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From Policy Text to School Practice: Curriculum Coherence in Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile in an Indonesian Primary School

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Abstrak

Kurikulum Merdeka menempatkan Profil Pelajar Pancasila sebagai inti pendidikan karakter, tetapi penguatannya sering berhenti pada kegiatan rutin. Penelitian ini menganalisis koherensi kurikulum, yaitu keselarasan dokumen perencanaan, praktik pembelajaran, dan asesmen, dalam penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila di sebuah sekolah dasar negeri di wilayah penyangga Ibu Kota Nusantara. Studi kasus kualitatif ini menggunakan analisis [n] dokumen, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan [n] partisipan, dan observasi terbatas yang dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa (1) dokumen kurikulum selaras dengan kebijakan nasional tetapi lebih menekankan kepatuhan administratif; (2) nilai-nilai profil tampak dalam budaya sekolah tetapi jarang dirumuskan secara eksplisit dalam tujuan pembelajaran; dan (3) keselarasan tujuan, aktivitas, dan asesmen bersifat parsial karena penilaian karakter belum menggunakan rubrik. Penelitian ini menawarkan konsep kesenjangan simbolik–substantif dan merekomendasikan pemetaan dimensi profil ke dalam tujuan pembelajaran, pengembangan rubrik karakter, serta pengembangan profesional guru.

Kata kunci: Asesmen Karakter; Koherensi Kurikulum; Kurikulum Merdeka; P5; Pendidikan Karakter; Profil Pelajar Pancasila.

Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum places the Pancasila Student Profile at the core of character education, yet its strengthening often remains confined to routine activities. This study analysed curriculum coherence, that is, the alignment of planning documents, instructional practice, and assessment, in strengthening the profile at a public primary school near Indonesia's new capital. This qualitative case study drew on [n] documents, semi-structured interviews with [n] participants, and limited observation, analysed thematically. The findings show that (1) curriculum documents were aligned with national policy but emphasised administrative compliance; (2) profile values were visible in school culture but rarely articulated explicitly in learning objectives; and (3) alignment among objectives, activities, and assessment was partial because character assessment lacked rubrics. The study proposes the notion of a symbolic–substantive gap and recommends mapping profile dimensions into learning objectives, developing character rubrics, and providing teacher professional development.

Keywords: Character Assessment; Character Education; Curriculum Coherence; Merdeka Curriculum; P5; Pancasila Student Profile.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education systems around the world increasingly recognise that schooling must develop not only academic knowledge but also the values, attitudes, and socio-emotional competencies that enable young people to live well with others and contribute to society (OECD, 2019). Research on the science of learning shows that social, emotional, and cognitive development are deeply intertwined and that schools shape character through both explicit instruction and everyday relationships and routines (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Character education is therefore increasingly understood not as a separate subject but as a dimension of the whole curriculum (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Lickona, 1991).

In Indonesia, this orientation is expressed in the Merdeka Curriculum through the Pancasila Student Profile (Profil Pelajar Pancasila), which comprises six dimensions: faith, piety, and noble character; global diversity; mutual cooperation (gotong royong); independence; critical reasoning; and creativity (Kemendikbudristek, 2022a, 2022b). The curriculum expects schools to strengthen these dimensions through intracurricular learning, school culture, and a dedicated co-curricular project known as the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila, P5) (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). In this way, character education is intended to be embedded throughout the curriculum rather than delivered as isolated moral instruction.

In practice, however, the translation of these intentions into school-level practice is uneven. Evaluations of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian primary schools report that teachers support its philosophy but struggle to formulate learning objectives, design meaningful projects, and develop appropriate assessments (Athahira et al., 2026; Lestari et al., 2026; Trisnawati et al., 2025). Studies of character education in primary schools similarly suggest that values are often promoted through routines and role-modelling but are rarely planned and assessed systematically (Muna & Zulela, 2026; Zulela, 2025). Curriculum theory explains such patterns as a problem of coherence: reforms are most effective when goals, learning experiences, and assessment form a consistent system, and they falter when these components are developed separately (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Priestley et al., 2015).

Despite growing research on the Merdeka Curriculum, few studies have examined how the Pancasila Student Profile is carried through the whole chain of curriculum documents, classroom practice, and assessment in a single school. Most existing studies focus on teacher perceptions or on descriptions of P5 activities, and they rarely analyse the coherence between what is written in school curriculum documents and what is done and assessed in classrooms. Moreover, many of the recent empirical studies reviewed above were conducted in schools in Java (e.g., Trisnawati et al., 2025), while schools in rapidly developing regions such as the area surrounding Indonesia's new national capital (Ibu Kota Nusantara, IKN) in East Kalimantan remain under-represented [Author: add 1–2 further references or a brief count of studies by region to support this claim]. This setting matters for character education because the IKN development is bringing rapid demographic change, an influx of migrant families from different provinces, and growing cultural and religious diversity in local classrooms, conditions that make the dimensions of global diversity

and mutual cooperation particularly salient.

Recent analyses of KOSP documents (Setyawan & Ghita, 2026) and of P5 implementation have examined either the documents or the activities separately. The novelty of this study lies in tracing the same profile dimensions across the whole chain, from the KOSP to teaching modules, P5 documents, and assessment records, within one school, which makes it possible to identify where coherence breaks down rather than only whether implementation occurs.

National policy has also continued to evolve. Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 13 of 2025 amended the curriculum regulation and introduced graduate profile (profil lulusan) dimensions together with co-curricular activities that build on the earlier P5 (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Because the data for this study were collected under the Pancasila Student Profile framework, the findings are interpreted with reference to this transition, and their implications for the new framework are considered in the discussion.

This study addresses these gaps by analysing curriculum coherence in strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile at a public primary school in Sepaku District, Penajam Paser Utara, East Kalimantan, located in the buffer area of the IKN. It was guided by three research questions: (1) How are the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile reflected in the school's curriculum planning documents? (2) How are the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile enacted in learning activities and school programmes? (3) To what extent are curriculum objectives, learning activities, and assessment aligned in strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile? The study contributes a coherence-based analytic lens for character education and offers practical recommendations for schools seeking to move from symbolic to substantive implementation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the concept of curriculum coherence and implementation, the Pancasila Student Profile as a framework for character education, and the role of project-based learning and assessment in character formation.

2.1. Curriculum Implementation and Coherence

Curriculum implementation is a dynamic process in which policy intentions are interpreted and reshaped by institutional contexts and teachers' professional judgement. Educational change research shows that reforms often fail not because of flawed design but because they lack shared meaning, capacity, and sustained support at the school level (Fullan, 2016). From a cognitive perspective, teachers make sense of policies through their existing knowledge and beliefs, which may lead to superficial adoption of new practices (Spillane et al., 2002). Priestley et al. (2015) emphasise teacher agency, arguing that teachers' capacity to act depends on the interplay of their professional knowledge, the cultures of their schools, and the structures in which they work.

Curriculum coherence refers to the consistency among a curriculum's goals, learning experiences, and assessment. Biggs and Tang (2011) describe this as constructive alignment, in which intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks are designed to support one another. Young and Muller (2016) further argue that a coherent curriculum must provide students with structured access to knowledge rather than a collection of disconnected activities. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, coherence is expected to be visible in the chain from the School Operational Curriculum (Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan, KOSP) to learning objectives, teaching modules, and assessment instruments (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). Studies of school curriculum documents in Indonesia show that this chain is often incomplete (Setyawan & Ghita, 2026).

Although constructive alignment was originally developed for higher education, its core logic, that intended outcomes, learning activities, and assessment should be designed together, also underpins curriculum design frameworks for schools, such as backward design, in which teachers first define desired results and acceptable evidence before planning learning experiences (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This study therefore uses constructive alignment as a design principle rather than as a higher-education model. At the same time, a standards-based view of alignment sits in tension with the ecological view of teacher agency: the former emphasises consistency with prescribed outcomes, whereas the latter values teachers' local adaptation (Priestley et al., 2015). The Merdeka Curriculum embraces both, granting schools flexibility while expecting alignment with national profile dimensions, and this tension is central to the analysis that follows.

2.2. The Pancasila Student Profile and Character Education

Character education has a long tradition in educational theory. Lickona (1991) defines good character as knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good, and argues that schools should cultivate all three through a comprehensive approach that includes instruction, school culture, and community involvement. Reviews of effective character education identify practices such as explicit teaching of values, student participation, positive relationships, and opportunities for moral action (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). The Pancasila Student Profile reflects this comprehensive approach by combining national identity with global competencies, and its dimensions are specified in terms of elements and sub-elements that can be developed progressively across educational phases (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b). Culturally responsive teaching provides a complementary perspective by emphasising that character is best developed when learning connects with students' cultural experiences and community values (Gay, 2018; Zulela, 2025). This perspective is used in this study to interpret how the dimension of global diversity is enacted in a school whose students come from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds.

2.3. Project-Based Learning and the Assessment of Character

Project-based learning engages students in sustained inquiry into authentic problems and can foster responsibility, collaboration, and empathy (Larmer et al., 2015). The P5 is designed as such a project-based mechanism, using themes such as sustainable lifestyles and local wisdom to integrate character development

with interdisciplinary learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2022a). Environmentally oriented projects aligned with education for sustainable development have also been shown to strengthen primary students' awareness and attitudes (Setiawan et al., 2025). However, the developmental value of projects depends on clear goals and on assessment that captures students' growth. Formative assessment improves learning when criteria are explicit and feedback is used to guide next steps (Black & Wiliam, 1998), and authentic assessment allows students to demonstrate competencies in realistic contexts (Gulikers et al., 2004). Without explicit indicators and assessment mechanisms, character education risks being reduced to activities whose impact cannot be known (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007).

Assessing character is particularly challenging because values and dispositions develop gradually and are expressed in behaviour across contexts. The literature suggests several practical tools for this purpose: developmental rubrics that describe observable indicators at successive levels of progression (Brookhart, 2013), portfolios and reflective journals that document growth over time, and structured observation scales that make teachers' judgements more systematic (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). In the Merdeka Curriculum, the elements and sub-elements of the profile are arranged by phase precisely so that such progression can be described and assessed (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b).

Taken together, these perspectives inform the three levels of coherence used in this study. Educational change and policy sense-making theories explain the policy–document level, that is, how national policy is interpreted in school documents; character education theory and teacher agency explain the document–practice level, that is, how values are enacted; and constructive alignment and assessment theory explain the objective–activity–assessment level, that is, whether character development is made visible and improvable. This framework is summarised in Figure 1.

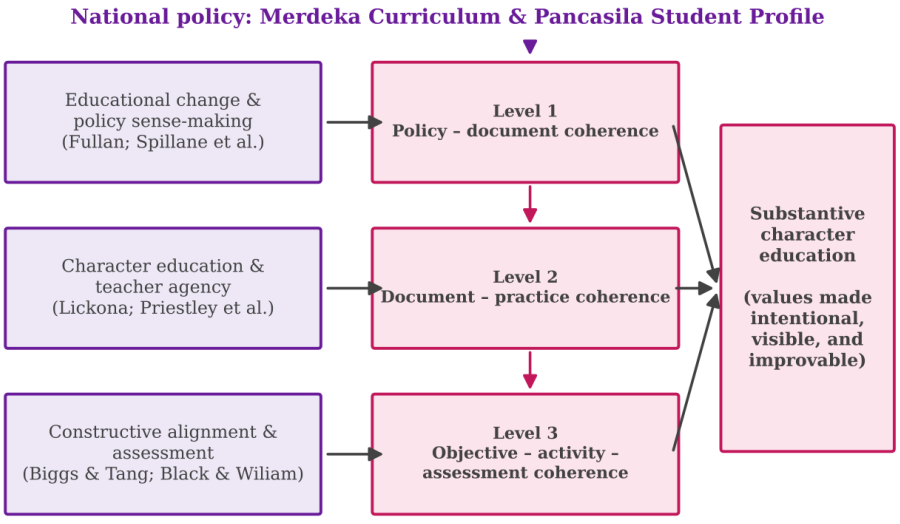


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of curriculum coherence in strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile

(Source: Developed by the author from Fullan (2016), Spillane et al. (2002), Lickona (1991), Priestley et al. (2015), Biggs and Tang (2011), and Black and Wiliam (1998))

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) with document analysis as the primary technique (Bowen, 2009), supported by semi-structured interviews. Document analysis was chosen because curriculum documents represent the formal manifestation of how a school interprets national policy, while interviews allowed the researcher to clarify how documents were used and enacted in practice. A single-case design was chosen because the aim was to understand how coherence is built, or fails to be built, within one school in its real-life context, rather than to generalise statistically to a population of schools (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

3.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a public primary school in Sepaku District, Penajam Paser Utara Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia (hereafter "the case school"). The school was selected as an information-rich case for three reasons: it is located in the buffer area of the new national capital, where rapid development has brought migrant families and growing cultural diversity; its students come from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds [Author: briefly describe, e.g., approximate number of students and main ethnic groups]; and it has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum across all grade levels since [year]. The research involved curriculum documents and key school actors who were directly involved in curriculum planning and implementation, selected purposively. The data sources are presented in Table 1. Documents were selected using the following criteria: they were in use in the [2024/2025] academic year; teaching modules covered [grades/phases and subjects]; and P5 documents covered all projects implemented in that year. Interview participants were the principal (P1) and [n] teachers (T1–T[n]) with [range] years of teaching experience, representing [grades taught], who were directly involved in curriculum planning or P5 implementation. Because the author is a [class teacher/curriculum coordinator] at the school, an insider position was acknowledged. This position facilitated access to documents and participants but may have shaped participants' responses and the author's interpretation; it was therefore addressed through reflexive notes, triangulation, and peer debriefing with colleagues outside the school.

Table 1. Data sources of the study

Data source	Code	Number	Focus of analysis
School Operational Curriculum (KOSP)	D1	1	Vision, mission, curriculum structure, and integration of the Pancasila Student Profile
Annual and semester programmes	D2	[n]	Distribution of learning objectives and character-related programmes
Teaching modules	D3	[n]	Explicitness of profile dimensions in learning objectives, activities, and assessment
P5 project documents	D4	[n]	Project themes, targeted dimensions, activities, and assessment plans
Assessment instruments and records	D5	[n]	Presence of criteria, rubrics, and records of character development
Principal and teachers (interviews)	P1, T1–Tn	[n]	Planning processes, enactment, and perceived challenges

Source: Research data (2026)

3.3. Instruments and Data Collection

A document analysis instrument was developed based on the national guidelines for the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b, 2024) and on the principles of curriculum coherence and constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Priestley et al., 2015). The instrument examined three levels of coherence, summarised in Table 2. Semi-structured interviews explored how documents were developed and used, how character values were integrated into learning, and the challenges faced by teachers. Interviews were conducted face to face in Indonesian, lasted approximately [n] minutes each, and were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for reporting. The interview guide covered the development and use of curriculum documents, the integration of profile dimensions into lessons and P5 projects, the assessment of character, and the challenges teachers faced. Limited classroom observation was also conducted in [n] lessons and [n] P5 sessions using field notes focused on how profile dimensions were enacted and assessed. The document analysis instrument and interview guide were reviewed by [n] experts in curriculum and primary education, and revisions were made to [briefly state outcome, e.g., the wording of indicators].

Table 2. Curriculum coherence analysis framework

Level of coherence	Guiding question	Indicators	Data sources
Policy – document	Do school documents reflect national curriculum principles?	Alignment of vision, mission, and structure with the Merdeka Curriculum and profile dimensions	D1, D2, interviews
Document – practice	Are profile dimensions enacted in learning and school programmes?	Explicit dimensions in objectives and modules; enactment in routines, projects, and lessons	D3, D4, interviews
Objective – activity – assessment	Are objectives, activities, and assessment aligned?	Assessment criteria, rubrics, and records linked to objectives and dimensions	D3, D5, interviews

Source: Developed from Biggs and Tang (2011), Priestley et al. (2015), and Kemendikbudristek (2022b, 2024)

3.4. Trustworthiness and Data Analysis

Trustworthiness was established using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was strengthened through triangulation between documents and interviews and between different types of documents. Dependability and confirmability were supported by iterative coding, an audit trail, and peer debriefing with colleagues outside the school. Reflexive notes were kept to address the author's insider position. Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The two approaches were combined as follows: Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases guided the generation of codes and themes, while Miles et al.'s (2014) model guided how data were condensed and displayed in matrices by level of coherence and data source. Codes were first generated inductively and then organised deductively according to the three levels of coherence in Table 2. The resulting themes and their relationship to the three levels of coherence are summarised in Figure 2.

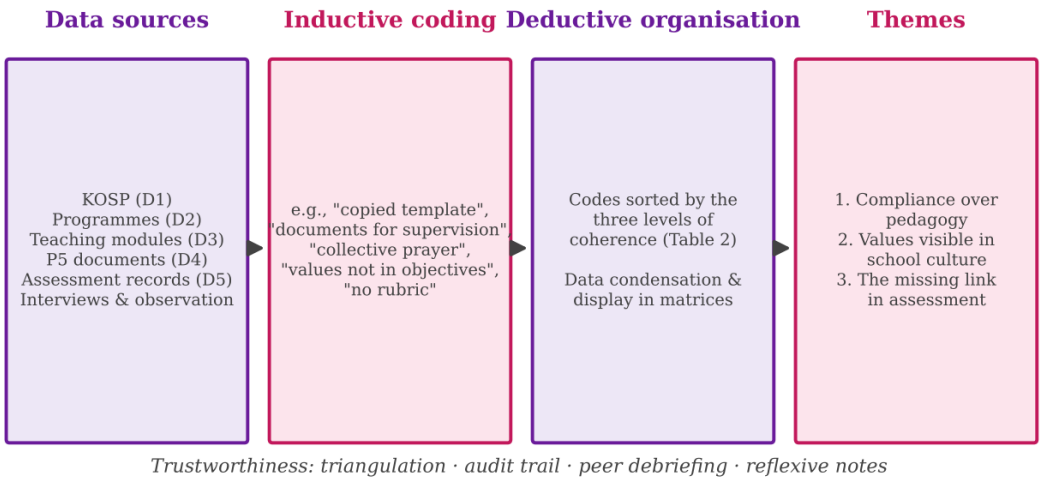


Figure 2. Analytic path from data sources to codes and themes

(Source: Research data (2026))

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are organised according to the three research questions and levels of coherence, followed by a discussion of their theoretical and practical implications.

4.1. Policy–Document Coherence: Compliance over Pedagogy

The analysis showed that the school's curriculum documents generally followed the national policy framework. The KOSP adopted the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, including student-centred learning, contextual instruction, and character education, and its vision and mission explicitly referred to the Pancasila Student Profile. The annual and semester programmes included P5 projects and character-related activities.

However, the documents emphasised administrative compliance more than pedagogical coherence. Of the [n] teaching modules analysed, only [n] explicitly stated profile dimensions in their learning objectives. Many sections reproduced national templates with limited adaptation to the school's context, and while learning objectives and general competencies were listed, they were seldom translated into measurable outcomes or indicators of progression. Interview data suggested that documents were often prepared to meet supervision requirements rather than as working tools for planning. As one teacher explained, "[verbatim quote from interview transcript]" (T[n], interview). The principal similarly noted that "[verbatim quote]" (P1, interview). A document example illustrates this pattern: a learning objective in a Grade [n] [subject] module (D3) reads "[copy the learning objective]", which specifies academic content but no element of the profile. This pattern confirms that reforms are frequently interpreted administratively rather than pedagogically (Fullan, 2016; Spillane et al., 2002) and resonates with findings that school curriculum documents in Indonesia are often formally complete but weakly operational (Setyawan & Ghita, 2026).

A closer reading of the KOSP shows how this compliance orientation was built into the structure of the document. The vision and mission statements explicitly named the Pancasila Student Profile, and the section on curriculum structure allocated time to P5 in line with national regulations (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). However, the sections that were meant to describe how the school would translate the profile into its own context, such as the analysis of the school's characteristics and the description of learning organisation, largely restated national guidance in general terms. The document did not specify which elements of the profile would be prioritised in each phase, how teachers were expected to integrate them into intracurricular learning, or how progress would be monitored. In other words, the KOSP functioned as a statement of commitment rather than as a plan for action. [Author: add one short excerpt from the KOSP (D1) that illustrates this, e.g., a mission statement or a paragraph on learning organisation.]

The annual and semester programmes (D2) displayed a similar pattern. They distributed learning objectives across the weeks of the academic year and scheduled P5 projects in dedicated blocks, which ensured that the formal requirements of the curriculum were met. Yet the programmes were organised almost entirely around academic content: character-related intentions appeared as separate events, such as commemorations of national days, religious activities, and project weeks, rather than as threads running through regular lessons. This separation matters because it signals to teachers that character education happens at particular moments outside ordinary teaching, which reinforces the perception that the profile is an addition to, rather than a dimension of, the curriculum.

Interviews helped to explain why the documents took this form. Participants described the preparation of curriculum documents as a periodic administrative task, typically completed before supervision visits or at the start of the academic year, often by adapting templates obtained from training sessions, teacher working groups, or online sources. [Author: insert a verbatim quote that illustrates the use of templates, with participant code.] Teachers did not reject the ideas behind the Merdeka Curriculum; on the contrary, they generally expressed support for its emphasis on character and student-centred learning. The difficulty lay in the gap between understanding the philosophy and having the time, guidance, and design skills to express it in concrete planning documents, a gap also reported in other evaluations of Merdeka Curriculum implementation (Athahira et al., 2026; Lestari et al., 2026).

From an institutional perspective, this pattern resembles what organisational theorists describe as ceremonial conformity, in which organisations adopt formal structures that signal legitimacy to external audiences while their core work proceeds largely unchanged (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Coburn (2004) shows, however, that the relationship between policy and classroom practice is rarely one of pure decoupling; teachers respond to policy messages in varied ways, from symbolic adoption to deep incorporation, depending on how the messages fit their existing practices and how much support they receive. The case school illustrates an intermediate position: the profile was formally adopted in documents and genuinely valued by teachers, but the documents themselves did not provide the bridge that would allow teachers to incorporate it systematically into their planning.

4.2. Document–Practice Coherence: Values Visible in School Culture

Interviews and limited observation indicated that the values of the Pancasila Student Profile were visible in school life. The enactment of each dimension, and the extent to which it was made explicit in planning documents and assessment, is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Enactment and documentation of the Pancasila Student Profile dimensions

Dimension	Enactment in school practice	Explicit in planning documents	Assessment practice
Faith, piety, and noble character	Collective prayers, religious routines, and teacher role-modelling	Mentioned in vision; rarely in learning objectives	Informal observation
Global diversity	Respect for classmates from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds	Rarely articulated	Not systematically assessed
Mutual cooperation	Group work, gotong royong activities, and class duties	Partly articulated in P5 documents	Informal observation
Independence	Class routines and responsibility for tasks	Rarely articulated	Informal observation
Critical reasoning	Discussions and problem-solving in some lessons	Partly articulated in teaching modules	Mainly through written tests
Creativity	Project products and environmental care activities	Partly articulated in P5 documents	Product scoring without rubrics

Source: Research data (2026)

Figure 3 presents the same information as a qualitative synthesis, showing how the strength of coherence declines from enactment to planning documents and assessment for every dimension, with mutual cooperation, critical reasoning, and creativity retaining partial coherence in planning documents.

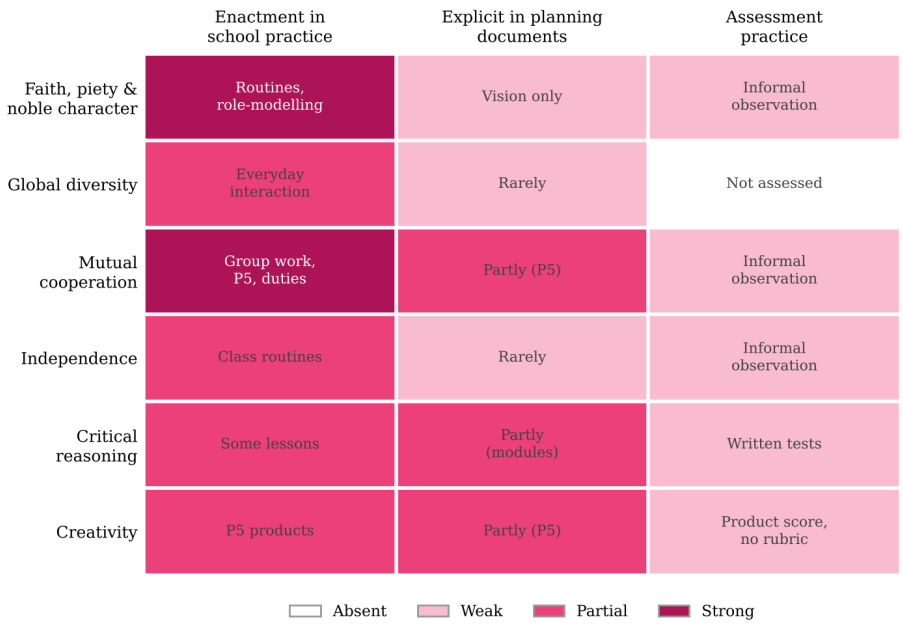


Figure 3. Strength of coherence across the six profile dimensions and three levels

(Source: Qualitative synthesis of Table 3 by the author (2026))

Table 3 shows that daily routines such as collective prayers, environmental care programmes, and collaborative learning served as the main vehicles for character formation. P5 projects related to environmental awareness and community engagement provided meaningful contexts for students to practise responsibility, cooperation, and social empathy, consistent with the literature on experiential and project-based character education (Larmer et al., 2015; Setiawan et al., 2025). However, most dimensions were implied rather than explicitly articulated in learning objectives and teaching modules. Character development thus depended largely on school culture and the initiative of individual teachers, which teachers described as leading to variation across classes. For example, one teacher stated, "[verbatim quote about integrating profile values into lessons]" (T[n], interview), whereas another reported, "[contrasting verbatim quote]" (T[n], interview). Observation notes from a Grade [n] lesson further showed that [describe briefly what was observed].

Faith, piety, and noble character was the most visible dimension in daily school life. Collective prayers at the beginning and end of the school day, religious observances, and teachers' emphasis on politeness and honesty formed a consistent set of routines that participants regarded as the foundation of character education at the school. These routines align with Lickona's (1991) view that moral culture is shaped through daily practice and adult role-modelling. Nevertheless, the dimension appeared in planning documents mainly at the level of the vision and mission and was rarely connected to the elements described in the national guidelines, such as moral conduct towards others and towards the natural environment (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b). As a result, teachers could describe what the school did to cultivate faith and noble character but found it harder to explain what students were expected to learn at each phase.

Global diversity was enacted mainly through everyday interaction rather than planned learning. Teachers described the student body as diverse in regional, ethnic, and religious background, reflecting the arrival of migrant families associated with the development of the new capital. [Author: confirm and briefly characterise the diversity of the student body.] Participants reported encouraging students to work in mixed groups, to respect classmates' customs, and to avoid ethnic teasing, and observation notes recorded instances of students from different backgrounds collaborating in group tasks [Author: confirm with field notes]. From the perspective of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018; Zulela, 2025), this diversity is a rich resource for learning about identity, culture, and intercultural communication. However, it was seldom used deliberately as learning content: teaching modules rarely included activities that drew on students' own cultural backgrounds, and the dimension was not assessed. The very context that makes this school relevant for global diversity was thus not yet reflected in its curriculum.

Mutual cooperation (gotong royong) was the dimension most consistently enacted across both routines and planned learning. Group work in lessons, classroom duty rosters, school clean-up activities, and collaborative P5 projects provided frequent opportunities for students to share responsibilities and help one another. This dimension was also partly articulated in P5 documents, which listed collaboration as a targeted element. Its relative strength is understandable: collaboration has a clear behavioural form that

teachers can organise and observe, and it resonates with the cultural value of gotong royong that is widely shared in Indonesian schools.

Independence was enacted mainly through classroom routines, such as preparing learning materials, completing tasks on time, and taking responsibility for class duties. Teachers regarded these routines as important for character formation but did not usually frame them as learning objectives or connect them to the elements of the dimension, such as self-understanding and self-regulation (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b). Because independence was understood primarily as good classroom behaviour, opportunities to develop students' capacity to set goals, monitor their own progress, and reflect on their learning, which are central to the dimension, were limited.

Critical reasoning was the dimension most often visible in teaching modules, where it appeared in learning objectives related to problem-solving, analysis, and discussion. In some lessons, teachers used questioning and problem-based tasks to encourage students to explain their reasoning. However, its enactment was uneven across classes and subjects, and its assessment relied mainly on written tests that measured the correctness of answers rather than the quality of reasoning. This illustrates a recurrent pattern in the data: where a dimension overlapped with familiar academic goals, teachers found it easier to articulate in planning documents, but the overlap also led them to assess it with familiar academic instruments rather than with criteria specific to the dimension.

Creativity was expressed mainly through P5 products and environmental care activities, such as making items from recycled materials and decorating classroom and school spaces. These activities gave students room to generate ideas and produce tangible outcomes, and P5 documents partly articulated creativity as a targeted dimension. Yet the products were typically scored as finished artefacts, so the creative process, including the generation of alternative ideas, revision, and reflection, received little attention. [Author: add a short description or excerpt from a P5 document (D4) that illustrates how creativity was targeted and assessed.]

Across dimensions, P5 projects played an important bridging role. Because projects had explicit themes, targeted dimensions, and planned sequences of activities, they were the setting in which the profile was most deliberately designed. This is consistent with studies that describe P5 as a key vehicle for strengthening character in Indonesian primary schools (Handoko et al., 2024; Rasworo & Ramadan, 2024; Ulandari & Rapita, 2023). However, the coherence achieved within projects did not extend to regular intracurricular learning, so the profile tended to be intensively addressed during project weeks and then to recede into the background of daily lessons. Strengthening the connection between projects and regular lessons, for example by revisiting project dimensions in subsequent teaching modules, therefore appears to be an important lever for coherence.

Variation across classes deserves particular attention because it shows how much the enactment of the profile depended on individual teachers. Teachers who had attended more intensive training or who were involved in coordinating P5 tended to describe more deliberate strategies, such as opening lessons by

naming the profile dimension being practised or ending group work with a short reflection on cooperation. Other teachers relied on general routines and saw character as something that would develop naturally through participation in school life. [Author: insert brief evidence from interviews or observation notes that illustrates this contrast, using participant codes.] Such variation is a predictable consequence of weak coherence: when documents do not specify what is to be developed and how, the curriculum that students actually experience is shaped mainly by the knowledge, beliefs, and energy of the individual teacher (Spillane et al., 2002).

4.3. Objective–Activity–Assessment Coherence: The Missing Link

The weakest level of coherence was the alignment between objectives, activities, and assessment. Teaching modules typically described learning activities in detail but provided limited guidance on how character development would be assessed. Character was usually evaluated through informal observation without explicit criteria, rubrics, or systematic records, and P5 projects were assessed mainly through their final products. As a result, the school had little evidence of students' progress in each profile dimension and could not use assessment information to improve learning. This finding mirrors evaluations that identify assessment as one of the weakest components of Merdeka Curriculum implementation (Lestari et al., 2026; Trisnawati et al., 2025) and supports the argument that, without explicit indicators, character education risks becoming symbolic (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007).

A closer look at the teaching modules (D3) clarifies the nature of this gap. Most modules included an assessment section, but it focused on cognitive outcomes through written tests, worksheets, or oral questions. Where character was mentioned, it typically appeared as a general statement that students' attitudes would be observed during learning, without specifying which dimension or element was being observed, what behaviours would count as evidence, or how observations would be recorded. [Author: insert an excerpt from the assessment section of a teaching module and state how many of the [n] modules contained any character-related assessment criteria.] In the absence of such criteria, teachers' judgements of character were necessarily holistic and impressionistic.

Assessment records (D5) confirmed this pattern. Character-related information appeared mainly in the descriptive sections of report cards and in P5 reports, which used general descriptors of students' attitudes and project participation. These descriptors were rarely linked to evidence collected during the semester, and teachers explained that they were often written at the end of the reporting period on the basis of their overall impressions of each student. [Author: insert a verbatim quote from a teacher about how character descriptions in report cards were written.] Such reporting fulfils the formal requirement to describe students' attitudes but provides little information that students, parents, or teachers could use to support further growth.

Teachers identified several reasons for the limited assessment of character: the number of students per class, the time required to observe and record behaviour systematically, uncertainty about how to describe progression in dispositions, and the absence of school-wide rubrics or examples. These reasons

point less to a lack of commitment than to a lack of shared tools and capacity. Assessment research shows that formative assessment depends on a clear conception of the goal, evidence about the learner's current position, and a way of closing the gap between the two (Sadler, 1989), and that feedback is most powerful when it addresses these questions explicitly (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Without explicit criteria for each profile dimension, neither teachers nor students at the case school had a shared picture of what progress in character looked like, so assessment could not perform its formative function.

The assessment of P5 projects illustrates both the potential and the limits of current practice. Project documents listed targeted dimensions and, in some cases, general descriptions of expected behaviours, which made projects the setting closest to an aligned design. In practice, however, assessment concentrated on the final product and on whether students had participated, rather than on how their collaboration, creativity, or independence developed during the project. Teachers rarely collected evidence at intermediate stages, such as planning notes, peer feedback, or reflections, which are the kinds of evidence that authentic assessment frameworks regard as essential for judging complex competencies (Gulikers et al., 2004). Simple tools such as a three- or four-level rubric for one or two targeted elements, combined with a brief student reflection at the end of each project stage, would allow teachers to capture development without adding excessive workload (Brookhart, 2013).

4.4. Discussion

4.4.1. From Symbolic to Substantive Character Education

The overall pattern shows strong coherence at the level of values and school culture, but weakening coherence as the Pancasila Student Profile moves into planning documents and assessment. This can be described as a symbolic–substantive gap (Figure 4): the school clearly embraces the profile as a normative ideal and enacts it through routines, but has not yet built the curricular structures that would make its development intentional, visible, and improvable. Theoretically, the finding extends work on curriculum coherence (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Priestley et al., 2015) to the domain of character education, showing that constructive alignment is as necessary for values as for academic knowledge. It also complements character education theory by highlighting that a supportive school culture (Lickona, 1991) is necessary but not sufficient without explicit planning and assessment.

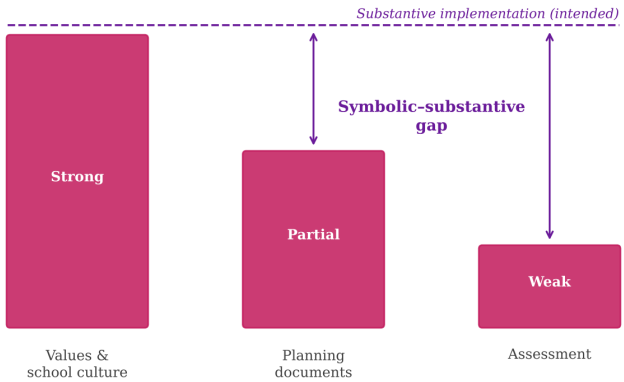


Figure 4. The symbolic–substantive gap in strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile

Coherence was not uniformly weak, however. Mutual cooperation, critical reasoning, and creativity were more explicitly articulated, mainly in P5 documents and some teaching modules, whereas faith, global diversity, and independence remained largely implicit. A plausible explanation is that the former dimensions are more easily translated into observable tasks and products, such as group projects, problem-solving activities, and creative outputs, and are directly emphasised in P5 guidelines, whereas the latter concern dispositions that teachers tend to treat as part of school culture rather than as learning objectives. This contrast shows that coherence is strongest where the profile dimension has a clear pedagogical form, which suggests that making dispositional dimensions observable is a key step towards substantive implementation.

The symbolic–substantive gap also helps to reconcile two seemingly contradictory observations that are common in research on the Merdeka Curriculum: teachers report strong support for character education, yet evaluations find that its planning and assessment remain weak (Lestari et al., 2026; Trisnawati et al., 2025). The present case suggests that these observations describe different levels of the curriculum. Support is expressed at the level of values and school culture, where the profile is meaningful to teachers and visible in routines, while weakness appears at the levels of planning and assessment, where the profile must be translated into specific objectives, tasks, and criteria. Studies that rely solely on teacher perceptions or on descriptions of activities may therefore overestimate the depth of implementation, whereas a whole-chain analysis reveals where coherence breaks down.

The case also adds a regional perspective to this body of research. Most published studies of P5 and the Merdeka Curriculum describe schools in Java, where support networks, training opportunities, and access to teacher working groups are relatively well established (Handoko et al., 2024; Trisnawati et al., 2025). In a fast-changing area near the new capital, schools face additional demands, including growing enrolments, increasingly diverse student populations, and teachers who are themselves adapting to a changing community. These conditions make coherent planning more important, because a diverse student body requires that dimensions such as global diversity and mutual cooperation be addressed deliberately rather than left to chance, and at the same time more difficult, because the time and support available for curriculum design are limited. The findings therefore suggest that support for schools in the IKN region should prioritise collaborative curriculum design over additional documentation requirements.

This interpretation has implications for how the success of character education is judged. International evidence on social and emotional learning indicates that school-based programmes improve students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes, particularly when they are sequenced, active, focused, and explicit and are implemented well (Durlak et al., 2011). Routines and a positive school culture are valuable, but without explicit objectives and systematic assessment, schools cannot know whether students are developing the intended competencies or adjust their practice accordingly. Substantive implementation of the profile therefore requires not only that values are visible in school life, but also that their development is planned, observed, and discussed with students over time.

4.4.2. Teacher Agency and Capacity

The findings also illustrate the ecological nature of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015). Teachers were committed to character education and used their initiative to embed values in learning, yet the structures in which they worked, particularly template-based documentation and supervision focused on compliance, did not support coherent design. Building coherence therefore requires changes to both teacher capacity and school structures. Professional development should move beyond policy socialisation to practice-based learning in curriculum mapping, writing learning objectives that integrate profile dimensions, and designing rubrics for character, delivered through collaborative and sustained formats (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009).

The findings also show how supervision practices shape teacher agency. Because supervision focused on the completeness of documents, the most rational response for busy teachers was to produce complete documents efficiently, often by adopting templates, rather than to invest time in designing coherent units. Teachers' agency was thus channelled towards compliance rather than towards curriculum making. Changing this pattern requires that the structures surrounding teachers, including supervision criteria, the organisation of planning time, and the availability of collaborative forums such as teacher working groups, reward the quality of design rather than the quantity of documentation (Fullan, 2016; Priestley et al., 2015). Such changes would also make professional development more effective, because teachers would have both the opportunity and the incentive to apply what they learn (Desimone, 2009).

4.4.3. Implications for Practice and Policy

Three practical implications follow. First, schools should map the dimensions and elements of the Pancasila Student Profile across phases and subjects, so that each teaching module and P5 project explicitly targets specific elements. Second, schools should develop simple developmental rubrics and portfolios for character, enabling teachers to record progress and give formative feedback (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gulikers et al., 2004). Third, supervision by principals and education authorities should focus on the quality and coherence of planning rather than the completeness of documents. These implications remain relevant under the newer graduate profile framework introduced by Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 13 of 2025 (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Several graduate profile dimensions, such as faith and piety, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, and independence, continue the dimensions examined here, and P5 is continued in the form of co-curricular activities. The symbolic–substantive gap identified in this study is therefore likely to persist unless the new dimensions are likewise mapped into learning objectives and assessed with explicit criteria.

For the transition to the graduate profile framework, the case offers a cautionary lesson. Introducing new dimensions or renaming existing ones will not in itself change practice if schools continue to translate policy into documents through templates and to assess character through general impressions. Policy guidance for co-curricular activities and deep learning could therefore usefully include worked examples that show how a dimension is translated into learning objectives, learning activities, and simple rubrics

within a single unit, so that teachers see coherence modelled rather than only prescribed (Kemendikdasmen, 2025; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

This study has several limitations. It focused on a single school, so the findings are not statistically generalisable, although the detailed description of the context supports transferability. The study relied mainly on document analysis and interviews, with limited classroom observation and without students' perspectives or measures of character outcomes. The author's insider position may also have influenced interpretation, although triangulation and peer debriefing were used to minimise bias. Future research should involve multiple schools, include classroom observations and student voices, and use mixed-methods designs to examine how curriculum coherence relates to students' character development.

5. CONCLUSION

This study analysed curriculum coherence in strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile in a public primary school near Indonesia's new capital. At the policy–document level, the school's curriculum documents were aligned with national policy but emphasised administrative compliance over pedagogical coherence. At the document–practice level, the values of the Pancasila Student Profile were visible in school culture through collective prayer, environmental care programmes, collaborative learning, and P5 projects, but were rarely articulated explicitly in learning objectives and teaching modules. At the objective–activity–assessment level, alignment was partial, as character development was assessed mainly through informal observation without rubrics. The study concludes that character education risks remaining symbolic unless it is embedded in a coherent chain of objectives, learning activities, and assessment. Mapping profile dimensions into learning objectives, developing character rubrics and portfolios, refocusing supervision on planning quality, and providing practice-based professional development in curriculum design and assessment literacy are therefore recommended.

Theoretically, the study contributes the notion of a symbolic–substantive gap and shows that constructive alignment is as necessary for character education as for academic learning. Although based on a single case, the findings are likely transferable to primary schools with similar template-based planning and compliance-oriented supervision, and they can be used by schools, principals, school supervisors, and teacher educators. The recommendations apply equally to the newer graduate profile framework and its co-curricular activities. Given the study's limitations, namely a single school, limited observation, and the absence of student perspectives, future research should involve multiple schools, classroom observations, and student voices.

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Author Contributions

Suminarsih: conceptualisation, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

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Ethics Statement

This study did not undergo formal review by an institutional ethics committee, as such review was not required for this type of minimal-risk educational research at the time of data collection. However, written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal of the case school, and all interview participants received an explanation of the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw, and gave informed consent before the interviews. School documents were used with permission, participant identities were anonymised using codes, and the school is not named in the text to reduce identifiability.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author is a teacher at the research site. This relationship was managed through triangulation, peer debriefing, and reflexive notes, and the author declares no other conflict of interest.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The author used Gemini tools to assist with language editing and manuscript structuring. All content and references have been reviewed and verified by the author, who takes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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