa* learning. The analysis reveals that the most effective approaches are contextual, dialogic, and practice-based learning. Several

studies emphasize the importance of enjoyable and contextual learning so that students practice using appropriate speech levels according to the social context (Maghfiroh & Abduh, 2023; Asih & Nisa, 2024; Khasanah et al., 2025; Mardhiyah et al., 2025). These strategies are considered effective because they provide students with direct experience in applying values of politeness and respect.

Additionally, the integration of character values is reinforced through a local wisdom-based learning approach, where learning materials are linked to students' daily lives. Teachers act as facilitators who not only teach linguistic aspects but also instill moral values through interaction and habit formation. Overall, active, contextual, and culture-based learning strategies have proven more effective in internalizing character values compared to approaches focused solely on cognitive aspects. This highlights the importance of pedagogical transformation in Javanese language education.

### 3.3. Challenges and Opportunities in Implementation

The third theme identifies various challenges as well as opportunities in the implementation of *unggah-ungguh basa* learning. The main challenges identified include the declining use of the Javanese language among the younger generation due to the influence of globalization, the dominance of the national and foreign languages, and changes in digital communication patterns (Musyarofah et al., 2025). Furthermore, Javanese language instruction in schools still tends to focus on cognitive aspects, such as vocabulary and language structure mastery, so the character values embedded within the language have not been fully utilized (Arafik & Rumidjan, 2016). Limitations in teachers' competencies regarding the integration of character education, as well as a lack of innovation in learning media, also act as barriers (Fadillah et al., 2025).

However, there is significant potential in developing *unggah-ungguh basa* instruction as a medium for character education. Integration into the curriculum, strengthening local content, and utilizing innovative learning media can serve as strategies to enhance instructional effectiveness. Furthermore, the growing awareness of the importance of preserving local culture also provides an opportunity to develop more contextual and relevant learning approaches. Thus, despite various challenges, *unggah-ungguh basa* learning holds immense potential as a strategic approach to strengthening character education, particularly at the elementary school level.

To reinforce the findings, a simple quantitative analysis was conducted to determine the frequency of themes and approaches in each study. This simple quantitative analysis involved calculating the frequency of character values and learning approaches based on the nine articles analyzed. The results of the analysis indicate that the value of politeness or courtesy was the most dominant, appearing in 6 out of 9 studies, followed by respect and social sensitivity, each appearing in 3 studies. Additionally, other values such as patriotism, faith and piety, as well as independence also emerged, albeit with lower frequencies. These findings indicate that the teaching of proper etiquette consistently contributes to the strengthening of social-interpersonal character, particularly in shaping students' communication ethics, respectful attitudes, and social sensitivity in daily life.

From a methodological perspective, most studies employed a qualitative descriptive approach (7 out of 9 articles), while two studies used a literature review approach. This indicates that research on *unggah-ungguh basa* remains largely dominated by exploratory and descriptive approaches, with limited use of quantitative or experimental methods to objectively measure learning effectiveness. In terms of instructional strategies, the findings reveal a dominance of habituation-based and practice-oriented approaches in social contexts, such as the use of *krama* language in

daily interactions, teacher modeling, and experiential learning. These approaches implicitly reflect a contextual and local wisdom-based learning model.

Furthermore, analysis of publication years indicates an increasing research focus on the integration of character education into *unggah-ungguh basa* learning, particularly in the 2023–2025 period. Earlier studies tended to emphasize language preservation, whereas more recent research explicitly links *unggah-ungguh basa* learning with character development. This shift reflects a transition from a purely linguistic perspective toward a more holistic and pedagogical approach.

Although all studies report positive contributions of *unggah-ungguh basa* learning to character development, variations exist in the depth of implementation. Some studies emphasize habituation as the primary strategy, while others integrate character values through more structured instructional activities. Additionally, several studies identify challenges in implementation, such as low student interest and the influence of external factors, including family and community environments. These differences suggest that the effectiveness of *unggah-ungguh basa* learning is influenced not only by the content but also by social context and pedagogical strategies.

These findings are consistent with character education theory proposed by Berkowitz and Bier (2005), which emphasizes the importance of habituation, direct experience, and social environment in character formation. *Unggah-ungguh basa* learning has a distinct advantage in integrating these elements through everyday language practices. However, the dominance of qualitative approaches in the literature indicates limitations in quantitatively measuring impact, highlighting the need for more methodologically robust future studies.

Based on this synthesis, *unggah-ungguh basa* learning can be conceptualized as an integrative medium linking cultural values and character education through habituation, social interaction, and contextual practice. Therefore, strengthening character education depends not only on cultural content but also on instructional strategies that enable students to actively experience and internalize these values in their daily lives.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that *unggah-ungguh basa* learning plays a strategic role in strengthening character education among elementary school students. Politeness and respect emerge as the dominant character values, followed by social awareness, independence, and patriotism. These findings indicate that *unggah-ungguh basa* learning consistently contributes to the development of students' social-interpersonal character through ethical communication practices. The effectiveness of this learning approach is strongly influenced by pedagogical strategies, where contextual learning, habituation, and teacher modeling are more effective in internalizing character values than purely cognitive approaches. Character development through *unggah-ungguh basa* can be understood as the integration of cultural values (*input*), contextual learning processes (*process*), and student character formation (*output*).

However, this study has several limitations, including the limited number of studies analyzed, the dominance of qualitative approaches, and the restricted research contexts, which limit the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ quantitative or experimental approaches to further examine the effectiveness of the proposed model. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of character education based on local wisdom and to provide practical guidance for educators in designing more contextual, meaningful, and sustainable Javanese language learning.

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