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Implementing Character Education through the Pancasila Student Profile Project: A Study in Upper Primary Schools

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Abstract

The implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) constitutes a central component of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in promoting character development through project-based learning aligned with Pancasila values. This study aims to comprehensively examine the implementation of P5 within the Merdeka Curriculum at the upper elementary school level, specifically Grades IV, V, and VI. A library research method was employed by reviewing relevant scholarly and policy sources, including educational journal articles, textbooks, government policies, and official documents concerning P5 implementation. The findings indicate that P5 implementation supports the development of the six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile, namely faith in and devotion to God Almighty and noble character, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity. At the upper elementary level, students are able to participate actively in contextual projects connected to real-life situations, thereby strengthening the practical application of these dimensions. However, implementation is constrained by several challenges, including varying levels of teacher readiness, limited infrastructure, and insufficient parental understanding of the project-based approach. The study concludes that effective P5 implementation requires sustained educator capacity building and stronger collaboration among schools, families, and communities. These findings contribute to the literature on character education and curriculum implementation by highlighting both the potential of P5 to strengthen Pancasila-oriented competencies and the

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institutional conditions required for its effective implementation in upper elementary education.

Keywords: Pancasila Student Profile; P5; Merdeka Curriculum; Character Education; Elementary Education

INTRODUCTION

Character education plays a crucial role in human resource development amidst global disruption, where a nation's progress is no longer solely measured by cognitive achievement, but rather by the moral resilience and cultural identity of its young generation. In the Indonesian context, this urgency demands an education system capable of integrating academic mastery with the authentic internalization of Pancasila values. This paradigm shift serves as the foundation for ongoing curricular policy reform to ensure students possess a moral compass relevant to the demands of the times (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

As a strategic step, the Independent Curriculum was introduced to revolutionize the conventional learning system and respond to the ongoing learning crisis, reflected in Indonesia's stagnant literacy and numeracy achievements in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (Mubarak, 2022). This curriculum paradigm shifts the orientation from the transmission of dense, content-based material to a student-centered learning model by granting educational units broad autonomy in designing contextual learning experiences.

The core of this pedagogical transformation is realized through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, a cross-disciplinary co-curricular intervention specifically designed to shape 21st-century competencies and strengthen national character (Mubarak, 2022). This program translates the Pancasila Student Profile vision into six essential, integrated dimensions: faith and noble character, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity (Mubarak, 2022). Through a hands-on, experience-based approach, students are facilitated to conceptualize theoretical knowledge into concrete actions to solve problems in their environment.

Theoretically, the implementation of this model is firmly rooted in the effectiveness of project-based learning, which has been empirically proven to foster intrinsic motivation, critical reasoning, and collaborative skills in students. The context of character development

for upper elementary school students, particularly grades IV to VI, offers strategic development momentum. Based on cognitive development theory, children in the advanced concrete operational phase begin to develop the capacity for logical and systematic reasoning regarding empirical phenomena, enabling them to internalize the dynamics of more complex social projects (Mubarak, 2022).

While conceptually promising, the implementation of this character-building program at the grassroots level faces various substantive obstacles. Field reports indicate significant pedagogical gaps, including unequal teacher preparedness in facilitating open inquiry, limited supporting facilities, parental resistance to understanding, and a lack of adaptive contextual modules (Fransiska et al., 2026). This disparity often reduces the essence of inquiry-based learning to mere administrative formalities and ceremonial celebrations without a deep internalization of its values.

The current literature gap indicates that most previous studies tend to focus on macro-policy analysis or general evaluation at the secondary education level, while empirical studies examining the mechanics of implementation and pedagogical adaptation in upper elementary school grades are still very limited. The lack of in-depth studies on the alignment between theme design, the cognitive developmental stages of children aged 9–12, and the sustainable impact of internalizing character dimensions creates a significant knowledge gap in contemporary elementary education discourse.

The implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) at the upper elementary school level has proven to be a strategic tool in contextually internalizing student character through directed project-based learning. This is in line with the findings of Hanwita, (2023) who confirmed that the implementation of P5 with an entrepreneurship theme in grade IV of SD effectively fostered dimensions of independence, creativity, and cooperation through direct experience of processing local products collaboratively. This effectiveness is reinforced by a study by Kristanti et al. (2024) who proved a significant increase in the critical reasoning dimension of fourth-grade students after the implementation of a project based on environmental problem solving, where upper-grade students began to be able to analyze real-sworld problems around them. Despite having a positive impact on affective and cognitive development, Madani et al. (2026) noted that the successful implementation of P5 in grade IV of SDN 46 Ampenan still faces crucial challenges, particularly the diversity of students' character readiness and the need for

standardized process assessment instruments, so that teacher support and consistent parental involvement are determining factors for optimal achievement of all dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile.

To bridge this gap, this study presents analytical novelty through a comprehensive exploration of the implementation mechanisms of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project in upper elementary school grades, by precisely mapping the relationship between project design, teacher instructional dynamics, and student cognitive characteristics. This study argues that the successful internalization of Pancasila values does not depend solely on the completion of the project product, but rather on the appropriate design of pedagogical facilitation that accommodates the child's stage of thinking maturity.

Based on this rationale, this study aims to: (1) analyze the theoretical foundation and operationalization of the program within the Merdeka Curriculum framework; (2) explore the implementation mechanisms in upper elementary school grades; (3) mapping the relevance of contextual theme selection to cognitive development stages; (4) evaluating the actual impact of project interventions on the achievement of six character dimensions; and (5) formulating a strategic mitigation model for structural and pedagogical obstacles encountered in the field.

Theoretically, the findings of this study contribute to enriching the literature on the integration of project-based learning in character education for elementary school children in developing countries. Practically, the study's outputs provide empirical references for educators in designing differentiated teaching modules, guide principals in managing co-curricular resources, and serve as a foundation for further policy formulation by stakeholders to optimize sustainable curriculum implementation.

METHODS

The researchers in this study used a qualitative approach with a literature study. A literature study is a series of activities related to library data collection methods, reading and taking notes, and processing research materials (Zed, 2018). This approach was chosen because this study focused on an in-depth review of various literature sources relevant to the topic of implementing P5 in the Independent Curriculum, without conducting primary data collection through direct fieldwork.

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources included official government documents such as the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Permendikbudristek*), the P5 guide from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Learning Outcomes (CP), and operational curriculum documents of educational units. Secondary data sources included indexed national and international scientific journals, educational textbooks, seminar proceedings, theses, dissertations, and research reports relevant to the P5 and Independent Curriculum themes published between 2018 and 2024.

Data collection techniques were conducted through several stages: (a) identification and inventory of relevant library sources through various scientific databases such as Google Scholar, SINTA, ERIC, and Mendeley; (b) selection of library sources based on topic relevance, source quality, and freshness of information; (c) in-depth reading and recording of important information from each source; and (d) classification and categorization of information based on established research themes (Alaslan, 2021; Suwendra, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques with a descriptive-analytical approach. The analysis process followed these stages: (1) data reduction, namely selecting and focusing relevant information from various library sources; (2) data display, namely presenting information systematically in the form of descriptive narratives; and (3) drawing conclusions based on patterns found from various literature sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data validity is maintained through source triangulation techniques, namely by comparing and confirming information from various literature sources to gain a comprehensive and objective understanding (Sugiyono, 2017).

RESULTS

Concept and Theoretical Basis of Pancasila Student Profile

The Pancasila Student Profile is a formulation of the competencies and character of Indonesian students, which serves as a long-term goal of the national education system. This concept was first comprehensively formulated in Ministerial Regulation Number 22 of 2020 concerning the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education and Culture, and was later strengthened through Ministerial Decree Number 56/M/2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Recovery. The Pancasila Student

Profile embodies the ideals of national education as stated in the 1945 Constitution and Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Mulyasa, 2023).

The philosophical foundation of the Pancasila Student Profile rests on the thinking of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, who emphasized the importance of comprehensive education encompassing the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but rather the process of developing a complete human being with noble character and the ability to live well in society (Juleha et al., 2025). In addition, the concept of the Pancasila Student Profile is also based on Kohlberg's character development theory which emphasizes that a person's moral character develops through increasingly complex stages along with meaningful experiences and learning.

The six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile are closely related. The dimensions of faith and devotion to God Almighty and noble character encompass religious character, personal character, character towards humans, character towards nature, and national character. The dimension of global diversity encompasses recognizing and appreciating culture, intercultural communication skills, and reflection on and responsibility for experiences of diversity. The dimension of cooperation encompasses collaboration, caring, and sharing. The dimension of independence encompasses awareness of oneself and the situation at hand, as well as self-regulation. The dimension of critical reasoning encompasses acquiring and processing information and ideas, analyzing and evaluating reasoning, reflecting on thoughts and thought processes, and making decisions. The dimension of creativity encompasses generating original ideas, producing original works and actions, and possessing flexibility of thought (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

P5 Implementation Mechanism in the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*)

In the Merdeka Curriculum structure, lesson hours are divided into two large groups: intracurricular and co-curricular learning. P5 is included in the co-curricular group, with a time allocation of 20-30% of the total lesson hours per year, depending on the student's developmental stage. At the upper elementary school level (Phase C for grades V-VI and part of Phase B for grade IV), the time allocation for P5 is significant enough to enable the implementation of meaningful and in-depth projects (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

The implementation of P5 is organized in the form of thematic projects that are carried out periodically. In one academic year, each class carries out at least two to three P5 projects with different themes. The selection of project themes is adjusted to the conditions,

needs, and local potential of the school, as well as the interests and learning needs of students. The principles underlying the implementation of P5 are: (1) holistic, meaning viewing each theme as a whole and not fragmented; (2) contextual, meaning relevant to the real situations faced by students; (3) student-centred, meaning providing ample space for students to play an active role; and (4) exploratory, meaning giving students the freedom to explore various possible solutions (Hawazi et al., 2025).

The stages of implementing the P5 project generally include: (1) introduction, which is the phase in which students are introduced to the project theme and the issues to be raised; (2) contextualization, which is the phase of gathering information and in-depth understanding of the issues through various activities such as observation, interviews, discussions, and simple research; (3) action, which is the phase in which students design and implement solutions or products based on the understanding that has been built; and (4) reflection and follow-up, which is the evaluation phase of the project process and results as well as further development plans (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Each of these stages is designed to maximize the active involvement of students and the development of various competencies according to the Pancasila Student Profile.

Relevant P5 Themes for Upper Elementary School Grades

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has established seven P5 themes for educational units to choose from: (1) Sustainable Lifestyle; (2) Local Wisdom; (3) Bhinneka Tunggal Ika; (4) Build Your Soul and Body; (5) Voice of Democracy; (6) Engineering and Technology to Build the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia; and (7) Entrepreneurship. For elementary school level, particularly upper grades, not all themes are mandatory; rather, educational units are given the freedom to choose the theme that best suits the local context and student needs (Arifin, 2025).

The Sustainable Lifestyle theme is highly relevant for upper grades of elementary school because it encourages students to understand the impact of human activities on the environment and develop simple solutions to environmental problems around them. Students can carry out projects such as school waste management, composting, or energy-saving campaigns. This theme supports the development of critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative thinking (Kharisma et al., 2025).

The Local Wisdom theme encourages students to explore and preserve the culture, traditions, and local wisdom of their respective regions. Projects within this theme can

include documentation of folklore, traditional arts and cultural performances, or the creation of craft products based on local materials. This theme strongly supports the development of a global dimension of diversity and faith and devotion to God Almighty. Research by Ibrahimi and Marvida (2025) and Ichsan et al. (2021) shows that integrating local wisdom into learning can significantly increase students' sense of pride and love for their homeland.

The Entrepreneurship theme is increasingly relevant for higher education given students' cognitive development, which enables them to understand simple business concepts. Entrepreneurship projects can involve students in planning, creating, and marketing simple products. These activities directly develop independence, creativity, and collaborative skills, while fostering an entrepreneurial spirit from an early age (Anis et al., 2025). Research shows that early entrepreneurial experience is positively correlated with problem-solving skills and self-confidence in adolescence (Ichsan et al., 2023).

The Impact of P5 Implementation on the Profile of Pancasila Students

Various literature studies have shown that the implementation of P5 has a significant positive impact on the development of students' character and competencies. First, in the dimensions of faith and noble character, P5 activities involving elements of culture and local wisdom help students understand the spiritual and moral values inherent in national traditions. Students participating in projects themed on local wisdom show an increased appreciation for local religious and cultural values (Suttrisno & Rofi'ah, 2023).

Second, the dimension of global diversity develops through projects that explore the diversity of Indonesian cultures, languages, and customs. Students learn to appreciate differences and build inclusive communication. It aligns with the findings of Nurlailah et al. (2026), which showed that project-based learning with a diversity theme significantly increases tolerance and empathy in upper-grade elementary school students.

Third, the dimensions of cooperation and collaboration develop naturally within the group work dynamics of P5 projects. Students learn to listen to others' opinions, divide tasks fairly, resolve conflicts constructively, and collaborate to achieve common goals. Research by Thomas (2000) and Bell (2010), widely cited in the PjBL literature, confirms that teamwork within the context of authentic projects effectively develops students' social intelligence.

Fourth, the independent dimension develops through the project planning and implementation process, which requires students to make decisions, manage their time, and

take responsibility for their own work. Wijayati et al. (2025) found that senior students who actively participated in P5 demonstrated significant improvements in self-management skills and intrinsic motivation. Fifth, the critical and creative reasoning dimensions are developed through authentic project challsenges that require in-depth analysis, innovative thinking, and unprecedented creative solutions.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Teachers as Facilitators in P5

The implementation of P5 demands a fundamental shift in the role of teachers. Teachers are no longer the primary source of information (sage on the stage), but rather as facilitators, motivators, and guides (guide on the side) who accompany students in their learning process. This paradigm shift requires pedagogical competencies that differ from conventional learning (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Effective teachers in facilitating P5 need to have: (1) a deep understanding of the project-based learning approach and its principles; (2) the ability to design contextual, challenging, and relevant project scenarios; (3) skills in guiding group discussions and collaboration; (4) the ability to provide constructive and formative feedback; and (5) creativity in optimally utilizing available resources. Teacher training and professional development are crucial factors in determining the success of P5 implementation (Maudyna et al., 2023).

The results of the literature review indicate that there is still a significant gap between the competencies required for the implementation of P5 and the actual competencies possessed by most elementary school teachers in Indonesia. Available teacher training programs are unevenly distributed and do not always align with actual needs in the field. Therefore, a structured, sustainable, and needs-based teacher professional development program is needed to prepare teachers for the optimal implementation of P5 (Asyauqiya et al., 2025).

Assessment in P5

The shift in assessment for the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) marks a fundamental break with the conventional evaluation traditions that have long dominated classrooms. Conventional assessments generally position students as test objects

through a final, number-oriented summative evaluation, while the P5 assessment places the process of character internalization at the heart of assessment. Its formative and holistic nature requires teachers to continuously track students' learning trajectories, rather than simply photographing physical work at the conclusion of the project theme (Ansori & Heriansyah, 2025).

The authentic characteristics of P5 are realized through a diversification of instruments that capture the dynamics of learning from various perspectives. The use of step-by-step rubrics, periodic reflection journals, portfolio compilation, collaborative observation sheets, and peer assessments create a holistic evaluation space. These multi-source instruments prevent bias from a single assessment and provide a realistic picture of how students reason critically, collaborate, and overcome real-life challenges while designing problem-solving strategies with their groups (Hidayati et al., 2022).

The reporting of learning outcomes in the form of qualitative narratives, rather than numerical symbols or letter grades, is a concrete manifestation of this paradigm shift. Numbers often simplify the complexity of character development into a series of scores that can easily trigger unhealthy competition and label students' abilities. With narrative descriptions that map the stages of achievement of the Pancasila Student Profile dimensions—from beginning to advanced to highly developed—learning reports serve as a more meaningful navigation map for personal development for both students and parents (Arbainata et al., 2026).

Theoretically, the P5 evaluation ecosystem integrates the principles of assessment for learning and assessment as holistic learning into daily practice. Through continuous feedback, educators use observational data to guide differentiated guidance, while students develop metacognition through self-reflection and peer evaluation. This practice shifts the focus of education from merely pursuing performance to developing independent learners who can recognize their own strengths, obstacles, and developmental paths.

Challenges and Solutions for P5 Implementation

Based on a literature review, there are several key challenges in implementing Project-Based Learning (P5) in upper-grade elementary schools. First, there is the challenge of teacher preparedness. Many elementary school teachers lack sufficient experience and competence in designing and facilitating project-based learning. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) showed that approximately

60% of teachers still require intensive mentoring in implementing Project-Based Learning (P5). Recommended solutions include increasing the frequency and quality of teacher training, developing professional learning communities (PLCs), and providing more comprehensive and user-friendly implementation modules and guides.

Second, the challenge of time and curriculum management. Teachers often face difficulties integrating P5 projects with intracurricular learning without sacrificing the achievement of established learning outcomes. The solution is integrative and collaborative curriculum planning among subject teachers at the same grade level, as well as the development of a realistic and structured project calendar (Jannah et al., 2025).

Third, the challenge of limited facilities and infrastructure. Not all schools have adequate facilities to support various types of projects, especially those requiring technology, materials, or specialized space. The solution is to optimize available resources in the school environment, utilize recycled materials, collaborate with the community and parents of students, and collaborate between schools in sharing resources (Aulia & Wudjud, 2025).

Fourth, the challenge of parental understanding and involvement. Some parents still don't understand the P5 concept and tend to measure their child's learning success solely on academic scores. The solution is to increase communication between schools and parents through various forums, project exhibitions, and the active involvement of parents in various project activities as resource persons or facilitators (Rustiyana, 2023).

The Relevance of P5 to the Development of Higher-Grade Students

The implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project in the upper elementary grades aligns functionally with the cognitive transition characteristics of children aged 10–12. Based on Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory, this age range marks the shift from the concrete operational stage to the beginning of formal operations. Students begin to master inductive reasoning, hierarchical classification, and empirical problem solving, but their thinking remains heavily anchored in physical reality. Project activities based on direct investigation—such as environmental observation or school waste management—provide the concrete media children need to build mental representations before moving on to more complex abstract formulations (Santrock, 2017).

From a social constructivist perspective, the collaborative learning design in P5 facilitates the Zone of Proximal Development mechanism formulated by Lev Vygotsky. Advanced students expand their horizons not only through one-way instruction from the

teacher, but also through peer interaction in workgroups. When designing solutions for entrepreneurship or sustainable lifestyles, a peer-scaffolding process occurs where students with higher analytical or technical skills help their peers transcend their actual capabilities to reach their potential. This dynamic of exchanging arguments and assigning roles naturally accelerates the internalization of higher-level cognitive functions (Vygotsky, 1980).

P5 also meets the psychosocial needs of children at the industry versus inferiority stage according to Erik Erikson's psychosocial model. In this phase of late middle school, children are encouraged to demonstrate competence, produce tangible work, and gain recognition for their efforts. P5's process-oriented exploration and exhibition of final work provide a formal platform for students to experience productive success. When their efforts are recognized within the classroom and school community, self-efficacy and a strong sense of perseverance are fostered; conversely, the lack of a structured creative space can trigger self-doubt and feelings of inferiority (Berliani, 2025).

The integration of cognitive, social, and psychosocial developmental dimensions confirms that P5 works in harmony with the biological and mental readiness of upper-grade students, not simply as an administrative complement to the curriculum. This cooperative, experience-based approach does not burden children's cognitive capacities with theoretical concepts beyond their age, but rather reconciles curricular demands with their natural growth and developmental trajectory. The implementation of P5 thus lays the foundation for character development and critical reasoning through a psychologically meaningful learning process (Haryono et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project in upper elementary school grades serves as a transformative pedagogical intervention that substantially strengthens 21st-century competencies and the internalization of character values through contextual and collaborative project-based learning. However, the program's long-term effectiveness remains distorted by structural constraints, particularly disparities in teacher pedagogical readiness, limited supporting facilities, and fragmented partnerships between schools and stakeholders. Therefore, the sustainability of P5 requires integrated, cross-sectoral policy interventions, while future

research needs to focus on large-scale empirical investigations to evaluate the program's longitudinal impact across diverse socio-cultural and geographic contexts.

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