


*International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*  
Vol. 24, No. 11, pp. 526-539, November 2025  
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.11.25>  
Received Jul 21, 2025; Revised Sept 27, 2025; Accepted Oct 3, 2025

## Character Formation through Undokai: Exploring the Educational Values of Japanese Practices for Indonesian Students

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**Abstract.** This study seeks to examine the educational significance of Undokai events in Japan and their importance for character development among students in Indonesia. Employing an exploratory qualitative method via interviews, observations, and document analysis, this study investigates the experiences of teachers, students, and parents concerning their roles in executing Undokai. The findings indicate that Undokai embodies several significant values in character development, such as teamwork and unity, accountability and self-discipline, perseverance, leadership and autonomy, alongside the participation of parents and the community. The results also indicate that there are contextual differences between Japan and Indonesia. Japan highlights structure, discipline, and community engagement, whereas Indonesia focuses on adaptability, creativity, and unity. Nonetheless, both methods could enhance one another in bolstering character education initiatives within educational institutions. This study validates that character education occurs not only in classrooms, but also through shared experiences with families and communities. This research suggests that integrating Undokai values with the richness of local Indonesian culture is essential for developing contextual, transformative, and sustainable character education.

**Keywords:** character education; educational value; Indonesia; Japan; Undokai

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## 1. Introduction

In the age of globalization, character development has emerged as a primary emphasis in education. Education requires new teaching strategies that foster not only students' cognitive skills but also their social-emotional and character growth (Hakim et al., 2025). Developing character is essential for students' personal growth and creating a healthy and harmonious community. Different nations have created different strategies and techniques to develop students' character, with one example being Japan (Tachibana, 2024).

The education system in Japan places great emphasis on moral values, social responsibility, and discipline, so that it is effective in shaping students' character (Huda et al., 2022). In recent years, character education has also become an important issue in national education. Character-based education was even initiated as a national movement from Early Childhood Education to Higher Education, including non-formal and informal education. According to the Minister of National Education, the character to be built is based on self-esteem and the creation of a noble national character (Sakban & Sundawa, 2023).

Thomas Lickona, a character educator from Cortland University who is known as the father of American character education, revealed that a nation is on the verge of destruction if there are 10 signs of the times, namely increasing violence among teenagers; a culture of dishonesty; the development of fanatical attitudes toward peer groups; reduced respect for parents and teachers; the blurring of good and bad morals; decreased use of language; increased self-destructive behavior such as drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity; a low sense of responsibility as an individual and citizen; decreasing work ethic; as well as suspicion and lack of concern for others (Annisa et al., 2024). This multidimensional crisis and the weakness of religious and civic education show that character education must be strengthened for the nation's future generations to be protected from moral damage (Jumari et al., 2024).

Character education needs to be fostered continuously from an early age, from the family and school environments to the wider community. Cultural values and national character must be developed through every subject, curricular and extracurricular activities, and school culture. Thus, in implementing character education in schools, all components (stakeholders) must be involved, including the educational components themselves, namely curriculum content, learning and assessment processes, quality of relationships, subject management, school management, as well as implementation of co-curricular activities (Harahap et al., 2024). This also includes empowering infrastructure, financing, the school residents' work ethic, and the school environment (Bamkin, 2019).

The criteria for success in character education at the educational unit level are demonstrated by the formation of school culture, namely, behavior, traditions, daily habits, and symbols practiced by all school members and the surrounding community based on the values developed. Character education must be taught systematically and holistically using the method of knowing, loving, and practicing goodness. Knowing goodness is relatively easy because it is cognitive

(Ishikawa et al., 2024). After knowing goodness, a feeling of love for goodness must grow so that awareness arises of doing good because one loves good behavior. From love for goodness, the will to do good will be born, which then forms the habit of spontaneously behaving well. This is the main goal of character education, namely the formation of individuals who can spontaneously do good according to the values taught (Murphy et al., 2025).

Etymologically, the term character comes from the Greek *charassein*, which means to carve. Thus, forming character is the same as carving a stone, which is certainly not an easy job. From this initial meaning, the understanding of character developed as a special sign or pattern of a person's behavior (individual moral behavior pattern) that reflects a love of goodness (Nisak et al., 2022). Character can be interpreted as morals or personality, which are formed from the internalization of various virtues that are used as the basis for ways of viewing, thinking, behaving, and acting (Fiala, 2024). Character formation also requires an integrated approach through three educational centers, namely school, family, and community. These three educational environments are crucial as character education laboratories. Character is related to moral strength and has a positive meaning. In other words, a person of character has positive moral qualities (M. W. Berkowitz, 2022).

In the context of education, Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System emphasizes that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to gain religious or spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble morals, and the skills needed by themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Raup et al., 2022). By paying attention to the meaning of character and education, character education can be understood as an effort to develop students' potential based on cultural values and national character so that they have an identity, apply these values in everyday life, and become good citizens and members of society. Character education is a planned effort to help someone understand, appreciate, and practice moral values (Shruthi & Padmanabha, 2024).

One of the important activities in character building in Japanese schools is *Undokai*, which is an annual sports event that involves all students, teachers, and often parents. *Undokai* is not just a sporting activity but also a means of instilling values such as cooperation, responsibility, solidarity, and the spirit of never giving up. This practice helps children learn character early (Asami-Johansson et al., 2020) (Innami, 2025). Many countries, notably Indonesia and Japan, prioritize character education. Character education in Japan emphasizes morality, social responsibility, and discipline in formal and non-formal education. Students, teachers, and parent-led *Undokai* activities have been shown to establish these values early on.

Character education in Japan emphasizes theoretical instruction, practice, and direct experience to shape student conduct (Syamsurrijal, 2021) (Sakti et al., 2024a). Indonesia's national education strategy currently emphasizes

comprehensive character education that nurtures moral values and social responsibility. However, lessons from Japan's non-formal and extracurricular practices could further enhance Indonesia's character education initiatives.

Character education becomes more difficult with time. Technology and social media have created new moral dilemmas for today's youth. Many nations are experiencing a moral crisis due to declining social responsibility, rising violence, and a culture of juvenile dishonesty, according to research. To address this new problem, character education must emphasize moral and ethical awareness in students (Mikami et al., 2022). By emphasizing character education in official and informal settings, Japan has overcome this difficulty. Japan encourages school community engagement, including parents and the surrounding community. This helps children grasp character principles through classroom and real-world situations. In Japan, community engagement in character education helps students become responsible and disciplined (Chishima et al., 2023).

Indonesia continues to struggle with character education, particularly in field implementation. Character education is part of the national curriculum, yet some schools struggle to apply it. The lack of resources, community support, and teacher training is challenging for many schools (Ciampa & Wolfe, 2021; Pike et al., 2021). However, there is great potential to increase the effectiveness of character education in Indonesia by adopting several elements from the character education system in Japan, especially in terms of community involvement and learning through direct experience (Sakti et al., 2024b).

Although various studies have discussed the importance of character education in both Indonesia and Japan, there is still a research gap regarding how typical Japanese practices like Undokai can be adapted and applied in the Indonesian educational context. Most studies focus more on the implementation of character education in general, but few specifically explore the educational values of Undokai activities as a means of character building for students in Indonesia.

The novelty of this research lies in exploring the educational values of Undokai as a typical Japanese educational practice and examining its potential to strengthen character education in Indonesia. Thus, this research not only enriches the literature on cross-cultural character education but also offers a practical perspective regarding the adaptation of foreign culture-based activities that are relevant to Indonesia's national education needs.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This research used an exploratory qualitative approach with the aim of exploring the educational values contained in Undokai activities in Japan and examining the possibility of their application in character building for students in Indonesia. An exploratory approach was chosen because this issue is still relatively new and has not been studied much in the Indonesian education context, so a broader, more open, and flexible understanding of the various findings that emerged from the field was needed. An exploratory approach is often used to understand

phenomena that are still minimally studied and allows researchers to develop analytical categories from field data (Creswell, 2016).

## **2.2 Participants**

The subjects of this research consisted of various informants who were considered relevant and had direct experience with the implementation of Undokai. One school head, two students, and one professor from an Undokai-implementing school near Osaka Sangyo University were the major informants. This study also included two students, one educator, and two education professionals from Indonesia to discuss Undokai ideals in the local context. Secondary data sources included the school curriculum, activity records, audiovisual evidence (pictures, videos, activity reports), and academic literature on character education in Japan and Indonesia. Qualitative researchers use purposive sampling to recruit respondents (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

## **2.3 Data Collection**

Three methods were used to obtain data. First, to understand Undokai's educational ideals, teachers, students, parents, and education specialists were interviewed in-depth. Second, minimal-participation observation was done in the field or via audiovisual recordings to directly see Undokai. Third, documents were analyzed by examining textual and visual materials to comprehend Undokai's educational significance and its potential adoption in Indonesia. These three methods follow (Denzin, 1978) triangulation concept to boost data trustworthiness (Mertens, 2018).

## **2.4 Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using an exploratory thematic analysis approach. The first stage was open coding, where initial themes that emerged from the data were identified, such as cooperation, discipline, sportsmanship, and mutual cooperation. The second stage was axial coding, where these themes were grouped into more structured educational value categories. The third stage was selective coding, which entailed compiling a framework of the most relevant and significant educational values and connecting it with the character education framework in Indonesia. This analysis process follows the qualitative coding model described by Strauss (Corbin, 2021).

## **2.5 Data Validation**

To ensure the validity of the data, this research used several validity strategies. Source triangulation was used by comparing data from various informants, namely students, teachers, parents, and education experts. Technical triangulation was used by combining interviews, observations, and document analysis. Apart from that, the member checking technique was also used by asking several informants for confirmation of the researcher's interpretation (Enworo, 2023). Data validity was also strengthened through peer debriefing by having discussions with peer researchers or academics who had expertise in the field of education to ensure consistency of interpretation.

### 3. Results and Findings

#### 3.1 Educational Values from Undokai

Based on analysis of data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation studies, several main themes were found that describe Undokai's contribution to student character formation. This grouping was carried out through a thematic categorization process that emphasizes the educational values that emerge from Undokai practice. Each theme not only shows how these activities shape student behavior but also enriches understanding of the differences and similarities between the Japanese and Indonesian contexts. These findings can be separated into the following sub-topics:

##### 3.1.1 Cooperation and solidarity

Undokai exercises stress collaboration, with each student playing their part. Because each function is equally crucial to mutual achievement, no position is deemed higher or lower. Undokai promotes unity and communal participation above individual accomplishments. An interview with a Japanese elementary school head corroborated this idea. He added, *"Even though a student's role may seem small, such as holding a flag or giving encouragement, it is considered as important as running on the front line."*

This declaration stresses that Undokai values collaboration in both physical activities and moral support among students. Students also support one another throughout practice and tournaments, according to field observations. Classmates' cheers boost excitement and group cohesiveness. The joy of a team win after the race reveals that triumph in Undokai belongs to the team.

##### 3.1.2 Responsibility and discipline

Undokai activities promote responsibility. Each student is responsible for providing equipment, organizing the competition, and cleaning the activity area. This technique teaches students that the event's success depends on both the instructor and the committee, and their active participation in their jobs. An interview with a pupil corroborated this. He added, *"I have to come early to prepare the equipment; if I'm late, my friends will have difficulties."*

This remark recognizes that individual accountability affects collective performance. Undokai effectively instills responsibility at a young age. The execution of Undokai also shows discipline. All students must follow the training timetable, as shown by the documentation study. This temporal consistency encourages punctuality and rule-following. Field observations demonstrate that children are accustomed to preparing early, following directions, and completing things in a set sequence.

##### 3.1.3 The spirit of never giving up (perseverance)

The Undokai ethos of perseverance is evident in their work. Training and competitions provide physical and mental difficulties for students. This event teaches kids that success takes persistence and a desire to strive despite obstacles. Students' everyday actions demonstrate tenacity, according to observations. Some kids who struggled with strength continued trying in a tug-of-war battle, even though their team nearly lost. Undokai teaches mental endurance and fighting

constantly via this refusal to give up. The school head stressed that Undokai's fundamental purpose was to overcome hurdles with tenacity, not success. In one interview, a teacher said, "Undokai teaches children that failure is not the end, but rather an opportunity to try better." Thus, students learn the importance of perseverance and build a character foundation that will benefit them in the future.

#### *3.1.4 Leadership and independence*

Undokai gives students plenty of leadership opportunities. As a team leader or group organizer, students experience leading friends, making choices, and managing activities. This is consistent with Japanese educational norms that stress students' involvement in school management; therefore, leadership is learned through both theory and practice. Undokai's official literature states that, "Senior students are given the responsibility to lead the line and organize strategy." This duty develops management skills and teamwork. Juniors look up to seniors in discipline, sportsmanship, and field decision-making.

In addition to leadership, Undokai develops independence. In an interview, a junior high school student said leading a team gave him the confidence to face other educational problems. This suggests that leadership experiences help kids develop self-confidence, initiative, and problem-solving skills. Undokai helps students create character that is both reflective of their instructor and their own experiences.

#### *3.1.5 Parental and community involvement*

One of the distinctive aspects of Undokai is the active participation of parents and the community in school activities. Observations show that they are not only present as spectators but are also directly involved in various family competitions. This involvement creates an atmosphere of togetherness that fosters a sense of belonging to the school, so that Undokai activities are not only the property of the students but also a celebration with the entire community.

This experience was also confirmed through an interview with one lecturer. He said, "*I saw their parent[s] involve[d] [in]... this activity, I think it makes parent[s] feel like... [a] part of the school, not just supporting children from outside.*" This expression shows how Undokai strengthens the role of the family in education, while building communication bridges between teachers, students, and parents. Thus, character education does not stop in the classroom but is extended to the family and community. In addition, photographs and films reveal how Undokai is a school and community celebration. Socially, this festival promotes cross-generational camaraderie and school identity. Undokai provides comprehensive and contextual character education via student, parent, and community collaboration.

### **3.2 Comparison with the Indonesian Context**

Extracurricular activities help students cooperate and be creative, according to Indonesian school education experts. Inter-class sports and arts events promote healthy competition and student unity. These activities teach children collaboration, respect, and social skills in a fun setting.

Indonesian extracurriculars are more flexible than Japanese Undokai. Students may be more creative since there are no prescribed practices or preparation schedules. This method allows for student creativity but may lessen the focus on discipline and accountability. A teacher said, *"We often hold inter-class competitions, but parent participation isn't as strong as in Japan."* This comment illustrates Indonesian school culture, where parental engagement in student activities is not common. In Japan, parents are active in Undokai festivities, whereas in Indonesia, they are mostly spectators or supporters. It seems that school-family-community linkages are underused.

This distinction allows Undokai's best practices to be used in Indonesia. Discipline, accountability, and family participation may improve Indonesian non-formal education. With these features, extracurricular activities may be entertainment, competition, and a vehicle for character development. Indonesian schools can build a balanced model while keeping flexibility and innovation. This strategy highlights local strengths and draws from the Undokai Japanese education. Integrating such activities may improve school-family-community links and provide children with contextual, meaningful, and durable character education.

#### **4. Discussion**

The study shows that Undokai improves pupils' collaboration and social skills (Kuraoka, 2025) (Shiraishi, 2023). This supports the idea of character education that group activities build social skills. Undokai helps pupils learn discipline and responsibility. These findings reflect prior studies showing that stringent rules and clear frameworks help develop discipline. Leadership roles in Undokai also assist students in developing leadership abilities. Developmental theory stresses that direct leadership experience shapes leadership traits (Saga et al., 2022).

Compared to Indonesia, extracurricular activities improve students' collaboration and social skills (Munadi & Khuriyah, 2023)(Rahayu & Dong, 2023). This shows that character education via group activities may be performed using multiple methods. Structured extracurricular activities promote discipline and responsibility, enhancing character education (Solehah et al., 2022). In contrast to Japan, certain Indonesian extracurricular activities encourage creativity and innovation. This indicates the necessity to tailor character education programs to each country's culture and society.

The Japanese method of highly organized Undokai has improved discipline and teamwork (Ledur et al., 2022). A clear framework and tight regulations influence behavior. Indonesia is more flexible, encouraging creativity and innovation. While this is effective, a clearer framework might increase discipline. Parent-community interaction in Undokai enhances social relationships and character development. This emphasizes community involvement in character education. Parental and community participation vary in Indonesia, and character education programs may benefit from their increased involvement (Murata, 2023)(Takayama & Okitsu, 2025).

Thus, Indonesian extracurricular activities might benefit from Undokai's meticulous preparation and explicit guidelines. Parental and community participation may help boost social support for character development (Krskova et al., 2024). However, these practices must be tailored to Indonesian culture and society. Flexibility fosters creativity and invention, which are crucial to character education. Giving students additional extracurricular leadership responsibilities may also boost self-confidence and leadership abilities (Bering & Schulz, 2024).

This study aligns with Lickona's character education theory, which emphasizes moral understanding, emotion, and action (Munawarsyah et al., 2024) (Suroso & Husin, 2024). Japanese students learn teamwork, discipline, and responsibility by preparing and implementing Undokai. Although more flexible, Indonesian children acquire these values via extracurricular activities. Undokai group activities and contests promote empathy, sportsmanship, and pride. Activities that stress collaboration and creativity foster unity in Indonesia. Both nations' children develop morality via real-world experiences.

In addition, these findings also have implications for Bandura's social learning theory, especially related to observation, imitation, and modeling (de la Fuente et al., 2023; Koutroubas & Galanakis, 2022; Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). Students in Japan observe positive behavior from teachers and seniors during Undokai, such as leadership and cooperation. In Indonesia, students imitate positive behavior from peers and mentors in various extracurricular activities. Active participation makes students imitate observed behavior. Japanese students imitate the discipline and cooperation demonstrated by authority figures, while Indonesian students imitate the creativity and innovation demonstrated by friends and mentors.

In this case, teachers, parents, and seniors in Japan act as models, while in Indonesia, mentors and seniors in extracurricular activities also become models of positive behavior. The impact of Bandura's theory in this research is that it provides a strong theoretical foundation to explain how the educational values of Undokai are transmitted and internalized by students. By linking observational learning and modeling with the practices in both Japan and Indonesia, the findings demonstrate that Undokai functions not only as a physical activity but also as a social learning environment where character values are cultivated through interaction and imitation. This theoretical perspective strengthens the interpretation of the results and highlights the significance of adapting Undokai to support character education in Indonesia.

From the perspective of Kolb's experiential learning theory, participation in Undokai provides concrete experience for students in Japan (Devi & Thendral, 2023; Kolb, 2015; Morris, 2020). Meanwhile, extracurricular activities in Indonesia also provide similar practical experiences. These two contexts allow students to reflect, identify the character values studied, and internalize them. This reflection process is important for understanding the value of cooperation, discipline, and responsibility. The abstract understanding that is formed is then applied in new situations, thereby strengthening character formation through sustainable

practice. The relationship of Kolb's experiential learning theory to this research is that it offers a theoretical lens to explain how experiential activities like Undokai support the internalization of character values. By engaging in repeated cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application, students transform concrete participation into long-term character development. This demonstrates that Undokai is an effective form of experiential learning that can be adapted to enrich character education in Indonesia.

If seen from Hofstede's cross-cultural approach, Japan, which tends to be collectivist, uses Undokai to strengthen togetherness and teamwork (Minkov & Kaasa, 2021; Yu et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Indonesia, which also has a collectivist culture, emphasizes flexibility, which provides space for individual creativity in a group context. The high level of uncertainty avoidance in Japan is reflected in the strict Undokai structure, while the more flexible approach in Indonesia reflects a higher tolerance for uncertainty, thereby allowing for adaptation and innovation.

The relationship of Hofstede's cross-cultural approach to this research is that it provides a theoretical lens to understand how cultural values shape the design and implementation of character education practices. By applying this framework, the study shows that while Japan and Indonesia share collectivist orientations, cultural differences in uncertainty avoidance influence how Undokai can be adapted. This reinforces the contribution of the research in offering culturally sensitive perspectives on the transferability of educational practices across countries.

According to Berkowitz and Bier's Comprehensive Character Education approach (M. W., & B. M. C. Berkowitz, 2024) (Johnson, 2022) parents and communities' Undokai participation strengthens Japanese kids' character. The entire character education model emphasizes community engagement. Indonesian parental and community engagement may benefit from increased participation. In addition, both cultures' different methods and activities teach character.

In Japan, Undokai works, whereas in Indonesia, extracurricular activities build character. This model is relevant to the present research because it highlights the essential role of family and community in shaping character, providing a theoretical lens to analyze both contexts. Applying this model suggests that Indonesian extracurricular programs can be enriched by involving parents and communities more actively, thereby contextualizing and strengthening character education practices.

## 5. Conclusion

This research reveals that Japanese Undokai and Indonesian extracurricular activities affect student character differently. Indonesia stresses flexibility, creativity, and togetherness; Japan emphasizes order, discipline, responsibility, and parental and community involvement. Since Undokai's structure may complement Indonesia's flexibility, integration is possible. Students' moral understanding, emotions, and behavior are enhanced by both countries' character

education techniques. Undokai also illustrates that character education encompasses family and community beyond the classroom. This supports the premise that experience, example, and social interaction shape character. In Indonesia, these ideas include enhancing school-family-community interactions for character education. Combining Japanese foundations with Indonesian culture's flexibility may contextualize and revolutionize character education, producing a disciplined, responsible, creative, adaptable, and global-ready generation.

## 6. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research standards. All participants were informed about the study, their participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta Ethics Committee.

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