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Integrating Jawi Language curriculum and character education in Thai Primary Schools: A qualitative case study

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ABSTRACT

The lack of effective integration between the Jawi language curriculum and character education in Thai primary schools; challenges in teachers' pedagogical adaptation; limited contextual learning materials; difficulties in students' internalization of character values; the role of teacher autonomy and institutional support in implementation; the influence of socio-cultural context and community involvement on the sustainability of character education. This qualitative single-case study at Santiwitiya School, Thailand, examined Jawi curriculum integration in character education. Data were collected via classroom observations, interviews with principal, teacher, and student, and document analysis, then thematically analyzed using an interactive model, with trustworthiness ensured through triangulation, member checking, and ethical procedures. The findings indicate that Jawi-based character education at Santivitiya School is influenced by curriculum institutionalization, teacher autonomy, pedagogical capacity, and socio-cultural context. Lesson plans and worksheets ensure consistency but may limit flexibility. Effective character formation requires teacher autonomy, institutional support, community involvement, and active, contextual learning to address linguistic challenges. This study highlights the importance of balancing curriculum standardization with teacher autonomy and socio-cultural engagement, providing insights for effective Jawi-based character education and informing policy, pedagogy, and community collaboration.

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INTRODUCTION

Character formation among elementary school students in Thailand, particularly within Muslim communities, is increasingly challenged by modernization, which tends to weaken cultural and religious values. Islamic education is therefore expected to respond by strengthening moral foundations while preserving local identity (Assalihee et al., 2024; Amin & Ritonga, 2024). Language plays a strategic role in transmitting religious knowledge and cultural values, with the Jawi language functioning as an important medium of Islamic literacy and scholarly tradition (Burhanudin, 2022). However, the use of Jawi among younger generations has steadily declined (Coluzzi, 2020). Although previous studies suggest that integrating local language instruction can enhance character development and student engagement, the systematic incorporation of Jawi into elementary education in Muslim communities in Thailand remains limited. This situation constitutes a significant educational problem that requires focused academic investigation.

Existing literature highlights the relevance of integrating the Jawi language and local cultural values in strengthening character education. Studies by Widiawati and Savski (2020) show that local language curricula enhance linguistic competence while supporting moral development. Culture-based learning has also been found to foster empathy, responsibility, discipline, and identity among students (Sakti et al., 2024; Hossain, 2024). From a technological perspective, Muryadi and Hashim (2025) demonstrate that gamification and artificial intelligence-based mobile applications increase students' motivation and understanding of the Jawi script. Diah and Mat Zin (2011) identify key dimensions of digital Jawi learning that support writing development. Meanwhile, Prayitno et al. (2022) emphasize prophetic values as essential foundations of character formation, underscoring the multidimensional role of Jawi-based education.

Despite extensive discussion on curriculum integration and character education, limited attention has been given to students' real linguistic practices in learning contexts. At Santiwitiya School, although located in a Muslim community where Jawi remains culturally recognized, students predominantly use a mixed form of Jawi and Thai in daily communication. This linguistic hybridity creates challenges for teachers in teaching standardized Jawi, particularly when the curriculum aims to strengthen students' character. While previous research has examined curriculum planning and implementation factors, the impact of mixed language use on the effectiveness of Jawi-based instruction remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need for empirical research examining how hybrid linguistic practices influence curriculum implementation and character formation among elementary school students in Thailand.

This study aims to analyze the planning of the local content Jawi language curriculum in shaping the character of elementary school students in Thailand, examine its classroom implementation, and identify supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its integration. Theoretically, this research contributes to character education and heritage language studies by providing empirical evidence on Jawi curriculum integration at the elementary level. Practically, the findings offer guidance for teachers and schools in designing effective local content curricula that support character development. At the policy level, this study provides recommendations for educational authorities, particularly in Muslim community areas, to strengthen Jawi language preservation through curriculum frameworks, resource allocation, and continuous teacher training.

This study concludes that integrating the Jawi language curriculum as local content has strong potential to strengthen character formation among elementary school students in Thailand. However, its effectiveness depends on structured curriculum planning, consistent classroom implementation, teacher competence, learning resources, students' linguistic practices, and community support. Limited training opportunities and resource constraints may hinder optimal implementation, indicating the need for systematic and sustainable support. Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions: How is the Jawi language curriculum planned and implemented to strengthen students' character? What factors support or inhibit its integration? How do students' linguistic practices influence the effectiveness of Jawi-based character education?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to obtain in-depth, contextual, and descriptive data regarding the integration of the Jawi language curriculum in strengthening character education among elementary school students. Qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration of social phenomena and the contexts shaping educational practices (Lim, 2024), allowing researchers to capture participants' perspectives and meanings embedded in curriculum planning and classroom implementation (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Within this qualitative paradigm, a single-case study design was adopted, as it allows for an intensive and holistic examination of a real-life phenomenon within its authentic context (Coombs, 2022). This design is particularly suitable for analyzing complex socio-cultural dynamics in specific settings, such as the integration of the Jawi curriculum within Muslim communities in Southern Thailand (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018).

The research was conducted at Santiwitiya School, Serong Carokseto Village, Thailand, an elementary school located in a Muslim community where the Jawi language is culturally recognized, although frequently used in combination with Thai in daily communication. This site was purposefully selected due to its relevance to the study's focus on local content curriculum integration and character education. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals directly involved in curriculum planning and implementation. Three key informants were included: (1) the school principal (RP), who provided insights into curriculum policy and institutional support; (2) the Jawi language teacher (ND), who described instructional strategies and classroom challenges; and (3) a student representative (SD), who shared learning experiences and perceptions. The number of informants was considered sufficient, as data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged during analysis.

Data were collected using three complementary techniques: observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted in classrooms and school environments to examine teaching practices, student interactions, and manifestations of character values. Semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol focusing on curriculum planning, instructional implementation, character integration, and supporting and inhibiting factors, while allowing flexibility for probing and clarification. Documentation included lesson plans, teaching materials, school reports, and curriculum policy documents. The combination of these methods enabled data triangulation, enhancing the depth and credibility of the findings (Banha et al., 2022; Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023).

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, coding, and categorizing information from interviews, observations, and documents to identify themes related to curriculum planning, implementation, and influencing factors (Zhao et al., 2025). Data displays were organized in thematic matrices to facilitate pattern recognition and relationship mapping (Cheong et al., 2023). Conclusions were drawn iteratively and continuously verified through cross-checking data sources and refining interpretations as new evidence emerged (Bingham, 2023).

To ensure research trustworthiness, several strategies were employed, including method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Participants were given opportunities to confirm the accuracy of interview summaries, while peer discussions were conducted to minimize researcher bias. Ethical considerations were strictly observed through informed consent, anonymity of participants using coded identifiers, and institutional permission from the school. The researcher also maintained reflexivity by acknowledging positionality as an external observer to the research setting, ensuring analytical rigor and transparency throughout the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Integration of the Jawi Language curriculum and character formation

The findings indicate that the integration of the Jawi language curriculum at Santivitiya School is characterized by a structured yet adaptive approach that links curriculum planning,

instructional implementation, and character formation. This integration is summarized in Table 1, which presents the key thematic findings derived from curriculum documents, classroom observations, and interview data.

Table 1 demonstrates that curriculum planning is anchored in standardized Core Competencies and Basic Competencies determined by the Serong Education Office, while simultaneously allowing teachers to expand indicators and adapt learning activities. This balance between policy-driven structure and teacher autonomy enables contextualization of learning, particularly in embedding character values such as discipline, responsibility, and respect within Jawi language instruction. The use of student worksheets as both planning and learning tools further strengthens this process by making learning objectives and expected behaviors explicit to students before instruction begins.

Table 1
Thematic Findings on Jawi Curriculum Integration and Character Formation

No	Thematic Findings	Analytical Explanation
1	Jawi curriculum planning	Lesson plans are developed based on standardized core competencies and basic competencies, while teachers are given flexibility to add indicators and adapt activities to students' character and learning needs.
2	Use of student worksheets	student worksheet function as curricular scaffolds containing core competencies, basic competencies, and indicators, enabling students to understand learning goals and expected character behaviors prior to instruction.
3	Lesson plan implementation	Lesson plan are designed systematically across introduction, core, and closing stages, integrating character values into learning objectives, activities, and reflection.
4	Role of school leadership	The principal acts as a facilitator by providing guidance and exemplar lesson plans while encouraging teacher autonomy and reflective practice.
5	Character formation process	Character development occurs organically through learning activities, classroom routines, and student participation rather than as a separate instructional component.

Further analysis of lesson plans reveals that character education is embedded across all instructional stages, rather than treated as an add-on. Interactive and student-centered activities encourage active participation, which supports the internalization of character values during the learning process. Leadership support also plays a critical role, as the principal's facilitative approach promotes consistency while empowering teachers to design context-sensitive instruction.

Nevertheless, the findings also highlight challenges, particularly in translating abstract character values into measurable indicators and selecting learning activities that simultaneously address linguistic and moral objectives. These challenges suggest that effective integration requires not only curricular flexibility but also sustained professional development and institutional support. Overall, the findings illustrate that the success of Jawi-based character education depends on the dynamic interaction between curriculum policy, teacher competence, and school leadership.

Implementation of the Jawi local content curriculum in character formation

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Jawi local content curriculum at Santivitiya School extends beyond linguistic instruction and is intentionally positioned as a medium for character formation. Learning is conducted through a contextual approach that draws on local traditions, folklore, and culturally familiar practices, enabling students to relate language learning to their everyday experiences. Through this process, character values are internalized in meaningful and socially grounded ways, positioning the Jawi language not merely as a means of communication but also as a vehicle for transmitting moral values and preserving local and religious identity.

Classroom practices demonstrate that character values are systematically integrated across all instructional stages opening, core, and closing activities. In the opening phase, routines such as greetings, prayer, attendance, and homework review establish a religious and disciplined learning climate that fosters moral readiness and responsibility. During core activities, character education is embedded through guided reading, vocabulary exploration, dialogue practice, independent tasks, and peer correction, promoting honesty, independence, cooperation, and accountability alongside

linguistic competence. Closing activities reinforce these values through reflection, moral reinforcement, and collective prayer, functioning as affective consolidation to ensure sustained internalization of character values.

The effectiveness of character formation is further strengthened by the development of learning materials rooted in students' lived contexts. Teachers intentionally embed values such as religiosity, independence, mutual cooperation, nationalism, and integrity into texts, dialogues, and vocabulary within lesson plans, encouraging students to interpret and model these values rather than merely memorize linguistic forms. Pedagogical adaptability is also evident in the strategic use of Jawi Thai code-switching to enhance comprehension and engagement, reflecting a pragmatic balance between language preservation and instructional effectiveness. This process is supported by the principal's instructional leadership, which emphasizes the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, thereby reinforcing the holistic role of the Jawi curriculum in character education.

Table 2
Thematic Integration of Character Values in the Implementation of the Jawi Curriculum

Instructional Stage	Learning Strategies	Dominant Character Values	Analytical Interpretation
Opening Activities	Greetings, prayer, attendance, homework review	Religiosity, discipline, responsibility	Establishes moral readiness and positive learning habits
Core Activities	Text reading, vocabulary discussion, dialogue practice, independent tasks, peer correction	Independence, honesty, cooperation, integrity	Character values are internalized through active and collaborative learning
Closing Activities	Reflection, reinforcement of values, closing prayer	Religiosity, responsibility	Affective consolidation of moral and linguistic learning
Material Development	Texts based on local culture and daily life	Nationalism, cultural identity	Jawi language serves as a medium for identity formation and cultural preservation
Language Strategy	Code-switching (Jawi–Thai)	Adaptability, inclusivity	Pedagogical compromise between linguistic preservation and learning effectiveness

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the implementation of the Jawi local content curriculum at Santivitiya School represents a holistic educational model in which character formation is organically embedded within language instruction. Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains are integrated through structured learning activities, contextual materials, and reflective practices. Nevertheless, the sustainability of this model depends heavily on teachers' pedagogical competence, strong school leadership, and systematic support to manage the tension between language preservation and instructional pragmatism. This study thus contributes to the growing body of literature on character education through local language–based curricula in elementary schools within Muslim communities.

Analytical findings on supporting and inhibiting factors in Jawi curriculum implementation

The findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of integrating the Jawi local content curriculum for character formation at MI Santivitiya Serong is shaped by a dynamic interaction between inhibiting and supporting factors rather than by isolated variables. Inhibiting factors primarily emerge from students' limited Jawi vocabulary and pronunciation accuracy, the dominance of a mixed Jawi Thai linguistic environment, and the persistence of teacher-centered instructional methods. These constraints reduce students' linguistic confidence and limit opportunities for active participation, which in turn weakens the internalization of character values that rely on sustained engagement, reflection, and practice.

Conversely, several enabling factors significantly mitigate these challenges. Adequate school facilities and infrastructure provide a supportive learning environment, while family involvement reinforces the use of Jawi beyond the classroom, strengthening language exposure and value transmission. Most importantly, institutional support through curriculum alignment with the

school's vision and mission ensures that character education is not treated as an additional component but as an integral objective of Jawi instruction. This alignment legitimizes teachers' efforts to embed moral values within language learning activities and sustains consistency across instructional practices.

Analytically, the findings indicate that teachers function as key mediators who negotiate between structural constraints and available supports. Their pedagogical choices determine whether inhibiting factors become barriers or catalysts for instructional adaptation. When teachers strategically leverage curriculum support and family involvement, limitations related to language proficiency and learning methods can be gradually transformed into opportunities for contextual and character-oriented instruction.

Table 3
Analytical Mapping of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Jawi Curriculum Implementation

No	Inhibiting Factors	Pedagogical Implications	Supporting Factors	Mitigating Function
1	Limited vocabulary and pronunciation	Reduces student confidence and participation	School facilities and infrastructure	Enables varied learning media and practice
2	Mixed Jawi–Thai language environment	Weakens consistent exposure to Jawi	Family involvement	Extends language use beyond school
3	Lecture-dominated instruction	Limits character habituation and interaction	Curriculum and school vision	Institutionalizes character-oriented learning

Overall, these findings suggest that the success of Jawi-based character education depends on the balance and interaction between constraints and supports within the school ecosystem. Rather than viewing inhibiting factors as fixed limitations, this study highlights the importance of adaptive pedagogy, institutional alignment, and community involvement in sustaining both language learning and character formation within Muslim elementary school contexts.

Discussion

Institutionalization and teacher autonomy in jawi character education

The findings indicate that the design of the Jawi curriculum at Santivitiya School through formal lesson plans and student worksheets reflects a high level of institutionalization, where instructional practices are strongly shaped by formal structures and procedural requirements. Conceptually, this demonstrates that the curriculum functions not only as a pedagogical guide but also as a governance mechanism that simultaneously enables standardization and constrains pedagogical flexibility. As noted by Nwafor and Ololube (2024), bureaucratic school structures significantly influence teachers' everyday practices. While standardized frameworks ensure quality assurance and consistency, they may limit teachers' capacity to adapt learning materials to students' socio-cultural contexts. This finding highlights a central tension between institutional control and contextual responsiveness in the implementation of local-content curricula aimed at character formation.

The relationship between curriculum standardization and student character development is mediated by teacher autonomy and moderated by institutional support. Teachers at Santivitiya demonstrate operational autonomy by adapting learning activities and assessment indicators; however, such autonomy remains dependent on principal guidance and is constrained by limited professional capacity (Medford & Brown, 2022). Chen and Yuan (2021) suggest that these adaptations are often situational rather than strategically planned. Evidence from Postholm (2018) and Cojorn and Sonsupap (2024) indicates that teacher autonomy contributes positively to learning quality only when supported by sustained professional development and collaborative institutional structures. Without these supports, autonomy becomes fragmented and unsustainable. This aligns with Alhamad and Aladwan (2019), who emphasize that effective curriculum decentralization requires supervisory systems and training models that strengthen teacher capacity rather than merely enforcing compliance.

Compared with previous studies, this research offers novelty by demonstrating that effective integration of local-content curricula depends not solely on administrative compliance with

structures but on meaningful engagement with community contexts. Nguyen et al. (2025) found that schools integrating parental and community participation achieve more consistent and sustainable character outcomes than those relying primarily on formal curriculum documents. Similar conclusions emerge from studies on local wisdom-based education in Thailand, which stress that contextual teaching materials strengthen student identity and positive behavior (Wangkamhan et al., 2024; Nadmilail et al., 2024). In the socio-cultural context of Santivitiya as a Muslim community school, the Jawi curriculum holds strong transformative potential. However, as emphasized by Sahasewiyon (2004) and Salgado et al. (2025), such potential can only be realized sustainably when local wisdom-based curricula move beyond administrative formality and are supported by coherent policy frameworks, continuous teacher training, and contextually relevant Jawi learning resources.

Balancing institutionalization and pedagogical flexibility in Jawi-Based character education

The findings conceptually indicate that the structured implementation of the Jawi language curriculum through lesson plans and student worksheets functions as a mechanism of institutionalization that ensures consistency in character value integration while simultaneously creating the risk of pedagogical routinization. When character education is embedded primarily as formal content within standardized documents, it may shift from a transformative pedagogical process into an administrative exercise (Ammar et al., 2024; Vasel, 2025). This condition becomes particularly evident when principals emphasize compliance with curriculum directives and teachers respond by merely inserting character values into vocabulary lists or texts without reflective or evaluative depth. In such cases, character education risks remaining symbolic rather than experiential, limiting its impact on students' holistic development (Walsh & Matsumura, 2025; Azoulay et al., 2025). Thus, the main conceptual contribution of this finding lies in highlighting the tension between curriculum assurance and pedagogical meaningfulness within Jawi-based character education.

Analytically, the relationship between curriculum structure and character formation operates through mediation and moderation mechanisms. Teacher autonomy mediates the effectiveness of curriculum standardization, while institutional support and pedagogical quality act as moderating factors. Teachers' strategies of integrating character values through vocabulary, dialogues, and narratives demonstrate alignment with classical educational theory, where cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains are developed simultaneously (Mercer et al., 2019; Cohen & Grossman, 2016; Kuo et al., 2024). The use of mixed Jawi-Thai language can be understood as a translanguaging strategy that enhances accessibility and affective engagement when intentionally designed (Simatupang & Supri, 2024; Sulis, 2024). However, when such strategies are implemented without reflective discussion or practical enactment, the internalization of character values weakens (Biwer et al., 2020; Reilly, 2017). This demonstrates that curriculum structure alone does not directly shape character; its influence is mediated by teacher agency and moderated by pedagogical depth.

Compared with schools that successfully integrate local content through community participation, contextualized materials, and continuous character assessment (de Jong et al., 2022), Santivitiya exhibits strong potential but remains vulnerable due to limited external support. This finding contributes novelty by showing that the effectiveness of Jawi-based character education depends not merely on formal curriculum integration but on the interaction between institutional policy, teacher capacity, and socio-cultural engagement. Studies in Thailand similarly emphasize that parental and community leader involvement strengthens the continuity and authenticity of character values (Sugiarti et al., 2024). Interpreted within the socio-cultural context of a Muslim community school, the transformation of "value insertion" into sustained character internalization requires flexible curriculum policies, professional development focused on affective and psychomotor assessment, and systematic school-community collaboration (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2022; Mu et al., 2023; Dursun & Aykan, 2025). This reinforces the argument that balancing institutional standards with contextual adaptation is essential for transformative character education.

Strategies to overcome obstacles in student character formation

The findings conceptually indicate that character formation through the Jawi language curriculum is shaped by a complex interaction of cognitive, pedagogical, and socio-linguistic factors rather than by instructional content alone. Limited vocabulary mastery and inaccurate pronunciation emerge as foundational constraints that hinder students' comprehension and engagement, thereby weakening the internalization of character values (Othman, 2024; Herlinawati et al., 2024; Puspitasari, 2024). These challenges are further intensified by mixed-language environments that reduce sustained exposure to Jawi and disrupt the continuity of linguistic and moral learning (Al-Harbi, 2024; Finders et al., 2023). In this context, the dominance of passive lecture-based methods reinforces surface-level learning, limiting meaningful interaction and experiential character formation (Ssemugenyi, 2023; Sailer et al., 2021; Mhlongo et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings underscore that character education through language requires active engagement and consistent linguistic immersion rather than mere information transmission.

The relationship between language instruction and character formation operates through both mediation and moderation mechanisms. Vocabulary and pronunciation proficiency mediate the effectiveness of character education, as limited linguistic competence restricts students' ability to interpret and embody moral values embedded in texts. This mediation is moderated by pedagogical approach and learning environment. Adequate facilities and learning resources, such as Jawi reading materials and interactive media, function as enabling conditions that enhance practice intensity and mitigate linguistic limitations (Savolainen, 2023; Hanaysha et al., 2023; Ghalebi et al., 2020; Mohammadi et al., 2024). However, as El Zaatari and Maalouf (2022) caution, physical resources alone are insufficient; their impact depends on systemic interaction between school, family, and curriculum. Family involvement strengthens linguistic exposure at home (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; Elsayed, 2024), while alignment between curriculum goals and school vision ensures that character education is institutionally reinforced rather than implemented as an isolated initiative (Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024).

The research extends existing literature by demonstrating that the effectiveness of Jawi-based character education lies in bridging linguistic gaps through active, socially embedded learning rather than relying on conventional instruction. Javaid et al. (2023) and Do et al. (2023) show that passive lecturing fails to address vocabulary limitations, whereas constructivist approaches such as project-based learning, language games, and interactive tasks promote deeper engagement and value internalization (Tsehay et al., 2024). The use of digital media and language laboratories further enhances immersive learning experiences (Kuhail et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2024). Contextually, within Muslim community schools, the synchronization of school practices, family participation, and curriculum design is critical for sustaining character formation (Jones et al., 2024; Filipe et al., 2024). This study contributes novelty by illustrating how socio-linguistic constraints can be transformed into opportunities for character strengthening when supported by holistic, context-sensitive educational ecosystems.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Jawi-based character education at Santivitiya School is shaped by a complex interaction between curriculum institutionalization, teacher autonomy, pedagogical capacity, and socio-cultural context. The implementation of the curriculum through lesson plans and student worksheets reflects a high level of standardization that ensures value consistency but simultaneously risks constraining pedagogical flexibility. The effectiveness of character formation is not determined by curriculum structure alone; rather, it is mediated by teacher autonomy and moderated by institutional support, pedagogical quality, and community engagement. Linguistic constraints, such as limited vocabulary mastery and inaccurate pronunciation, weaken the internalization of character values when not supported by active and contextual learning approaches. Therefore, the transformation of Jawi-based character education requires a balance between institutional standards, strengthened teacher capacity, and socio-cultural integration.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on language-based character education by extending mediation and moderation frameworks, positioning teacher autonomy as a key mediator between curriculum institutionalization and student character formation. The findings emphasize that local-content curricula do not operate linearly but through dynamic interactions among policy structures, pedagogical agency, and social context. Practically, this research provides evidence for schools and policymakers that effective Jawi-based character education cannot rely solely on administrative compliance but must be supported by sustained teacher professional development, active learning strategies, and school family community collaboration. This study enriches the discourse on sustainable, culturally grounded character education practices.

The practical implications of this study highlight the need for flexible curriculum policies, continuous teacher training focused on affective and psychomotor assessment, and strengthened collaboration between schools, families, and local Muslim communities. The development of contextualized Jawi learning materials and active instructional strategies should be prioritized to address students' linguistic challenges. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single school and its contextual qualitative approach, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research should examine the effectiveness of project-based and interactive pedagogical interventions, conduct comparative studies across different cultural contexts, and employ mixed-method approaches to assess the long-term impact of Jawi-based character education on students' behavior.

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