

Character Mapping of University X Students: The Six Pillars of Character

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ABSTRACT

Character education plays a crucial role in shaping students' personalities as future leaders. However, in practice, a gap still exists between the understanding of character values and their implementation in everyday behavior. This study aims to describe the character profile of third-semester students at University X based on six character pillars—trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship—viewed from the aspects of knowledge, attitudes, and actions. A quantitative descriptive approach was employed, involving 70 students from seven faculties. Data were collected using a Situational Judgment Test (SJT) that measured the knowledge, attitude, and action dimensions of each character pillar and were analyzed manually by classifying scores into low, moderate, and high categories. The results indicate that students' character across the six pillars is categorized as high in the knowledge and attitude aspects, but moderate in the action aspect. These findings suggest that although students have a strong understanding of character values, their application in real-life actions still needs to be strengthened through learning processes and role modeling within the university environment.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received :10 November 2025

Accepted :31 December 2025

KEYWORDS

Student Character; Six Pillars of Character; Character

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Introduction

Character education constitutes a fundamental foundation in shaping university students into morally grounded, integrity-driven, and socially responsible individuals. Within the context of higher education, the reinforcement of character education is increasingly essential to ensure that students not only achieve academic excellence but also demonstrate ethical conduct and civic responsibility. Yunanto and Kasanova (2023) highlight that moral degradation and the erosion of national identity among young people have emerged as major challenges in the era of globalization. Similarly, Rasyid, Amanda, Aulya, Aswandi, and Anugrah (2024) emphasize that integrating character education into higher education learning processes is a critical strategy for cultivating students who are both ethical and responsible in their roles as citizens.

Despite these efforts, empirical evidence suggests that character education in higher education institutions has not yet been fully effective in shaping student behavior in alignment with national and moral values. Rudiyanto and Kasanova (2023) report a persistent decline in national character and moral awareness among the younger generation, underscoring the urgency of strengthening character-based education. Concurrently, universities are expected to produce graduates with resilient character, superior competencies, intelligence, and creativity to enable them to compete successfully in a globalized environment (Nurpratiwi, 2021).

Previous studies indicate that character education has been implemented through a range of academic and non-academic activities; however, its outcomes remain inconsistent. Rozhana, Emqi, and Anwar (2022) found that both academic and extracurricular activities contribute to the development of positive student attitudes. Supardi and Ambarsari (2024) further stress the importance of character-based personal development courses in fostering discipline, honesty, and collaborative skills. Additionally, Suriyatna Mentaya, Mayasari, Arrazin, and Sahduari (2025) identify responsibility as a core value underpinning both social and professional life. Nevertheless, many of these studies focus primarily on outcomes without providing a comprehensive profile of students' character across multiple dimensions.

The present study is grounded in the Six Pillars of Character framework developed by the Josephson Institute, which comprises trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Astuti & Nurjannah, 2022; Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2002). This framework has also been adopted in national character development policies aimed at achieving Indonesia's "Golden Generation 2045," emphasizing a balanced development of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual competencies (Ambarita, 2014). Empirical evidence further suggests that integrating character values into the curriculum enhances students' learning motivation, independence, and leadership capacity (Rukiyanto et al., 2023).

Unlike previous research, this study specifically examines the character profile of third-semester students across faculties at University X. This transitional stage is particularly critical, as students begin to internalize academic values while facing increasing social and organizational demands. The primary objective of this study is to map the six pillars of character and to identify the strongest and weakest pillars based on three key dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, and actual behavior. Employing a quantitative descriptive approach using a Situational Judgment Test (SJT), this study seeks to provide an objective and comprehensive portrayal of students' character development.

Accordingly, this research aims to describe the character profile of third-semester students at University X based on the six pillars of character, viewed through the dimensions of knowledge, attitudes, and actions. The findings are expected to serve as an empirical foundation for developing character-based learning strategies and role modeling practices within higher education institutions.

Method

This study employed a quantitative descriptive approach with a survey design to examine the character profile of third-semester students at University X based on the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These pillars were analyzed across three key dimensions—knowledge, attitudes, and actions. The survey design was selected because it allows for an objective assessment of students' character without experimental intervention and is considered efficient, valid, and ethically appropriate, as data were collected directly from students using a standardized instrument.

The study was conducted during the odd semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The research population consisted of all active third-semester students at University X. Inclusion criteria were regular students who were actively enrolled and willing to participate, while exclusion criteria included students on academic leave or those who did not complete the questionnaire in full. A total of 70 students were selected using purposive sampling, with 10 participants representing each of the seven faculties.

Data were collected using a questionnaire in the form of a Situational Judgment Test (SJT) encompassing the six character pillars across the three assessed dimensions. Each item presented five response options (A–E) reflecting varying levels of effectiveness in responding to moral or ethical situations. As described by Whetzel, Sullivan, and McCloy (2020), SJTs assess individuals by presenting situational scenarios accompanied by multiple behavioral response options that represent differing degrees of behavioral effectiveness.

Data analysis was conducted manually by calculating individual scores for the knowledge, attitude, and action dimensions. These scores were then averaged at both the faculty and university levels. The results were classified into three character levels—low, moderate, and high—and visually presented using a spider web chart to illustrate the relative strengths of each character pillar.

Result and Discussion

Results

The results of this study indicate that, overall, students demonstrate strong character in the dimensions of knowledge and attitudes; however, a noticeable gap remains in the action dimension. This finding suggests that students possess a high level of understanding and awareness of character values, yet the translation of these values into observable behaviors requires further improvement. The mean scores for the six character pillars are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Students' Character Across the Six Pillars of Character

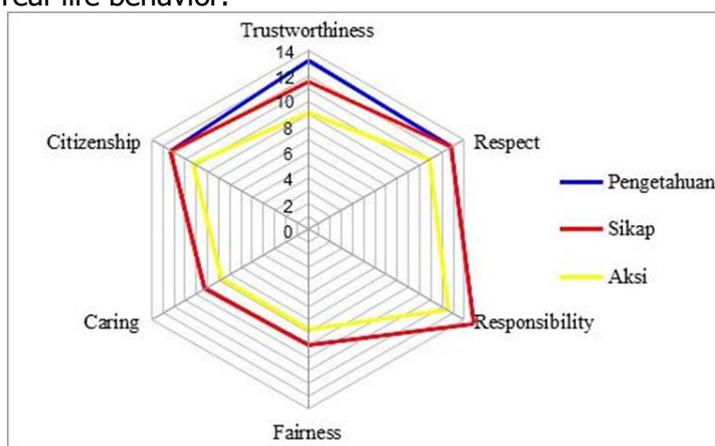
No.	Character Pillar	Dimension			Category (Knowledge–Attitude–Action)
		Knowledge	Attitude	Action	
1	Trustworthiness	13.20	11.48	9.11	High–High–Moderate
2	Respect	12.84	12.84	10.94	High–High–Moderate
3	Responsibility	14.81	14.81	12.58	High–High–Moderate
4	Fairness	9.00	9.00	7.81	High–High–Moderate
5	Caring	9.25	9.25	7.75	High–High–Moderate
6	Citizenship	12.31	12.31	10.24	High–High–Moderate

Table 1 presents the mean scores of students' character across the six pillars of character—trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship—evaluated through the dimensions of knowledge, attitudes, and actions. Overall, the findings reveal a consistent pattern in which students demonstrate high levels of character in the knowledge and attitude dimensions across all six pillars, while the action dimension is uniformly categorized at a moderate level.

Among the six pillars, responsibility shows the highest mean scores in both the knowledge ($M = 14.81$) and attitude ($M = 14.81$) dimensions, as well as the highest score in the action dimension ($M = 12.58$), indicating that students possess a strong understanding of and positive disposition toward responsible behavior, although its practical enactment remains moderate. Similarly, trustworthiness and respect exhibit high levels of knowledge and attitudes, with mean action scores of 9.11 and 10.94, respectively, suggesting that these values are well internalized cognitively and affectively but are less consistently translated into everyday behavior.

In contrast, fairness and caring display comparatively lower mean scores across all three dimensions, particularly in the action dimension ($M = 7.81$ for fairness; $M = 7.75$ for caring). Although both pillars remain classified as high in knowledge and attitudes, these findings suggest that values related to justice, empathy, and concern for others may be more challenging for students to operationalize in concrete actions. The citizenship pillar also follows a similar pattern, with high knowledge and attitude scores ($M = 12.31$) but a moderate action score ($M = 10.24$), indicating partial engagement in behaviors related to civic responsibility and social participation.

Taken together, these results highlight a clear discrepancy between students' cognitive-affective mastery of character values and their behavioral implementation. While students demonstrate a strong understanding of and favorable attitudes toward the six pillars of character, the moderate levels observed in the action dimension underscore the need for more structured opportunities, experiential learning, and role modeling to strengthen the translation of character values into consistent real-life behavior.

**Figure 1.** Radar Chart Illustrating Students' Six Pillars of Character

Discussion

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness pillar obtained mean scores of 13.20 in the knowledge dimension, 11.48 in the attitude dimension, and 9.11 in the action dimension, resulting in a high–high–moderate classification. These findings indicate that students possess a solid understanding of honesty and recognize the importance of trust, yet they do not consistently demonstrate honest behavior in their daily lives. According to Astuti and Nurjannah (2022), honesty constitutes a fundamental pillar of morality that must be cultivated through habituation and role modeling rather than solely through cognitive understanding. The present results suggest that while the internalization of honesty is

relatively strong, greater opportunities for practical application are needed for this value to become an ingrained behavioral trait.

Respect

The respect pillar yielded mean scores of 12.84 for both knowledge and attitudes, and 10.94 for actions. These results suggest that students understand and value respectful behavior toward others; however, its consistent implementation in social interactions remains limited. Mutual respect is a defining characteristic of a civilized academic community and must be reinforced through an environment that fosters empathy and ethical communication. In line with Mulyana and Hidayat (2025), character education in higher education should cultivate a culture of respect not only through theoretical instruction but also through daily practices and concrete examples within campus life.

Responsibility

Among the six pillars, responsibility demonstrated the highest mean scores, with 14.81 in both the knowledge and attitude dimensions and 12.58 in the action dimension. This finding indicates a high level of student awareness regarding academic and social responsibility, although consistent application beyond classroom-related activities remains limited. While students are able to conceptualize responsibility, they require further encouragement to translate this understanding into sustained social engagement and collective discipline. These findings support Mentaya et al. (2025), who assert that responsibility serves as a key indicator of moral maturity that develops through real-life experiences and repeated opportunities to practice reliability within educational settings.

Fairness

The fairness pillar recorded mean scores of 9.00 for knowledge, 9.00 for attitudes, and 7.81 for actions, corresponding to a high–high–moderate classification. These results indicate that students comprehend the importance of fairness; however, consistent enactment in social interactions and group work remains a challenge. Rasyid et al. (2024) argue that fairness requires empathy and the ability to assess situations objectively—capacities that develop through collaborative practices and open communication. Therefore, strengthening collaborative learning and reflective activities within the university context is essential to foster the practical application of fairness among students.

Caring

The caring pillar achieved mean scores of 9.25 in the knowledge dimension, 9.25 in the attitude dimension, and 7.75 in the action dimension, also classified as high–high–moderate. This pattern suggests that students are aware of the importance of empathy and social solidarity but have not fully translated these values into concrete actions, such as participation in social activities or peer support. This finding aligns with Hikmah (2021), who notes that gaps between knowledge and action often stem from limited opportunities for students to practice social values within campus life. Expanding student-led social and community engagement activities may therefore serve as an effective strategy to strengthen the action dimension of this pillar.

Citizenship

The citizenship pillar demonstrated mean scores of 12.31 for both knowledge and attitudes and 10.24 for actions, resulting in a high–high–moderate classification. These findings indicate that students understand their roles and responsibilities as citizens and hold positive attitudes toward social participation; however, active involvement in community-related activities remains insufficient. Mulyana and Hidayat (2025) emphasize that integrating citizenship values into academic programs and student organizations can enhance social engagement, enabling character values to be not only understood but also enacted in meaningful ways.

Overall Analysis of the Knowledge–Attitude–Action Gap

Overall, all six character pillars exhibit a similar pattern in which the knowledge and attitude dimensions are consistently higher than the action dimension. This indicates that students possess

adequate moral understanding and awareness but have not yet fully reached the stage of behavioral implementation. This condition reflects a well-documented knowing–doing gap, referring to the discrepancy between moral cognition and actual behavior. Hikmah (2021) suggests that such gaps arise because character education in higher education tends to emphasize theoretical knowledge rather than experiential learning. Consequently, learning approaches that provide students with authentic opportunities to experience and practice character values within the campus environment are essential for bridging this gap.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the character of University X students across the six pillars of character—trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship—is generally classified as high in the dimensions of knowledge and attitudes, and moderate in the dimension of action. This pattern suggests that students have developed a strong understanding of and agreement with moral values; however, the translation of these values into observable behavior remains insufficient. The results underscore the importance of implementing more practical and sustainable character education strategies in higher education, particularly through habituation, role modeling, and student social engagement activities.

These findings provide an empirical basis for universities to strengthen character education through more application-oriented approaches. Such efforts may include the cultivation of positive behavioral routines, exemplary conduct by lecturers, community-based social projects, and the integration of character values into academic learning and student organizational activities. Through these strategies, the action dimension of character can be enhanced in alignment with students' knowledge and attitudes. These initiatives support national character development policies aimed at achieving the "Golden Generation 2045" (Ambarita, 2014) and contribute positively to the advancement of science and technology grounded in moral and humanistic values (Mulyana & Hidayat, 2025).

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