

Collaborative Learning, School Habituation, and the Development of Social Awareness and Civic Responsibility among Elementary School Students

Feby Arief Nugroho^{✉1}, Ida Wahyu Wijayati¹, Marsini¹ & Fery Muhamad Firdaus²

¹ Universitas Doktor Nugroho Magetan, Magetan, Indonesia

² Department of Elementary Education, Yogyakarta State University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

✉ nugrohofebby@gmail.com

Abstract. Social awareness and civic responsibility are important components of character development among elementary school students. However, globalization and digital technology have increasingly influenced children's patterns of social interaction and may encourage more individualistic behavior. This study explored how collaborative learning and school habituation practices support the development of social awareness and civic responsibility among elementary school students, as well as how teacher role modeling, school culture, and parental support reinforce this process. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach involving 14 fifth-grade students and one classroom teacher at SDN Kraton 6, Maospati, Magetan, Indonesia. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that collaborative learning supported students' social awareness by encouraging cooperation, communication, mutual respect, and shared problem solving. School habituation practices including classroom-cleaning schedules, mutual cooperation activities, flag ceremonies, moral discussions, and daily discipline routines supported civic responsibility by providing repeated opportunities for students to practice discipline, participation, responsibility, and care for shared environments. Teacher role modeling, positive school culture, and parental support further reinforced the internalization of these social and civic values. The study highlights the importance of integrating collaborative instructional practices, continuous school habituation, and supportive educational environments to promote sustainable character development among elementary school students.

Keywords: Civic Responsibility; Collaborative Learning; Elementary School Students; Social Awareness; School Habituation

1. Introduction

Elementary education plays a fundamental role in developing students' character, social attitudes, and civic competence during the early stages of human development. Beyond improving academic achievement, elementary schools are expected to cultivate values that enable children to interact positively with others, appreciate diversity, and participate responsibly in society. Social awareness and civic responsibility have become essential competencies because they shape students' ability to demonstrate empathy, cooperation, respect, and responsibility in everyday life. These competencies also contribute to preparing future citizens who are capable of responding to increasingly complex social challenges (Nucci et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025).

Rapid globalization and digital transformation have significantly changed children's patterns of communication and social interaction. Digital technologies provide broad educational opportunities by improving access to information and encouraging creativity in learning. However, excessive dependence on digital media has also reduced direct social interaction among children, limiting opportunities to develop empathy, cooperation, and interpersonal responsibility (van Tulder & van Mil, 2022). Similar concerns have been reported across many countries, where children increasingly spend more time in virtual environments than participating in face-to-face social activities that strengthen civic engagement and social competence (Vetrivel et al., 2026). A cluster-randomized evaluation of a digital citizenship curriculum also found that structured school-based instruction improved children's knowledge

and self-efficacy in addressing online problems, although its effects on online civility and cyberbullying remained limited (Jones et al., 2024).

These global developments place schools in a strategic position to strengthen students' social awareness and civic responsibility through meaningful educational experiences. Character education is no longer viewed solely as the transmission of moral values but as a continuous process integrated into classroom learning, school culture, and students' daily experiences. Therefore, educational institutions are challenged to design learning environments that simultaneously promote academic excellence, positive social interaction, and responsible citizenship in response to the demands of twenty-first century education.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite continuous efforts to strengthen character education, declining social awareness and civic responsibility among children remain significant educational concerns. Increased exposure to digital technology, changing family interaction patterns, and the growing influence of individualistic lifestyles have contributed to weaker empathy, reduced collaboration, and lower civic participation among young learners. As a result, many children experience fewer opportunities to develop meaningful interpersonal relationships and social responsibility through direct interaction with peers and their communities (van Tulder & van Mil, 2022; Vetrivel et al., 2026).

Within the Indonesian educational context, these challenges are reflected in elementary school students' limited collaborative skills, insufficient discipline, low social participation, and reduced concern for their surrounding environment. Although schools have implemented various character education initiatives, many students still demonstrate limited empathy, weak responsibility, and difficulties in cooperating effectively during classroom and school activities. These conditions indicate that existing character education practices have not fully addressed the social challenges emerging in the digital era (Balan et al., 2026).

If these issues are not addressed systematically, they may influence students' future social behavior and weaken their ability to participate responsibly in society. Consequently, schools require educational strategies that not only deliver academic knowledge but also strengthen students' social awareness and civic responsibility through meaningful learning experiences, continuous school habituation, and supportive educational environments. Investigating how these educational components work together is therefore important for developing more effective character education practices at the elementary school level.

1.2. Related Research

Previous studies have consistently emphasized the importance of character education in promoting students' moral development and civic engagement. Nucci et al., (2022) explained that character education contributes significantly to the development of empathy, moral reasoning, and responsible behavior among young learners. Likewise, Ciampa & Wolfe, (2021) demonstrated that integrating character education into classroom instruction improves students' cooperation and positive social interaction. These studies confirm the educational value of character development but primarily focus on instructional implementation within classroom settings.

Other scholars have highlighted the importance of experiential learning and educational environments in strengthening students' social and civic competencies. Dewey's educational perspective emphasizes democratic participation and meaningful social experiences as essential foundations of civic education, while (Zhao, 2025) argues that schools function not only as institutions for knowledge transmission but also as environments for moral and character formation through teacher role modeling and supportive learning cultures. In the Indonesian context, Ki Hadjar Dewantara similarly stressed that exemplary behavior and educational culture play central roles in shaping students' character (Nugroho, D.A. et al., 2026). However, these studies generally examine classroom learning, school culture, or teacher influence as separate dimensions of character education.

Despite the growing body of literature, empirical evidence remains limited regarding how collaborative learning, school habituation practices, teacher role modeling, and school culture interact simultaneously to strengthen elementary school students' social awareness and civic responsibility. Most previous studies investigate these variables independently rather than examining their integrated contribution to character development. This study addresses that gap by proposing a holistic perspective in which collaborative learning, school habituation, teacher role modeling, and school culture collectively foster social awareness as an important pathway toward the development of civic responsibility among elementary school students. This integrated perspective constitutes the novelty and state of the art of the present research. A recent thematic review of 222 empirical character education studies found that the field remains conceptually diverse and frequently examines specific interventions or character outcomes without sufficiently explaining how instructional, relational, and cultural mechanisms interact (Oldham & McLoughlin, 2026).

1.3. Research Objectives

This study aims to explore how collaborative learning and school habituation practices support the development of social awareness and civic responsibility among elementary school students. Specifically, the study examines the contribution of collaborative learning to students' social awareness, the role of school habituation in strengthening civic responsibility, and the ways teacher role modeling and positive school culture reinforce these processes

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How does collaborative learning support the development of social awareness among elementary school students? (2) How do school habituation practices support the development of civic responsibility among elementary school students? (3) How do teacher role modeling and positive school culture reinforce the contribution of collaborative learning and school habituation to students' social awareness and civic responsibility?

The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on elementary character education and offer practical insights for integrating collaborative instruction, school habituation, and supportive school environments.

2. Theoretical Framework

Character education has become one of the fundamental objectives of elementary education because schools are expected to develop students not only academically but also socially and morally. Contemporary educational perspectives emphasize that students' character is formed through continuous interaction between learning experiences, social participation, and the educational environment. Social awareness and civic responsibility are therefore regarded as essential competencies that enable children to build positive relationships, demonstrate empathy, cooperate with others, and participate responsibly in society. These competencies should be developed through meaningful educational experiences that integrate classroom instruction with everyday school practices (Hart & Liddle, 2024; Nucci et al., 2022).

The present study is grounded in two interrelated concepts that represent the main focus of the research. The first concept is social awareness, which explains students' ability to understand social situations, demonstrate empathy, cooperate with others, and respect diversity. The second concept is civic responsibility, which refers to students' awareness of their responsibilities, discipline, participation, and contribution to the school and wider community. These concepts provide the theoretical foundation for explaining how collaborative learning, school habituation practices, teacher role modeling, and positive school culture contribute to strengthening elementary school students' character development.

2.1. Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning refers to an instructional approach in which students work together in small groups to achieve shared learning goals through discussion, mutual assistance, the exchange of ideas, and collective problem solving (Endrawan & Aliriad, 2023). In elementary

school settings, collaborative learning provides meaningful opportunities for students to communicate, listen to different perspectives, negotiate roles, help peers, and assume shared responsibility for group tasks. These interactions may support the development of social awareness because students are required to recognize the needs, feelings, opinions, and contributions of others during the learning process. Therefore, collaborative learning in this study is understood as an instructional practice that creates opportunities for students to develop cooperation, empathy, mutual respect, and social interaction.

2.2. School Habituation

School habituation refers to the continuous and repeated implementation of positive routines and social practices within the school environment. These practices may include classroom-cleaning schedules, flag ceremonies, mutual cooperation activities, daily discipline routines, moral discussions, and shared responsibility programs (Sakban & Sundawa, 2023; Anisah, 2023). Through regular participation in these activities, students are provided with concrete opportunities to practice discipline, responsibility, participation, care for shared spaces, and respect for school rules. In this study, school habituation is understood as a school-based process through which civic values are reinforced through repeated experience and everyday participation rather than through verbal instruction alone.

2.3. Social Awareness

Social awareness refers to an individual's ability to understand the feelings, perspectives, and needs of other people while demonstrating empathy, cooperation, tolerance, and respect during social interaction. In elementary education, social awareness represents an important dimension of character development because it enables students to build positive interpersonal relationships and participate constructively in collaborative learning activities. Students with strong social awareness are generally more capable of communicating effectively, appreciating differences, resolving conflicts peacefully, and contributing positively to their learning communities (Rasteiro et al., 2025).

The development of social awareness requires continuous learning experiences that actively involve students in meaningful social interaction. Collaborative learning, classroom discussion, mutual cooperation, and participatory learning activities provide opportunities for students to practice empathy, shared responsibility, and mutual respect. Character education therefore should not be limited to conceptual instruction but should be reinforced through authentic experiences embedded within classroom learning and school culture. As emphasized by (Berkowitz, 2021), effective character education integrates instructional activities with everyday school experiences so that social values become part of students' daily behavior. Likewise, Ciampa and Wolfe (2021) argue that integrating character education into classroom learning contributes significantly to improving students' cooperation, empathy, and positive social interaction. Recent classroom-based evidence further demonstrates that collaborative discussion can strengthen children's relationship-building, responsible decision-making, and social awareness, particularly when teachers provide appropriate cognitive and metacognitive scaffolding (Kusumaningsih & Sun, 2025; Niman, 2025).

2.4. Civic Responsibility

Civic responsibility refers to an individual's awareness of personal rights and obligations as an active member of society who demonstrates responsibility, discipline, participation, and concern for the common good. Within elementary education, civic responsibility is reflected in students' willingness to obey school rules, participate in collaborative activities, respect others, maintain shared environments, and contribute positively to their school community. Developing civic responsibility from an early age is considered essential because elementary school represents the initial stage of lifelong character formation (Jung, 2025).

The development of civic responsibility is closely associated with educational environments that consistently reinforce positive values through both learning activities and school habituation practices. Teacher role modeling, school culture, daily discipline, community service, and collaborative participation provide authentic opportunities for students to internalize civic values in everyday practice. Research on moral and character education

policy further indicates that character values are more effectively internalized when they are embedded within subject learning and routine educational activities rather than presented as a separate moral program (Chung, 2023). Schenkenhofer & Vismara, (2025) emphasize that educational environments encouraging social participation contribute significantly to strengthening students' civic awareness and social responsibility. Similarly, (Liapina et al., 2026) explain that sustainable civic development requires continuous collaboration among schools, families, and communities in reinforcing responsibility, cooperation, and prosocial behavior. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes civic responsibility as the outcome of continuous interactions among collaborative learning, school habituation practices, teacher role modeling, and supportive school culture, which collectively strengthen elementary school students' social and civic character.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how social awareness and civic responsibility are fostered among elementary school students through learning activities and school habituation practices. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding participants' experiences, behaviors, and social interactions within the educational environment (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2023). Meanwhile, a descriptive method was used to systematically describe various phenomena related to the formation of students' social character through learning activities and habits at school. In qualitative research, the researcher served as the primary instrument for collecting and interpreting data obtained from the field. The study focused on the role of schools, teachers, and the educational environment in instilling attitudes of social awareness, discipline, tolerance, and a sense of responsibility in students' daily lives. In addition, this study also identified various forms of learning activities that contributed to strengthening social and civic values in elementary school students. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of character education practices related to students' social awareness and civic responsibility (Vetrivel et al., 2026).



Figure 1. Flowchart of the Research Process

Figure 1 illustrates the overall research procedure used in this study. The research began with identifying problems related to students' social awareness and civic responsibility, followed by selecting a qualitative descriptive approach and determining research participants. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking were conducted throughout the research process.

3.2. Participants

The participants consisted of 14 fifth-grade students and one classroom teacher from SDN Kraton 6, Maospati, Magetan, Indonesia. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in collaborative learning, school habituation programs, and character education activities. The students regularly participated in group discussions, classroom cleaning schedules, flag ceremonies, mutual cooperation activities, and classroom responsibility programs. The teacher was selected because of their direct role in planning and implementing social and civic character education.

The student participants were approximately [10–11] years old and were enrolled in the fifth grade. The teacher was aged [31] years and had an educational background in [Bachelor of Education]. These characteristics were relevant because the students' developmental stage and the teacher's professional experience influenced their participation and perceptions regarding social awareness and civic responsibility.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Students	Male	8	53.3
Students	Female	6	40.0
Teacher	Female	1	6.7
Total		15	100.0

As presented in Table 1, the participants consisted of 14 fifth-grade students and one classroom teacher, resulting in a total of 15 participants. Among the students, 8 (53.3%) were male and 6 (40.0%) were female, while the classroom teacher represented 6.7% of the total participants. The participants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in collaborative learning activities, school habituation programs, and character education practices implemented at SDN Kraton 6. The diversity of participants enabled the researchers to obtain comprehensive perspectives from both students and the classroom teacher regarding the development of social awareness and civic responsibility. Furthermore, data saturation was achieved during the data collection process, as no substantially new themes or information emerged from the final interviews, observations, and documentation. Therefore, the selected participants were considered sufficient to address the research objectives and provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. These techniques were used to obtain comprehensive information regarding students' social awareness, civic responsibility, and participation in character education activities within the school environment.

Observations were conducted during classroom learning activities, school ceremonies, collaborative projects, school habituation practices, and daily social interactions among students. The observation protocol specifically focused on collaborative learning processes, including group discussion, peer interaction, shared task completion, and mutual assistance, as well as school habituation practices, including classroom-cleaning schedules, flag ceremonies, mutual cooperation activities, and daily discipline routines. The observations also documented students' cooperation, empathy, mutual respect, discipline, responsibility, participation, and care for shared environments. Field notes were prepared to record relevant

behaviors, interactions, classroom situations, and school practices related to the research focus. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the classroom teacher and students to explore their experiences, perspectives, and understanding of character education practices in daily school activities. The interview questions covered collaborative learning, school habituation, teacher role modeling, social interaction, discipline, responsibility, and family support. The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to ask follow-up questions and obtain more detailed information from the participants (Ashuro et al., 2025).

Documentation was used to complement and confirm the data obtained through observation and interviews. The documents included photographs of school activities, classroom activity records, cleaning schedules, learning materials, and other records relevant to character education practices. The use of these three data collection techniques enabled the researchers to compare information across different sources and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the development of students' social awareness and civic responsibility.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This analytical approach was selected because it provides a systematic procedure for identifying, organizing, and interpreting meaningful patterns within qualitative data. Thematic analysis is particularly relevant to educational research because it enables researchers to examine patterned meanings across participants' experiences while retaining sensitivity to the institutional and social contexts in which those experiences occur (Kushnir, 2025). The analysis began with data familiarization, during which the researchers repeatedly read the interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documentation records to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data.

The second phase involved generating initial codes by identifying meaningful segments related to students' social awareness, cooperation, discipline, responsibility, and civic participation. The coded data were then organized into potential themes by identifying similarities and relationships among the codes. During the fourth phase, the preliminary themes were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency with the research objectives and the overall dataset. Subsequently, each theme was clearly defined and appropriately named according to its conceptual meaning.

The final phase involved producing the research report by integrating the identified themes with supporting evidence from interviews, observations, and documentation. The coding process was conducted manually because the dataset was relatively small and manageable. Throughout the analysis, the researchers continuously compared information obtained from different data sources to ensure consistency and strengthen the interpretation of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.5. Validity and Reliability

In this qualitative descriptive study, the researchers served as the primary instruments for collecting and interpreting the data. Data collection was supported by a semi-structured interview guide, an observation protocol, and a documentation checklist. The instruments were developed based on the research questions and the conceptual indicators of collaborative learning, school habituation, social awareness, and civic responsibility. The interview questions were designed to be open-ended to enable participants to describe their experiences and perspectives in depth.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied several strategies commonly used in qualitative research, including source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the classroom teacher, students, and supporting documents. Method triangulation was achieved by integrating data collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, allowing the researchers to compare findings across different sources and data collection techniques.

Member checking was conducted by returning selected interview findings to the participants to confirm that the researchers' interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. In addition, prolonged engagement in the research setting enabled the researchers to develop a deeper understanding of the school context and participants' daily activities, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

To further strengthen the dependability of the study, peer debriefing was conducted among the researchers throughout the coding and interpretation processes. The consistency of data collection, coding procedures, and thematic development was maintained during the entire research process. The combination of these strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and trustworthiness of the findings by minimizing researcher bias and ensuring that the interpretations were grounded in the collected data.

4. Findings

The findings revealed that social awareness and civic responsibility among elementary school students were developed through collaborative learning activities, school habituation practices, and positive interactions within the school environment. The formation of students' social character was carried out in an integrated manner through academic activities in the classroom and non-academic activities that encourage active student involvement.

In this process, teachers played a crucial role in guiding students to understand the values of social awareness, cooperation, discipline, and responsibility in everyday life. Based on observations, students who actively participated in collaborative activities have better social interaction skills than students who are less involved in group activities. In addition, the consistent habituation of positive behavior helped foster a caring attitude towards the school environment and peers. This study also showed that the formation of social character is not only influenced by the formal learning process, but also by the school culture that supports the creation of a positive, conducive, and humanistic learning atmosphere.

All interview quotations presented in this section were originally expressed in Bahasa Indonesia and were translated into English by the researchers while preserving their original meaning.

4.1. Collaborative Learning and the Development of Social Awareness

Collaborative learning activities were found to play an important role in strengthening students' social interaction and cooperation skills. Observations conducted during classroom learning showed that students actively participated in group discussions, shared ideas, and helped each other complete assignments. Through these activities, students learned to respect different opinions and develop tolerance during the learning process.

Interviews with students indicated that collaborative activities helped them better understand the importance of cooperation, mutual respect, and shared responsibility during learning activities. One student stated, "I enjoy group activities because we can help each other complete assignments and solve problems together." Another student explained, "At first, I was hesitant to share my ideas during group discussions because I was afraid of making mistakes. However, after working together with my classmates, I became more confident because they listened to my opinions and helped me when I faced difficulties." This statement illustrates how collaborative learning fostered students' confidence, mutual respect, and willingness to participate actively in social interactions. In addition, collaborative learning also encouraged students to become more confident in expressing opinions and participating actively during classroom discussions.

Teachers also explained that collaborative learning created more positive interactions among students and reduced individualistic behavior during classroom activities. Observations further showed that students who actively participated in collaborative activities demonstrated better communication skills and social awareness toward their peers.

The findings on collaborative learning indicate that students developed stronger interpersonal communication and cooperation through active classroom interaction. Building upon these

classroom experiences, the following findings demonstrate how continuous school habituation practices further reinforced students' responsibility and civic values in their everyday school life.

4.2. School Habituation and Civic Responsibility

The findings indicated that school habituation activities supported the development of students' civic responsibility and discipline. Schools regularly implemented habituation programs such as classroom cleaning schedules, community service activities, flag ceremonies, and daily discipline practices to strengthen students' sense of responsibility toward their environment. Observations during classroom cleaning activities at SDN Kraton 6 showed that students actively worked together to maintain classroom cleanliness and organize learning equipment. Observations indicated that students who consistently participated in these activities demonstrated more caring attitudes toward school cleanliness and social order. Students also became more aware of their responsibilities in maintaining shared spaces and cooperating with classmates during school activities.

One student stated, "When we clean the classroom together, I feel responsible for keeping our classroom tidy because it is a place that we use every day. If someone forgets their duty, we remind each other to complete our responsibilities." This response reflects the development of students' sense of responsibility and collective awareness through daily habituation practices.

The teacher explained that continuous habituation activities helped students develop positive behavior more consistently in their daily lives. Furthermore, repeated social practices encouraged students to become more disciplined, cooperative, and responsible both inside and outside the classroom environment.

While school habituation provided repeated opportunities for students to practice responsibility and discipline, these activities were consistently supported by teachers who served as facilitators and role models. Therefore, the next theme focuses on the important contribution of teachers to students' character development.

4.3. Teachers' Role in Character Development

Findings indicated that teachers played a central role in fostering students' social awareness and civic responsibility. Teachers were not only responsible for delivering academic materials but also acted as role models who demonstrated positive attitudes and behaviors during daily school activities.

Observations showed that teachers consistently encouraged students to cooperate, respect others, and maintain discipline during classroom learning. Teachers also provided guidance and motivation when students experienced conflicts or difficulties during collaborative activities.

Interviews revealed that students viewed teachers as important figures in shaping their attitudes and behavior. The teacher participant explained that providing direct examples of discipline, responsibility, and respect was more effective than simply giving verbal explanations about moral values. The teacher stated, "Students become more disciplined when teachers consistently provide examples of positive behavior during classroom activities".

The teacher also reflected, "I believe students learn more from what they observe than from what they are told. When I consistently demonstrate discipline, respect, and responsibility, students gradually imitate these behaviors in their daily activities." This statement highlights the teacher's perception of role modeling as a key mechanism in character development.

The use of participatory and humanistic approaches during classroom learning also created a more supportive learning environment, allowing students to feel comfortable expressing opinions and interacting positively with others.

Although teachers played a central role in guiding students' social and civic development, the findings also revealed that character formation extended beyond classroom instruction. The broader school culture and support from families further strengthened the internalization of positive social values among students.

4.4. School Culture and Family Support

The study also found that positive school culture and parental involvement supported the development of students' social character. A school environment that emphasized discipline, cooperation, mutual respect, and responsibility contributed to creating positive social interactions among students.

Observations showed that students were more likely to demonstrate caring behavior when social values were consistently reinforced through school activities and teacher guidance. In addition, parental support also influenced students' attitudes toward responsibility and social awareness in daily life.

The teacher explained that communication between schools and parents helped reinforce the values taught in school activities. This collaboration supported the consistency of character education practices both at school and at home.

The four themes presented above consistently demonstrate that collaborative learning, school habituation practices, teacher role modeling, and positive school culture collectively contributed to strengthening students' social awareness and civic responsibility. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence
Collaborative Learning	Improved cooperation and communication skills	Student interviews and classroom observations
School Habituation	Strengthened discipline and responsibility	Community service and daily school routines
Teachers' Role	Teachers acted as role models and facilitators	Interview with classroom teacher
School Culture & Family Support	Positive environment supported character development	Observations and teacher statements

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that collaborative learning, school habituation activities, teacher guidance, and positive school culture contributed to strengthening students' social awareness and civic responsibility. Classroom observations and interview data consistently showed that students developed better cooperation skills, discipline, responsibility, and social awareness through active participation in school activities. Figure 2 presents a conceptual model derived from the four identified themes.

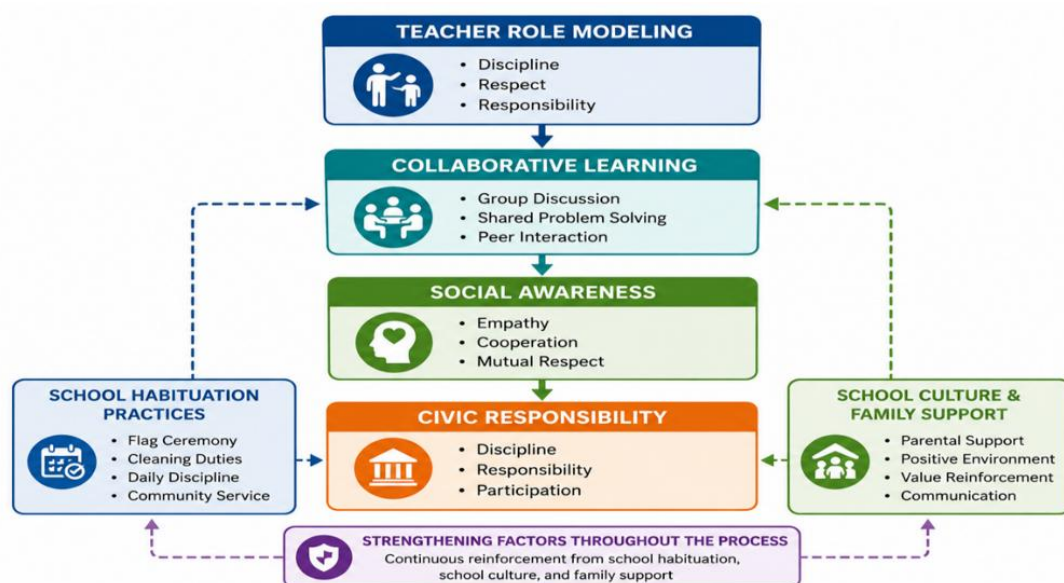


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Social Awareness and Civic Responsibility Development

Teacher role modeling supports students' participation in collaborative learning, which develops cooperation, communication, mutual respect, and social awareness. School habituation practices, positive school culture, and family support reinforce the internalization and consistency of social and civic values. Together, these interconnected factors contribute to the development of students' civic responsibility.

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual relationships identified from the findings of this study. Teacher role modeling was found to influence students' participation in collaborative learning activities by providing examples of discipline, cooperation, and responsibility. Collaborative learning contributed to the development of students' social awareness through interaction, mutual respect, and shared problem-solving experiences. School habituation practices reinforced these experiences and supported the development of civic responsibility through repeated participation in daily school activities. Furthermore, positive school culture and family support functioned as strengthening factors that reinforced the internalization of social and civic values. The model suggests that social awareness serves as an important pathway through which collaborative learning and habituation practices contribute to the development of civic responsibility among elementary school students.

5. Discussion

This study highlights the importance of integrating collaborative learning, school habituation practices, and positive social interaction in supporting the development of elementary school students' social awareness and civic responsibility. The findings indicate that character development is a continuous process that requires consistent support from teachers, schools, and families. Through collaborative learning, students had opportunities to cooperate, communicate, respect different perspectives, and assume shared responsibility during classroom activities. Through school habituation practices, students repeatedly engaged in activities that encouraged discipline, participation, responsibility, and care for shared environments. The findings further suggest that the integration of classroom learning and everyday school practices provides meaningful experiences through which social and civic values can be internalized (Mao, 2026). This interpretation is also consistent with the view that sustainable character development requires an integrated educational strategy involving learning experiences, school practices, and supportive social environments (Leão et al., 2025). The following discussion is organized around the two central practices highlighted in this study: collaborative learning as a context for developing students' social awareness and school habituation as a context for strengthening civic responsibility.

5.1. Integration of Learning and Social Habits in Building Student Character

The findings indicate that collaborative learning, when combined with continuous school habituation practices, played a central role in strengthening students' social awareness and civic responsibility. This finding provides the basis for understanding how instructional experiences and everyday school practices jointly contribute to character development. These findings confirm previous evidence that collaborative learning promotes students' social development (Slamet et al., 2025). However, unlike previous studies that primarily examined collaborative learning as an instructional strategy, the present study demonstrates that its effectiveness depends on continuous reinforcement through school habituation practices. This finding extends existing literature by showing that character development emerges from the interaction between classroom learning and the broader educational environment rather than from isolated instructional experiences. Empirical evidence also shows that structured cooperative learning in social studies encourages students to exchange perspectives, solve problems jointly, and sustain their motivation to participate in group learning (Chaiyarat, 2024).

Mutual cooperation activities and the consistent cultivation of discipline further strengthened students' civic character. Through these practices, students learned that maintaining cleanliness, following school rules, assisting peers, and completing shared responsibilities were concrete expressions of civic responsibility. The integration of classroom learning with repeated social practices allowed students to understand social and civic values in contextual and practical ways. This interpretation is consistent with (Sarmini et al., 2026), who emphasized the

contribution of direct social experiences and culturally embedded practices to character development. However, the present study extends this view by showing that such experiences become more meaningful when they are connected to collaborative classroom learning and reinforced through school-wide habituation.

This finding provides a nuanced extension to traditional character education theory, which often emphasizes either instructional experiences or moral habituation as separate mechanisms of character formation. The present study suggests that these mechanisms operate synergistically, with collaborative learning providing opportunities for social interaction while school habituation reinforces the consistent application of social and civic values in everyday practice. More specifically, collaborative learning becomes educationally meaningful when students are able to refer to, elaborate on, and transform their peers' ideas through structured communication, rather than merely completing tasks in the same group (Jurkowski et al., 2024). Consequently, character development may be better understood as a dynamic process emerging from the interaction between learning experiences and the broader educational environment.

Flag ceremonies and discussions on moral values are crucial elements in fostering civic responsibility in students. Flag ceremonies are not merely a routine school event but also serve as a means to instill nationalism, discipline, and respect for national symbols (Christodoulou & Berg, 2026). On the other hand, discussions about moral values help students understand various positive behaviors that need to be applied in everyday social life. During the learning process, teachers relate the material to situations close to students' experiences, making these values easier to understand and apply in real life. Research results show that students who actively participated in these activities tend to demonstrate more discipline, responsibility, and respect for others. These findings demonstrate that contextual learning experiences help students internalize social and civic values more effectively in their daily behavior. Therefore, schools have a strategic role in creating an educational environment that emphasizes not only academic aspects but also supports the development of students' social and civic character (Chen & Khoso, 2025).

These relationships are synthesized in the conceptual model presented in Figure 2, which illustrates that collaborative learning and school habituation are interconnected processes rather than separate educational practices. The model therefore provides a more integrated explanation of character development among elementary school students.

5.2. The Role of Teachers, Parents, and School Culture in Cultivating Civic Responsibility

The findings indicate that teacher role modeling played a central role in strengthening students' social awareness and civic responsibility. Teachers influenced students not only through verbal instruction but also through consistent demonstrations of discipline, respect, cooperation, and responsibility during daily school activities. The humanistic and participatory approach applied in classroom learning also created a supportive environment that encouraged students to participate actively in academic and social interactions (Wang, 2025). This finding supports argument that teachers function not only as instructors but also as moral agents who shape students' character through daily interactions. However, the present study further demonstrates that teacher influence becomes more sustainable when supported by positive school culture and parental reinforcement. Therefore, teacher role modeling should be viewed as one component within a broader ecosystem of character education rather than an isolated instructional factor. This interpretation is also consistent with (Osman, 2026; Vaez shahrestani, 2025), who emphasizes the importance of sustained teacher guidance and positive interaction in developing students' attitudes and behavior. However, the current study extends this perspective by showing that teacher influence is strengthened when the values demonstrated at school are reinforced through family practices and a supportive school culture.

In addition to the role of teachers, parental involvement and the creation of a conducive school culture also contribute significantly to building students' civic character. Students who received consistent social and moral reinforcement from their family environment demonstrated stronger responsibility and social awareness in daily school activities.

Collaboration between schools and parents is a crucial element in strengthening character education because the values instilled in school can be continuously reinforced within the family environment (Gaete Quezada, 2025). On the other hand, a school culture that emphasizes discipline, concern for others, and social responsibility contributes to creating an educational atmosphere that supports the optimal development of students' character. A positive school environment also encourages students to become more accustomed to demonstrating good social behavior in various interactions in everyday life. The collaboration between schools, teachers, parents, and the broader educational environment plays an important role in supporting sustainable character development among elementary school students (Shabalala & Photo, 2025).

These findings also extend ecological perspectives on character education, which emphasize the influence of multiple social environments on children's development. The present study suggests that teacher role modeling, family support, and school culture do not function independently but interact dynamically to reinforce students' social awareness and civic responsibility. This finding highlights the importance of considering character formation as a multidimensional process shaped by interconnected educational and social contexts.

Overall, the findings indicate that the integration of collaborative learning, school habituation practices, moral discussions, and positive school culture contributed significantly to strengthening students' social awareness and civic responsibility. Character development among elementary school students requires continuous guidance, meaningful social experiences, and consistent habituation practices rather than relying solely on theoretical instruction (Qublan, E. & Bataineh, R. 2025). The findings suggest that collaborative learning, moral discussions, mutual cooperation activities, and school discipline practices contributed positively to students' social awareness and civic responsibility. Furthermore, the success of instilling civic character is also greatly influenced by the role of teachers as role models for students, support from parents, and the creation of a school culture that supports optimal character development (Cheng, 2025). Therefore, schools need to continuously develop character education strategies that are relevant to students' social and developmental needs in contemporary educational contexts.

5.3. Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to the theoretical development of character education by proposing an integrated conceptual model that explains the relationships among collaborative learning, school habituation practices, teacher role modeling, school culture, social awareness, and civic responsibility. As illustrated in Figure 2, character development should not be understood as the outcome of a single instructional intervention but rather as a dynamic process emerging from the interaction of multiple educational components.

Unlike previous studies that primarily examined collaborative learning, school culture, or teacher influence independently, the conceptual model presented in Figure 2 demonstrates how these components operate simultaneously to foster students' social awareness. The model further suggests that social awareness functions as an intermediary process connecting collaborative learning and school habituation practices with the development of civic responsibility. This integrated perspective extends existing character education literature by providing a more comprehensive explanation of how instructional and environmental factors interact throughout students' daily educational experiences.

The proposed model also has broader implications beyond the Indonesian context. Although developed from an elementary school setting, the relationships identified in this study may inform future research examining character education in different educational systems and cultural settings. Future empirical studies may further validate or refine this conceptual model using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches to strengthen the theoretical understanding of social awareness and civic responsibility development among young learners.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the integration of collaborative learning, school habituation practices, teacher role modeling, and positive school culture plays a significant role in fostering elementary school students' social awareness and civic responsibility. The findings indicate that character development is strengthened not only through classroom instruction but also through continuous participation in meaningful social experiences, including collaborative activities, moral discussions, flag ceremonies, mutual cooperation, and daily discipline practices. Furthermore, this study extends the existing literature by proposing an integrated conceptual model in which social awareness functions as an important pathway linking collaborative learning and school habituation to the development of civic responsibility. These findings highlight the importance of creating educational environments that actively involve teachers, families, and schools in supporting sustainable character education. Practically, the study suggests that elementary schools should integrate character education into both instructional activities and school culture to promote students' social and civic development. Although this study provides valuable insights into character education practices, it was conducted in a single elementary school with a relatively small number of participants. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine the proposed conceptual model in broader educational contexts and diverse socio-cultural settings to further strengthen the understanding of social awareness and civic responsibility development among elementary school students.

Limitation

This study was limited to one elementary school setting with a relatively small number of participants, consisting of 14 fifth-grade students and one classroom teacher. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent character education practices implemented in different educational contexts. In addition, the study focused primarily on collaborative learning, school habituation practices, and social interaction within the school environment, without examining broader socio-cultural or policy-related factors that may also influence students' social awareness and civic responsibility development.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, schools are encouraged to strengthen character education programs by integrating collaborative learning activities, social habituation practices, and positive school culture into daily educational activities. Teachers are also expected to continuously provide role modeling and create participatory learning environments that support students' social and civic development. Furthermore, future research is recommended to involve broader educational settings, larger participant groups, and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds to obtain more comprehensive findings regarding the development of social awareness and civic responsibility among elementary school students.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no financial, professional, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, analysis, interpretation, or reporting

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a language-support tool to improve grammar, sentence structure, and language clarity. The authors carefully reviewed, revised, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this article.

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