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Integrating Pauline Ethics into Character Education: A Four-Pillar Framework for Advancing SDG 4 in Effective 21st-Century Schools

Layu Marsiana*, Erny Roesminingsih, Karwanto

Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia



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ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine the integration of Pauline Ethics into character education through a Four-Pillar Model designed to strengthen effective 21st-century schools amid increasing moral, social, and digital challenges. The study aims to analyze the implementation of Pauline Ethics-based character education and its contribution to supporting SDG 4 (Quality Education) through holistic character development. **Method:** Employing a qualitative case study approach in a private junior high school in Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving school leaders, teachers, and students. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to the implementation of Pauline Ethics values. **Results:** The findings indicate that the values of Regularité, Simplicité, and Travail were effectively internalized through four interconnected pillars: curricular integration, teacher role modeling, school culture, and ecosystem collaboration. These pillars contributed to strengthening students' discipline, responsibility, empathy, perseverance, and twenty-first-century competencies while fostering a supportive and value-oriented school environment. **Novelty:** Introducing the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model as a novel spiritually grounded character education framework that systematically integrates curriculum, teacher role modeling, school culture, and educational ecosystem engagement. The model provides a practical and contextual approach for strengthening character formation and promoting quality education in contemporary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Character education has regained strategic importance within contemporary educational systems due to the increasing complexity of moral, social, and digital challenges in the twenty-first century. Rapid technological advancement has not only transformed communication patterns and access to knowledge but has also contributed to various problems, including moral degradation, declining empathy, cyberbullying, intolerance, and weakened social responsibility among students. These conditions indicate that educational success can no longer be measured solely through academic achievement and cognitive performance, but must also encompass moral, emotional, and social capacities in responding to contemporary societal dynamics. In this context, character education is considered a fundamental foundation for developing learners who are not only intellectually competent but also ethically and spiritually mature (Boiliu, 2025). Furthermore, the transformation of global education systems requires schools to integrate character development with twenty-first-century competencies in a more holistic and contextual manner (Jalilov et al., 2025). Contemporary educational reforms increasingly emphasize the importance of balancing academic excellence with ethical responsibility and social awareness in shaping future generations (Kumar, 2024).

Recent studies have demonstrated that character education is closely associated with the development of positive school culture, social-emotional competencies, and students' psychological resilience. Systematically implemented character education contributes to

improving discipline, responsibility, collaboration skills, and ethical awareness within modern learning environments (Cholifah, 2024). In addition, effective character education has been linked to the strengthening of students' emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and adaptive capacities in multicultural educational settings (Van Pham, 2024). In Indonesia, the urgency of character education has intensified due to the increasing prevalence of verbal violence, declining academic integrity, and reduced social sensitivity among students (Azka et al., 2025). Educational institutions are therefore expected to function not only as centers of academic learning but also as environments that cultivate ethical behavior and social responsibility (Rachmad, 2022). Consequently, character education cannot be implemented partially through isolated subjects alone, but requires an integrative approach involving curriculum, school culture, teacher role modeling, and sustainable environmental support (Jordan, 2023).

In practice, most character education models continue to emphasize universal moral values without integrating spiritual dimensions that possess strong historical and practical foundations. However, spiritual values play a crucial role in cultivating moral awareness, self-reflection, and social responsibility among students in everyday life (Hasan, 2025). Several recent studies further emphasize that spiritually grounded ethics-based character education strengthens the balance between intellectual, emotional, and moral dimensions in shaping students' identities (Espinosa & Domingo, 2025). Spiritually integrated educational practices have also been shown to foster empathy, humility, resilience, and ethical decision-making among adolescents within rapidly changing social contexts (Jia et al., 2025). Nevertheless, scholarly discussions concerning the integration of spiritual ethical frameworks into modern educational systems remain relatively limited, particularly those developed through systemic and operational approaches within effective school contexts (Macpherson, 2025). This condition indicates the need for a character education model that is not merely normative, but also practical and responsive to contemporary educational challenges.

One approach that offers considerable potential in addressing these challenges is Pauline Ethics, which is rooted in the spiritual tradition and educational practices of the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres (SPC). Pauline Ethics emphasizes three core values, namely *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail*, as the foundational principles of sustainable character formation. *Regularité* refers to discipline, orderliness, and consistency in action, while *Simplicité* emphasizes simplicity, sincerity, humility, and authentic social relationships. Meanwhile, *Travail* represents work ethic, perseverance, responsibility, and commitment in fulfilling duties and life purposes. These values not only possess profound spiritual dimensions but are also highly relevant in addressing the demands of twenty-first-century education, particularly in strengthening self-discipline, empathy, and resilience among students (Siregar, 2025). Similar findings suggest that values-based educational systems contribute significantly to long-term behavioral consistency and moral self-regulation among learners (Guerrero & Estera, 2020). Within the context of modern education, these values may serve as a foundation for developing adaptive, resilient, and socially responsible learners capable of navigating complex global realities (Swargiary, 2024).

Beyond their moral and spiritual dimensions, Pauline Ethics also offers an educational approach that emphasizes the integration of academic learning and value habituation within daily school practices. This perspective aligns with transformative education paradigms that position schools as spaces for character formation through lived experiences, role modeling,

and institutional culture (Burnett, 2024). Recent research indicates that the effectiveness of character education is strongly influenced by the consistency of values embodied within school environments rather than merely delivered through classroom instruction (Hidayati & Nihayah, 2025). School environments that consistently model ethical behavior and collaborative practices tend to produce students with stronger social awareness and civic responsibility (Awoyemi et al., 2024). Furthermore, institutional culture has been identified as a determining factor in sustaining students' moral development and long-term behavioral transformation (Najafov, 2025). Therefore, successful character education requires systemic support encompassing curricular, relational, and cultural dimensions simultaneously. From this perspective, schools function not only as academic institutions but also as moral ecosystems that continuously shape students' behaviors and identities.

Despite its potential contributions, research concerning the integration of Pauline Ethics into character education remains conceptually and operationally limited. Most previous studies have primarily examined character education from general perspectives without developing systemic models that integrate spiritual values, school culture, teacher role modeling, and educational ecosystem engagement within a unified framework (Anantama, 2024). Existing studies also tend to focus more heavily on cognitive or behavioral outcomes while paying limited attention to the role of spiritual ethics in sustaining character formation processes (Hasriani et al., 2025). Moreover, limited studies have explored how the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* can be operationalized within modern educational practices to strengthen twenty-first-century competencies and school effectiveness. This research gap demonstrates the need for a new conceptual framework capable of bridging spiritual values with contemporary educational needs in a more contextual and applicable manner (Dillard et al., 2024). Consequently, the development of a Pauline Ethics-based character education model becomes increasingly relevant in supporting holistic and sustainable educational transformation.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Pauline Ethics-based character education and formulate a Four-Pillar Model as a framework for developing effective twenty-first-century schools. The proposed model consists of four primary dimensions, namely curricular integration, teacher role modeling, school culture, and educational ecosystem collaboration. This study further introduces the conceptual novelty of the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model, which integrates spiritual values, institutional culture, and stakeholder engagement within a systemic educational approach. The model is expected to provide a more operational and contextually grounded framework for strengthening character education in contemporary schools (Banerjee, 2024). Through this framework, character education is not merely understood as an individual behavioral formation process, but as a broader transformation of educational culture involving the entire school ecosystem in a sustainable manner. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of more contextual, integrative, and globally relevant character education models for effective schools in the twenty-first century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical roots of paulinian values

The values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* are rooted in the spiritual tradition and educational practices of the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres (SPC), which have developed since

the late seventeenth century. Historically, these values were embodied within the early communities guided by Louis Chauvet in Levesville-la-Chenard, France, as foundational principles for character formation and communal life. In this context, values were not merely understood as normative concepts, but as lived practices consistently manifested in daily activities. This perspective aligns with values education theory, which emphasizes that values are more effectively internalized when they are repeatedly practiced within social and institutional cultures (Hasanah et al., 2023). Furthermore, virtue ethics theory explains that character formation occurs through the continuous habituation of virtues until they become integral components of an individual's moral identity (Culham et al., 2024). Therefore, the continuity of Paulinian values for more than three centuries demonstrates their nature as enduring values that remain relevant across diverse social and educational contexts.

Previous studies have demonstrated that education grounded in historical and spiritual values significantly contributes to the development of moral identity and students' social behavior. Effendi (2025) explained that spiritual values consistently transmitted within educational institutions strengthen moral awareness, personal integrity, and social responsibility among learners. Similarly, research conducted by Ku (2026) revealed that spiritually grounded ethics-based education helps students develop self-reflection, empathy, and ethical decision-making skills in everyday life. These findings support the present study because the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* possess not only historical significance but also contemporary relevance in addressing twenty-first-century character education challenges. Consequently, this study is important in developing a character education model that is not only theoretically grounded in modern educational discourse but also supported by strong spiritual and historical foundations.

Core values in pauline ethics: Regularité, simplicité, and travail

Pauline Ethics is not merely normative-theological in nature but also possesses a practical dimension manifested through concrete values in everyday life. The three principal values within Pauline Ethics, namely *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail*, represent forms of virtue that are highly relevant to contemporary educational needs. From the perspective of virtue ethics theory, character is formed through the consistent habituation of moral virtues within actions and social relationships (Swanton, 2023). The value of *Regularité* emphasizes discipline, orderliness, and consistency in action, whereas *Simplicité* is associated with simplicity, sincerity, and humility in building authentic social relationships. Meanwhile, *Travail* represents work ethic, responsibility, and perseverance in fulfilling life duties and obligations. Collectively, these values establish a comprehensive framework of character formation that encompasses not only moral behavior but also the development of students' social and spiritual identities.

Within the framework of social-emotional learning theory, values such as self-discipline, empathy, responsibility, and perseverance are essential components in developing students' social and emotional competencies (Baharuddin & Tumiran, 2025). Research conducted by Domingo & Fernández Espinosa (2025) demonstrated that virtue-based education contributes significantly to improving discipline, resilience, and prosocial behavior among students within school environments. Furthermore, Upadhyay et al. (2026) argued that integrating spiritual values into education strengthens the balance between students' intellectual, emotional, and moral development. These findings support the present study because the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* are directly associated with

strengthening character and twenty-first-century competencies. Therefore, this research is important because it offers a spiritually grounded ethics-based character education approach that is more contextual, systemic, and relevant to contemporary educational demands.

Character education in the twenty-first century

Character education has become a central priority in twenty-first-century education as a response to increasing moral, social, and digital challenges within global educational contexts. Rapid technological advancement has significantly transformed social interaction patterns, learning cultures, and student behavior. From the perspective of character education theory, character formation extends beyond the transmission of moral knowledge and involves the internalization of values through social experiences and institutional culture (Purwaningsih & Ridha, 2024). Kennedy & Sundberg (2025) emphasized that twenty-first-century education requires the integration of cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical competencies to prepare learners to face global challenges responsibly. Moreover, transformative learning theory explains that effective education should foster reflective awareness and behavioral transformation through meaningful learning experiences (Chasokela, 2025). Consequently, character education constitutes a crucial element in developing adaptive, resilient, and morally responsible future generations.

Previous studies have shown that character education is strongly associated with strengthening discipline, social responsibility, and collaborative skills among students. Ahmad & Ismail (2024) explained that systematically integrated character education improves students' social-emotional competencies and psychological resilience in responding to contemporary social pressures. Similarly, Nufa (2025) found that schools integrating character education into learning culture demonstrate higher levels of student engagement and healthier social relationships. Santosa & Santoso (2026) further argued that character education in Indonesia should be developed through more holistic approaches that transcend academic achievement orientation alone. These findings reinforce the importance of this study because the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model offers a character education framework integrating moral, spiritual, social, and institutional dimensions simultaneously.

Integration of technical and non-technical skills

Modern education requires not only mastery of technical skills but also the development of non-technical competencies such as communication, collaboration, empathy, and self-regulation. From the perspective of twenty-first-century skills theory, individual success is determined not solely by academic abilities but also by interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities in navigating social transformation and global professional environments (Libertson, 2023). Zynuddin et al. (2023) explained that non-cognitive skills significantly influence academic achievement, workplace productivity, and the quality of social relationships. In addition, holistic education theory emphasizes that education should integrate intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions in a balanced manner (Marchuk et al., 2024). Therefore, character education serves a strategic role as a bridge connecting technical and non-technical competencies within educational processes.

Previous research indicates that character strengthening contributes directly to enhancing collaboration, leadership, and responsibility among students within modern educational settings. Martinez & Gomez (2024) argued that integrating social-emotional learning into educational practices improves students' interpersonal communication and ethical decision-

making abilities. Similarly, Oliveira et al. (2023) demonstrated that school environments supporting character development tend to produce students with stronger academic engagement and social adaptability. These findings support the present study because the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* not only shape moral dimensions but also strengthen social and emotional competencies required in the twenty-first century. Therefore, this study is important in reinforcing the integration of character education with contemporary global competency demands.

Pauline ethics and character formation

Pauline Ethics is rooted in the teachings of the Apostle Paul, emphasizing love, humility, responsibility, and perseverance as foundational principles for moral and spiritual life. From the perspective of moral development theory, character formation occurs through the gradual internalization of values through social experience, self-reflection, and moral habituation (Hamidi & Nurhakim, 2025). The values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* represent concrete manifestations of virtues that remain highly relevant within contemporary educational contexts. Lin et al. (2025) explained that spiritually grounded ethics-based education strengthens students' moral development and personal integrity more profoundly than purely normative moral instruction. Furthermore, spiritual approaches assist students in developing meaning, empathy, and stronger social awareness in everyday life.

Previous studies indicate that religion-based character education positively contributes to strengthening discipline, responsibility, and social concern among students. Gomez (2024) found that integrating spiritual values into education enhances reflective awareness and prosocial behavior among learners within school settings. Similarly, Azizi et al. (2023) demonstrated that spiritually grounded education significantly influences students' resilience and self-regulation in responding to contemporary social pressures. These findings support the present study because Pauline Ethics offers a character education approach that not only emphasizes moral dimensions but also develops students' spiritual and social capacities sustainably. Therefore, this research is highly relevant in developing a more holistic and contextual character education model.

Effective schools and character education

The concept of effective schools has evolved beyond academic achievement to encompass school culture, leadership, and character development among students. From the perspective of effective school theory, effective schools are institutions capable of creating safe, supportive, collaborative, and holistic learning environments that foster students' comprehensive development (Gordon, 2022). Positive school culture has been shown to significantly influence discipline, responsibility, and student engagement within learning processes (Habibulloh et al., 2024). Furthermore, school culture theory explains that values and norms consistently embodied within school environments shape collective habits that reinforce students' character formation (Saryanto et al., 2023). Consequently, character education constitutes an integral component in developing sustainable and effective schools.

Previous studies indicate that schools systematically integrating character education tend to demonstrate healthier social relationships, stronger student engagement, and more positive learning climates. Feliza (2025) emphasized that teacher role modeling plays a crucial role in cultivating moral culture and disciplined student behavior within schools.

Research conducted by Zhou & Colomer (2024) further revealed that school cultures promoting collaboration, empathy, and social responsibility significantly improve institutional effectiveness. However, most previous studies have examined character education and effective schools separately without integrating spiritually grounded ethical frameworks into systemic implementation models. Therefore, this study is important because it introduces the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model, which integrates curricular dimensions, school culture, teacher role modeling, and ecosystem collaboration within a holistic character education framework relevant to twenty-first-century schools.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and approach

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to analyze the implementation of Pauline Ethics-based character education in developing effective twenty-first-century schools. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the internalization process of the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* within everyday educational practices in the school environment. A case study design enables research to be conducted contextually and holistically toward character education phenomena occurring in real educational settings (Kiely & Hartman, 2023). The school was positioned as a moral ecosystem integrating institutional culture, learning processes, and role modeling in shaping students' character development. This approach was considered relevant for exploring the relationship between spiritual values, school culture, and the strengthening of twenty-first-century competencies systematically.

Research site and participants

The study was conducted at a private junior high school in Indonesia that actively implements spiritually grounded character education within its school culture and learning system in 2026. The research participants consisted of school principals, teachers, and students selected through purposive sampling techniques based on their involvement in the implementation of character education within the institution. A total of 12 participants were involved, consisting of one principal, five teachers, and six students. Purposive sampling was employed because the selected participants possessed direct experience and in-depth understanding related to Pauline Ethics-based character education practices. In qualitative research, participant selection emphasizes information richness rather than statistical representation (Alordiah & Oji, 2024). The selected participants were considered capable of providing relevant and representative data aligned with the research objectives.

Data collection techniques

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to ensure data completeness and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using interview guidelines developed based on concepts of character education, school culture, virtue ethics, and Pauline Ethics values. Participatory observations were carried out during classroom learning activities, school routines, reflection sessions, and students' social interactions to examine the implementation of values in daily school practices. Document analysis was conducted on school curricula, character education programs, school regulations, and student activity reports as supporting data sources. The

use of multiple data collection techniques contributed to strengthening the credibility and depth of data interpretation (Chand, 2025). The researcher acted as the primary research instrument supported by interview protocols, observation sheets, and field notes throughout the research process.

Data trustworthiness

Data trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from principals, teachers, and students, while technique triangulation was carried out by comparing interview, observation, and documentation findings. Member checking was conducted by reconfirming interview results and data interpretations with participants to ensure the accuracy of the collected information. In addition, field notes and research documentation were utilized to maintain consistency throughout the data analysis process. These procedures were implemented to strengthen credibility, dependability, and transparency within the qualitative research process. Ethical considerations were also maintained through participant consent and confidentiality of participants' identities during the research process.

Research procedure

The research was conducted through several stages, including preliminary observation, research instrument preparation, data collection, data processing, and conclusion drawing. The preliminary observation stage was carried out to understand the school context and the general implementation of character education practices. Data collection was conducted over four months, from February to April 2026, through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The collected data were subsequently transcribed, categorized, and organized according to the research themes. The interpretation stage focused on identifying the implementation patterns of the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* within the school environment. The final stage involved developing the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model as the primary conceptual outcome of the study.

Data analysis technique

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques consisting of data reduction, coding, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Thematic analysis was employed because it enables researchers to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from participants' experiences and educational practices within the school environment (Naeem et al., 2023). The analysis process began with repeated readings of interview transcripts, observation notes, and school documents to obtain comprehensive understanding of the research data. Subsequently, open coding was conducted to identify themes related to the implementation of the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail*. The resulting themes were then categorized into the four primary pillars of the study, namely curricular integration, teacher role modeling, school culture, and ecosystem collaboration. Data analysis was supported using Nvivo 14 software to facilitate data organization, coding processes, and visualization of relationships among themes, thereby enhancing the systematicity and transparency of the analytical process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Integration of pauline ethics values through curricular practices

The findings revealed that curricular integration became the primary entry point in the internalization process of Pauline Ethics values within the school environment. The values of Régularité, Simplicité, and Travail were not positioned as separate subjects, but were systematically integrated into learning activities through project-based learning, reflective sessions, collaborative discussions, and authentic assessments. Classroom observations conducted from February to April 2026 indicated that teachers consistently connected academic learning with moral reflection and behavioral habituation. The value of Régularité was reflected through academic discipline, punctuality, classroom routines, and consistency in completing assignments. Meanwhile, Simplicité appeared through students' openness during reflective discussions, honesty in learning activities, and respectful communication practices. The value of Travail emerged strongly through students' persistence in completing projects, collaborative tasks, and responsibility in academic activities. These findings demonstrate that the curriculum functioned not only as a medium for knowledge transmission but also as an operational mechanism for shaping students' moral habits and social responsibility.

The integration of values within the learning process was explained by one teacher as follows: *"We do not create a separate subject specifically about Pauline Ethics, but its values are always integrated into the learning process. Students are accustomed to discipline through small habits, such as being punctual, being honest during discussions, and taking responsibility for group assignments. In this way, they learn character while going through the daily learning process."* (G-2, Interview, February 14, 2026). A student also described how the learning process gradually shaped discipline and responsibility: *"At first, I thought assignments were only about grades, but over time the teachers taught us that the process also matters. If we submit work late or do it carelessly, we are reminded immediately. Now I have become more disciplined and less likely to give up when facing difficult assignments."* (S-4, Interview, February 21, 2026).

The thematic analysis process identified that curricular integration functioned as the foundational pillar in introducing and reinforcing Pauline Ethics values. Coding results generated several dominant categories, including academic discipline, reflective learning, responsibility habituation, and ethical learning interaction. Data reduction showed that Régularité appeared most strongly in classroom routines and assessment consistency, while Travail was frequently reflected through project-based learning and collaborative activities. Furthermore, document analysis indicated that lesson plans and character education programs explicitly embedded reflective and value-oriented learning approaches. These findings indicate that character education was operationalized through structured pedagogical practices rather than merely normative instruction.

Overall, the findings confirm that curricular integration served as a strategic mechanism for transforming Pauline Ethics values into practical educational experiences. The curriculum did not merely function as an academic framework but also as a moral learning system shaping students' discipline, empathy, perseverance, and responsibility. The novelty of this finding lies in the integration of spiritually grounded ethical values into authentic classroom practices through a systemic approach. This study demonstrates that effective character education in twenty-first-century schools requires curriculum models that combine cognitive learning, moral reflection, and behavioral habituation simultaneously.

Teacher role modeling as a reinforcement mechanism of values

The findings demonstrated that teacher role modeling functioned as one of the strongest mechanisms in strengthening the internalization of Pauline Ethics values among students. Teachers were not merely positioned as instructional facilitators but also as moral exemplars whose behaviors became observable references for students in everyday school life. Observational data showed that students tended to imitate teachers' discipline, communication styles, responsibility, and interpersonal attitudes during classroom and non-classroom interactions. The value of *Régularité* was reflected through teachers' punctuality, classroom consistency, and commitment to institutional responsibilities. Meanwhile, *Simplicité* emerged through humble attitudes, open communication, and warm interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. The value of *Travail* appeared through teachers' work ethic, persistence, dedication, and willingness to guide students beyond formal classroom obligations. These findings indicate that students learned values more effectively through direct observation and repeated interaction than through verbal instruction alone.

The influence of teacher role modeling was described by one student as follows: *"Our teachers do not simply tell us to be disciplined; they show us how to do it. They arrive on time, teach seriously, but still stay close to the students. That makes us feel embarrassed if we act irresponsibly or break the rules."* (S-2, Interview, February 18, 2026). The implementation of teacher role modeling was also explained by one teacher as follows: *"Students today tend to pay more attention to actions than just advice. So if teachers want to teach responsibility or hard work, they must demonstrate those values consistently every day."* (G-4, Interview, February 26, 2026).

Thematic coding results identified several dominant themes, including behavioral consistency, ethical interaction, professional commitment, and moral embodiment. Data analysis revealed that students frequently associated teacher behavior with their own motivation to behave responsibly and respectfully within the school environment. Observation findings also demonstrated that relational closeness between teachers and students strengthened students' willingness to internalize values voluntarily rather than through coercive disciplinary mechanisms. These findings indicate that teacher role modeling functioned as a value embodiment mechanism in which ethical values became visible and emotionally meaningful through lived interactions.

The study confirms that teacher role modeling played a critical role in transforming Pauline Ethics values into observable social practices within the school environment. The reinforcement of discipline, humility, and perseverance became more effective because values were embodied directly through teachers' daily behavior. The novelty of this finding lies in positioning teacher role modeling not merely as pedagogical support but as a central operational pillar within spiritually grounded character education systems. This finding also strengthens the argument that effective schools require teachers who function simultaneously as educators, mentors, and ethical role models.

School culture as a collective value reinforcement system

The findings indicated that school culture functioned as a collective reinforcement system ensuring the sustainability of Pauline Ethics values within students' daily lives. The values of *Régularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* were institutionalized through routines, norms, rituals, and social interactions consistently practiced throughout the school environment. Observational findings revealed that school routines such as morning greetings, collective

prayers, daily reflections, classroom cleanliness programs, and collaborative service activities became effective mechanisms for value habituation. Regularité was strengthened through structured routines, discipline systems, and consistent school regulations. Meanwhile, Simplicité was reflected through inclusive social relationships, mutual respect, and simplicity in interpersonal interactions among school members. The value of Travail emerged through collective commitment toward responsibility, hard work, and appreciation for learning processes rather than solely academic outcomes. These findings demonstrate that school culture transformed ethical values into collective behavioral norms rather than individual moral obligations.

The role of school culture in reinforcing values was explained by one teacher as follows: *"What influences students the most is actually the small daily habits. Students are accustomed to greeting others, praying together, reflecting together, and helping each other during group activities. Over time, they become more respectful and more caring toward others."* (G-1, Interview, March 3, 2026). A student also explained how school culture influenced students' social and emotional behavior: *"The atmosphere in this school feels different. Teachers and students support one another, so whenever someone faces difficulties, people usually help together. That makes us learn not to be selfish and to appreciate the learning process more."* (S-5, Interview, March 10, 2026).

Thematic analysis identified dominant themes such as collective discipline, inclusive interaction, moral habituation, and community responsibility. Data categorization showed that repetitive cultural practices strengthened students' emotional attachment to school values and increased behavioral consistency across different school activities. Observation data further indicated that students displayed stronger empathy, collaboration, and social responsibility in environments where school culture consistently reflected Pauline Ethics values. The analysis also revealed that school culture functioned as a stabilizing mechanism ensuring that ethical values remained visible and continuously practiced in daily institutional life.

These findings confirm that school culture served as a collective operational system in sustaining character education implementation. The integration of routines, institutional norms, and social interactions strengthened the transformation of ethical values into students' behavioral habits. The novelty of this finding lies in demonstrating how spiritually grounded school culture can function as a systemic reinforcement mechanism connecting institutional identity, social interaction, and moral development simultaneously within effective twenty-first-century schools.

Ecosystem collaboration and sustainability of character formation

The findings demonstrated that the sustainability of Pauline Ethics-based character education was strongly influenced by collaboration among schools, families, communities, and educational stakeholders. Character internalization became more effective when values practiced at school were reinforced consistently within students' broader social environments. The value of Regularité was strengthened through consistency between school discipline and family routines, particularly regarding responsibility and time management. Meanwhile, Simplicité developed through healthy social relationships within families and communities that encouraged empathy, openness, and mutual respect. The value of Travail was reinforced through collaborative support encouraging perseverance, responsibility, and positive work habits both in academic and non-academic contexts. These findings indicate that character education sustainability depended not solely on school

intervention but also on ecosystem consistency across students' social environments. The importance of collaboration between schools and families was explained by the principal as follows: *"If these values only exist within the school environment, the results will never be fully effective. Parents also need to reinforce them at home so students can see that discipline, responsibility, and simplicity are important wherever they are."* (K-1, Interview, March 15, 2026). The strengthening of values through ecosystem collaboration was also explained by one teacher as follows: *"We frequently communicate with parents about students' development. We discuss not only academic performance but also their habits and daily attitudes. When the school and family move in the same direction, students' character development becomes much more visible."* (G-5, Interview, March 22, 2026).

Thematic coding identified dominant categories including stakeholder engagement, family reinforcement, shared responsibility, and value sustainability. Analysis results showed that students demonstrated stronger consistency in discipline, empathy, and responsibility when family and school environments shared similar ethical expectations. Document analysis also revealed that school programs involving parents and community service activities strengthened students' social awareness and collective responsibility. These findings indicate that ecosystem collaboration functioned as a sustainability mechanism ensuring that character education extended beyond institutional boundaries into broader social contexts.

Overall, the findings confirm that ecosystem collaboration constituted the final reinforcing pillar within the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model. The integration of school, family, and community participation strengthened the continuity of moral habituation and value internalization across students' daily lives. The novelty of this finding lies in demonstrating that spiritually grounded character education requires not only institutional support but also collective ecosystem engagement to sustain behavioral transformation and twenty-first-century character competencies effectively.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of Pauline Ethics-based character education through the Four-Pillar Model was able to establish a more systematic, holistic, and sustainable process of value internalization compared to conventional character education approaches that primarily focus on the normative transmission of moral values. The integration of the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* into the curriculum, school culture, teacher role modeling, and ecosystem collaboration demonstrates that character formation becomes more effective when these values are embedded within students' authentic daily learning experiences. These findings are consistent with the view that character education should not merely emphasize the teaching of moral concepts, but must also integrate the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action simultaneously (Wahab, 2025). In the context of this study, the value of *Regularité* was strongly reflected through academic discipline and students' behavioral consistency, thereby reinforcing the theory of habit formation, which argues that character is developed through continuous habituation within a consistent social environment (Pangesti et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of moral reflection into the learning process also supports the concept of transformative learning, which explains that educational experiences not only generate cognitive change but also foster transformations in students' moral and social consciousness (Bharti & Singh, 2026). These findings extend previous studies that primarily

emphasized school culture, as this study demonstrates that the effectiveness of character education increases significantly when all school components operate integratively within a sustainable value system.

The findings further reveal that teacher role modeling played a highly significant role in strengthening students' character internalization. Teachers were not merely positioned as instructional facilitators, but also as concrete representations of moral values practiced consistently in everyday school life. These findings support social learning theory, which explains that individuals tend to learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and social interaction with significant role models (Saka, 2025). In this study, students internalized discipline, responsibility, and perseverance more effectively when they directly observed teachers consistently demonstrating these values in real practices. Previous research has similarly shown that teacher role modeling significantly influences students' moral development. However, this study contributes a new dimension by positioning role modeling not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a mechanism of value embodiment that integrates spiritual and social dimensions within school life (Faella et al., 2025). On the other hand, these findings differ slightly from studies suggesting that digital generations are more strongly influenced by social media than by teachers (Marrero Galván et al., 2023). In the context of this study, relational closeness between teachers and students instead became a major factor reinforcing the effectiveness of value internalization. This finding indicates that interpersonal relationships continue to play a dominant role in character education, despite the strong influence of digital culture in contemporary society.

The school culture identified in this study functioned as a collective reinforcement system that maintained the consistency of values in students' everyday lives. Simple routines such as daily reflections, collective prayers, service activities, and mutual respect practices were found to strengthen students' emotional attachment to moral values more profoundly. These findings are aligned with school culture theory, which emphasizes that positive school culture contributes to the formation of sustainable collective norms and social behaviors (Wilson Heenan et al., 2023). Within this study, the value of *Simplicité* emerged strongly through inclusive and empathetic social relationships, while *Travail* developed through appreciation for learning processes, collaboration, and perseverance. These findings also support previous research demonstrating that humanistic school environments enhance students' empathy, collaboration, and social responsibility (Maharani et al., 2025). Nevertheless, this study presents a unique contribution because school culture was not constructed merely through formal regulations, but through spiritual habituation naturally embedded in everyday social interactions. This condition suggests that spiritually grounded character education possesses greater potential for fostering moral sustainability compared to purely administrative disciplinary approaches. Therefore, within the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model, school culture functions not merely as a complementary aspect of character education, but as the primary arena for continuous collective moral transformation among students.

This study also found that the success of character education could not be separated from ecosystem collaboration involving schools, families, communities, and broader institutional support systems. Value internalization became significantly stronger when consistency existed between school environments and students' lives at home and within society. These findings support ecological systems theory, which explains that individual development is influenced by interactions among multiple social environments simultaneously (El Zaatari &

Maalouf, 2022). In this study, the value of *Regularité* was reinforced through consistent disciplinary practices between schools and families, while *Travail* developed more optimally when students received moral and social support from their surrounding environments. Previous studies have also demonstrated that family involvement improves the effectiveness of character education. However, this study extends the concept by revealing that ecosystem collaboration also functions as a mechanism for sustaining moral consistency beyond the classroom context (Rachmad, 2022a). Interestingly, this study found that failures in value internalization often occurred when inconsistencies emerged between school values and family environments. This finding explains why some students continued to display behavioral inconsistencies despite the school's optimal implementation of character education programs. Consequently, these findings imply that twenty-first-century character education requires an ecosystem-based character education approach to ensure that value transformation extends beyond institutional settings into students' broader social lives.

Overall, this study provides significant theoretical and practical contributions to the development of spiritually grounded character education in contemporary educational contexts. Theoretically, the study introduces the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model as a character education framework integrating curricular dimensions, teacher role modeling, school culture, and ecosystem collaboration into a unified systemic structure. This model expands the discourse of modern character education, which has often focused primarily on universal moral values without operational spiritual integration. Practically, the findings demonstrate that character formation becomes more effective when moral values are consistently embodied through authentic experiences and everyday social interactions. Nevertheless, this study also identified several important challenges, including students' limited spiritual understanding, inconsistencies within family environments, and the absence of standardized assessment instruments capable of objectively measuring the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail*. These findings indicate that the development of comprehensive character assessment systems remains a crucial challenge within contemporary character education. Therefore, future research should focus on developing more comprehensive and measurable spiritually based character assessment instruments to ensure that character education implementation is not only conceptually strong but also empirically valid and evaluatively reliable within the context of twenty-first-century global education.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This study demonstrates that the integration of Pauline Ethics into character education through the Four-Pillar Model effectively strengthens students' character formation and supports the development of effective twenty-first-century schools. The findings reveal that the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail* were successfully internalized through four interconnected dimensions: curricular integration, teacher role modeling, school culture, and ecosystem collaboration. Among these dimensions, teacher role modeling and positive school culture emerged as the most influential factors in fostering discipline, empathy, responsibility, and perseverance among students. The study confirms that character education becomes more meaningful and sustainable when moral and spiritual values are consistently embedded within students' daily learning experiences and social interactions. **Implication:** The findings provide both theoretical and practical implications for character education development. Theoretically, this study introduces the

Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model as a spiritually grounded framework that integrates curriculum, institutional culture, teacher practices, and stakeholder engagement into a unified system. Practically, the model offers schools an operational approach to strengthening character education while supporting holistic student development and institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, the model contributes to the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education), particularly in promoting values-based education, ethical responsibility, and twenty-first-century competencies. **Limitation:** This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single educational institution, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative case study approach prioritized depth of understanding rather than statistical measurement of outcomes. Third, the assessment of character internalization relied primarily on observations and participant perceptions due to the absence of standardized instruments specifically designed to measure the values of *Regularité*, *Simplicité*, and *Travail*. In addition, variations in family environments and students' spiritual understanding influenced the consistency of value implementation beyond the school setting. **Future Research:** Future studies are encouraged to implement the Pauline Ethics Four-Pillar Model across different educational levels, institutional settings, and sociocultural contexts to examine its broader applicability and effectiveness. Further research should also develop standardized and measurable instruments for assessing spiritually grounded character formation. In addition, quantitative and mixed-method approaches are recommended to provide stronger empirical evidence regarding the impact of Pauline Ethics-based character education on academic achievement, social-emotional competencies, resilience, and twenty-first-century skills development.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Layu Marsiana contributed to conceptualization, investigation, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, and writing the original draft. **Erny Roesminingsih** contributed to conceptualization, supervision, validation, interpretation of findings, and critical review and editing of the manuscript. **Karwanto** contributed to methodology development, supervision, validation, and manuscript review and editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors state that no financial or personal conflicts of interest exist that may have affected the content or findings of this research.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools or other digital writing assistants were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All stages of the research process, including data analysis, interpretation, and manuscript writing, were conducted solely by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the content presented in this article.

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***Layu Marsiana (Corresponding Author)**

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,
Universitas Negeri Surabaya
Jl. Lidah Wetan, Surabaya, East Java 60213, Indonesia
Email: layu.21005@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Erny Roesminingsih

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,
Universitas Negeri Surabaya
Jl. Lidah Wetan, Surabaya, East Java 60213, Indonesia
Email: ernyroesminingsih@unesa.ac.id

Karwanto

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,
Universitas Negeri Surabaya
Jl. Lidah Wetan, Surabaya, East Java 60213, Indonesia
Email: karwanto@unesa.ac.id
