

Implementing Comprehensive School Counseling to Foster Character Development: Evidence from SMP Negeri 2 Warungkondang and SMP Negeri 1 Gekbrong

Enyi Masrukoyah* and S Sobari

Nusantara Islamic University, Bandung, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: enyimasrukoyah99@gmail.com

Abstract. This study aims to analyze the strategies for planning, implementing, evaluating, and following up on Guidance and Counseling (BK) services in strengthening student character at SMP Negeri 2 Warungkondang and SMP Negeri 1 Gekbrong. The study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving BK teachers, principals, homeroom teachers, and students as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation study, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods. The results showed that comprehensive CB services designed based on student needs through the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) cycle were able to improve student character indicators, such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and empathy. These findings are in line with Kohlberg's moral development theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Lickona's character education principles, and Santrock's educational psychology perspective, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful experiences, social interaction, and reflection in character formation. This study also fills a gap in previous literature, which was still partial, by examining in depth the strategies and practices of implementing counseling services from the planning stage to follow-up. In conclusion, adaptive, collaborative, and contextual counseling services can produce tangible positive changes in student behavior, while contributing to the development of a more structured and effective character education model.

Keywords: character education, guidance and counseling, school services, character building, case studies, PDCA.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Character education is a fundamental aspect of the national education mission in Indonesia, aiming to shape individuals who are intelligent and have noble character [1]. In this context, character education serves as a bridge to build a generation with noble character, discipline, and the ability to face complex global challenges [2], [3].

National education policy emphasizes the importance of character education in every curriculum, with research showing that character values must be integrated into various aspects of learning at school [4], [5]. In line with this, the implementation of character education based on local wisdom and national culture has proven to be effective in encouraging student character development [3], [6]. Through this approach, it is hoped that students will not only excel academically, but also have high integrity and social responsibility, creating a competent generation and a better society [7].

In facing the challenges of globalization and technological advances, character education is of the utmost urgency [8]. Today's young generation is faced with various negative behaviors, such as bullying, lack of discipline, and gadget addiction, which have an impact on their morality and ethics [9], [10], [11]. Efforts to shape character are becoming increasingly important so that students not only excel academically, but also have strong integrity and social responsibility [11], [12].

Character education needs to be integrated into modern education curricula [13]. This involves developing teaching methods that focus not only on knowledge but also on instilling moral values that can shape critical and responsible individuals [9]. Providing a positive and supportive educational environment is an important step in overcoming negative behavior among students [12], [14]. With the right approach, character education can help create a resilient young generation that is ready to face the challenges of the future in this digital age [15].

Early adolescence, particularly at the junior high school level, is a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood characterized by rapid development in cognitive, emotional, and social aspects [16]. During this period, students often face various challenges, including deviant behaviors such as bullying, low motivation to learn, and weak self-control [17].

Deviant behavior is a common problem in schools that can hinder the formation of positive character [18]. Research shows that student interactions in the school environment greatly influence their character development [19], [20]. In addition, effective character education must be integrated into the curriculum to shape students' good behavior and self-awareness [21]. Schools as educational institutions play an important role in creating an environment that supports character development, which is expected to better equip students to face these challenges [22].

This study focused on two schools, namely SMP Negeri 2 Warungkondang and SMP Negeri 1 Gekbrong, which faced significant challenges in character building among students but showed a high commitment to implementing counseling services. Although both schools have made good efforts, the implementation of counseling services in the field often faces obstacles, such as limited human resources and facilities,

variations in understanding between teachers and counseling staff regarding student character, and a lack of integration between counseling programs and academic and extracurricular activities. This indicates the need for more in-depth research on strategies for planning, implementing, evaluating, and following up on counseling services in the context of real schools.

However, obstacles encountered in implementing guidance counseling services in the field are often caused by factors such as limited human resources and facilities, variations in understanding between teachers and guidance counselors regarding student character, and a lack of integration between guidance counseling programs and academic and extracurricular activities. This study emphasizes the importance of collaboration and consistent understanding among all parties in the school environment to create an environment that supports effective student character building. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy involving all stakeholders is needed to ensure that character education is not just a slogan, but is manifested in the actual behavior of students at school and in the community.

1.2 Previous Research and Rationale

Previous studies have highlighted the role of Guidance and Counseling (BK) services in shaping student character. According to Cania (2024), guidance and counseling services play an important role in reducing deviant behavior, improving discipline, and instilling responsibility in students [23]. Sasmita (2021) explains that most studies emphasize the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services on student behavior and academic achievement, as well as their impact on overall character building [24]. However, Sasmita (2023) asserts that previous studies are still partial, only examining one form of service or a specific aspect, and have not explored in depth how the planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up strategies of guidance and counseling services are carried out comprehensively in schools [25]. Thus, this study attempts to fill this gap by exploring counseling services practices more comprehensively and contextually. The research gap is evident in the lack of studies that capture the dynamics of counseling services implementation comprehensively in the real context of schools. Many schools face obstacles, such as limited human resources and facilities, variations in teachers' and BK staff's understanding of student character, and a lack of integration of BK programs with academic and extracurricular activities. This creates a need to understand more comprehensively how BK services are implemented, how challenges are overcome, and how effective strategies can be developed to improve student character in a tangible way.

Furthermore, several studies have attempted to link BK practices with moral development and character education theories, but these attempts remain limited. For example, BK interventions that focus on strengthening discipline and responsibility can be understood through Kohlberg's (1969) framework of moral development, in which value-based decision-making exercises and structured social interactions encourage students' moral reasoning to reach the conventional level [26]. Strengthening student motivation through rewards and recognition is consistent with Maslow's (1943)

hierarchy, in which the need for self-esteem and belonging becomes a driver for the internalization of positive values [27].

In addition, the principle of integrated and continuous value learning is in line with Lickona's (1991) character education framework and the "Six Pillars of Character" principle (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship), which emphasizes the relationship between moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions [28], [29]. The adolescent development perspective according to Santrock (2011) shows that active involvement in social interactions, value habituation, and reflective experiences support more effective character internalization [30].

This study presents new insights through a multiple case study approach on two public schools with different characteristics, namely SMP Negeri 2 Warungkondang and SMP Negeri 1 Gekbrong. The novelty of this research lies in its focus, which not only assesses the impact of guidance counseling services but also examines the strategies, adaptations, and practices of implementing guidance counseling services from the planning stage to follow-up. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of guidance counseling services in shaping student character and how schools can optimize resources and collaboration to support sustainable character building.

Based on this background, this study has the main objective of analyzing the strategies for planning, implementing, evaluating, and following up on guidance counseling services at SMP Negeri 2 Warungkondang and SMP Negeri 1 Gekbrong. This study also aims to assess the effectiveness of guidance counseling services in improving student character and to produce recommendations for developing an adaptive, contextual guidance counseling service model that is in line with the real needs of schools. Thus, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to strengthening student character through more structured and comprehensive guidance counseling services.

2 Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which provides a methodological framework for exploring in depth the practice of Guidance and Counseling (BK) services in a real school context. This case study framework was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the phenomenon under study holistically, in the context of everyday life at school [31]. The research focuses on two public schools with different characteristics namely SMP Negeri 2 Warungkondang and SMP Negeri 1 Gekbrong with the aim of gaining a comprehensive understanding of how guidance and counseling services are implemented, the challenges faced, and the adaptation strategies that emerge.

Research participants consisted of guidance counselors, principals, homeroom teachers, and students, who were purposively selected to represent various key perspectives in the implementation of guidance counseling services. Selection criteria included involvement in the implementation of guidance counseling, experience in student character building, and willingness to share reflections related to the process. The selection

of participants using a purposive approach aimed to ensure the depth of data and relevance of the context being studied.

Data was collected through three complementary methods. First, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences regarding strategies, implementation, and their perceptions of guidance counseling services. Second, participatory observation was conducted in the field, where researchers participated in guidance counseling activities and school interactions in order to capture the dynamics of implementation firsthand. Third, a documentation study was conducted through analysis of school documents, BK reports, activity plans, and program evaluation records, as additional data sources that strengthened triangulation [32].

To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, this study applied triangulation of sources and methods. By comparing data obtained from various participants and collection techniques, the study sought to ensure that the findings accurately reflected reality and had sufficient credibility [33]. This approach is in line with the principles of case studies, which emphasize the use of "multiple sources of evidence" to strengthen findings [31].

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) [34]. The first stage was data reduction, which is the process of simplifying, selecting, and focusing raw data into more structured units of analysis. The second stage was data presentation, in which the data was summarized through tables, diagrams, and descriptive narratives so that patterns and relationships between themes could be clearly identified. The third stage was drawing conclusions and verification, which involved interpreting the main findings and validating the analysis results through cross-checking with participants and other data sources.

Using this methodological narrative, the research aims to capture the complexity of guidance counseling practices, identify effective strategies, and understand the challenges and innovations that arise in character building among students in both schools. This approach not only explores "what" happens, but also "how" and "why" guidance counseling services can work in the specific context of public schools in Indonesia.

3 Results

3.1 Planning

Both schools developed data-based student guidance programs based on the principles of comprehensive student guidance services as stipulated in Permendikbud No. 111 of 2014. SMP Negeri 2 Warungkondang placed greater emphasis on discipline and responsibility because, based on the results of student needs assessments, indicators of tardiness and lack of academic commitment were quite high. Meanwhile, SMP Negeri 1 Gekbrong emphasized empathy and honesty in response to data on cases of dishonesty in exams and low social awareness among students.

The planning process was carried out through coordination meetings between guidance counselors, principals, homeroom teachers, and parents, in line with the systemic function of guidance counselors as liaisons between schools and families. The planning

documents produced included a service calendar, success indicators, and evaluation strategies. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the preparation of such documents is important as a preliminary step in data reduction, which facilitates analysis and monitoring of program achievements. Thus, the planning stage in these two schools is not merely an administrative formality, but a strategic instrument for shaping adaptive, collaborative, and contextual services.

3.2 Implementation (Do)

The services are implemented thematically using classical, group, and individual guidance methods. Guidance counselors utilize participatory approaches such as group discussions, *role-play*, and *storytelling*. For example, to instill the value of honesty, students are asked to simulate dilemmatic situations. Observations show that student participation is quite high, especially in educational game-based activities. This strategy is in line with the view of that active learning that directly involves students will facilitate their cognitive and socio-emotional development. Furthermore, Stuttaford (1991) emphasizes the importance of instilling values through contextual activities so that students are able to internalize the characters taught [35]. These findings are also consistent which shows the effectiveness of using value-based classical guidance in improving students' positive behavior. Thus, the participatory methods applied by guidance counselors can significantly increase students' emotional and moral involvement.

Table 1. Comparison of Character Planning Focus

School	Core Character Values	Planning Method
SMPN 2 Warungkon-	Discipline &	Teacher meetings, student needs
dang	Responsibility	analysis
Gekbrong Public Jun-	Empathy &	Collaboration between guidance
ior High School 1	Honesty	counselors, homeroom teachers,
		and parents

3.3 Evaluation (Check)

Evaluations are conducted periodically every semester. Guidance counselors use instruments such as attitude questionnaires, case notes, and student reflections. The results show a significant improvement in the indicators of discipline, responsibility, honesty, and empathy. This evaluation also emphasizes the importance of data triangulation as emphasized by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in to ensure the credibility of the results. In addition, the formative evaluation approach is in line with the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994), who view data analysis as an interactive process. Thus, evaluation is not only administrative in nature but also serves as a mechanism for critical reflection for service improvement.

Table 2. Results of Student Character Change Evaluation

Character Indicators	Warungkondang Public Junior High School No. 2	Gekbrong Public Junior High School 1
Discipline	+40% (reduction in tardiness)	+25
Responsibility	+35	+20
Honesty	+28%	+35% (decrease in dishonesty cases)
Empathy	+22	+40

3.4 Follow-up (Act)

Based on the evaluation results, the guidance counselors revised the program, strengthened collaboration with parents, and added a character reward system. This demonstrates the practice of continuous reflection as suggested by Sink (2018) that effective school counseling services require continuity of strategy and systemic support [36]. The application of character *rewards* and *reinforcement* is also in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970), in which rewards can increase student motivation and self-esteem [37]. This participatory strategy, which was found to be effective in both schools, is a concrete example of how the "one form of service" mentioned in the research gap can be creatively operationalized to overcome resource constraints.

Before being presented visually, the results of the semester evaluations showing improvements in character indicators at both schools are summarized in the following graph to clarify the differences in achievement between schools and between indicators.

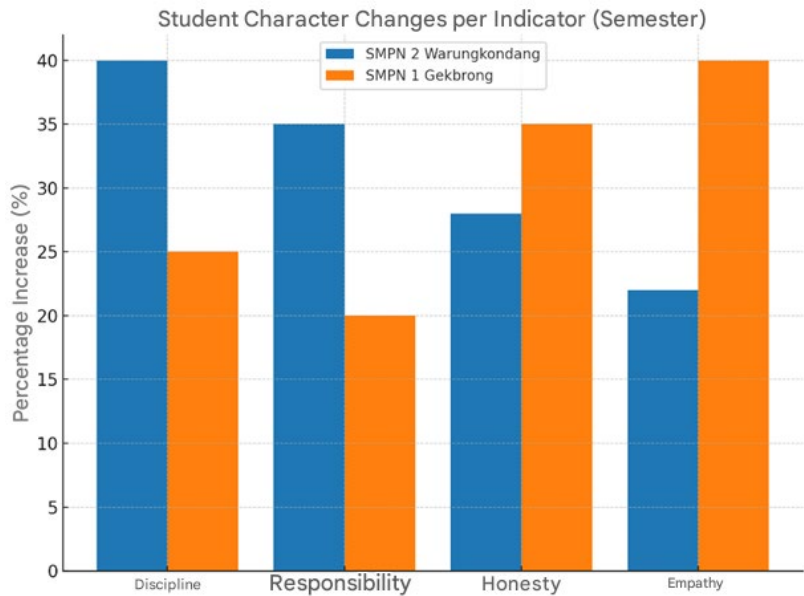


Figure 1. Graph of Student Character Changes per Semester

The Figure 1 shows a consistent improvement in all character indicators in both schools. SMPN 2 Warungkondang showed the highest increase in discipline, with a

40% decrease in tardiness, followed by a 35% increase in responsibility. Meanwhile, SMPN 1 Gekbrong has made significant progress in the indicators of empathy (40%) and honesty (35%). These differences in achievement patterns confirm that each school has a different focus on character building according to the needs of its students.

Theoretically, these results are in line with Santrock's (2011) view that adolescent character development is influenced by repeated and consistent social experiences. The improvement in discipline at SMPN 2 Warungkondang reflects the effectiveness of systematic behavior control strategies, while the strengthening of empathy and honesty at SMPN 1 Gekbrong supports Lickona's (1991) idea regarding the importance of value education based on real-life contexts. In addition, these positive achievements also demonstrate adaptive counseling practices as recommended by Sink (2018), namely by adjusting interventions to the specific conditions and needs of students.

Thus, the graph not only illustrates statistical data, but also illustrates the relevance of moral development and character education theory to actual practice in schools. This finding further confirms that contextually designed guidance counseling services can have a real impact on the character development of junior high school students. This is also in line with the mandate of Permendikbud No. 111 of 2014, which emphasizes that guidance counseling services must include aspects of personal, social, learning, and career development in an integrated manner within the framework of character education.

4 Discussion

4.1 Relevance of Moral Development Theory

The findings of this study consistently confirm the strategic contribution of guidance counseling services to student character building. The pattern of improvement in the indicators of discipline, responsibility, honesty, and empathy in both schools shows that interventions designed adaptively based on the actual needs of students and managed through the PDCA cycle are capable of producing behavioral changes that are observable in both quantitative and qualitative data. Conceptually, these results are consistent with Kohlberg's moral development framework, in which value-based decision-making exercises and structured social interactions facilitate a shift in moral reasoning towards a more mature conventional level. The *role-play* and *storytelling* practices used by guidance counselors help students explore other people's perspectives and reflectively weigh moral consequences, a mechanism that is also considered effective by contemporary moral psychology approaches.

4.2 Theoretical Synthesis and Mechanism of Change

From a motivational perspective, the reinforcement and recognition provided in services (e.g., character awards) fulfill the needs *for esteem* and *belongingness* in Maslow's hierarchy, which in turn strengthens students' commitment to positive behavior. The

fulfillment of basic needs for safety and security is a prerequisite for the internalization of values, as seen in the regular implementation of services, a supportive classroom climate, and coordination between schools and parents. In terms of adolescent development, challenging cognitive and social participatory activities as implemented by guidance counselors (case discussions, simulations, reflections) are in line with educational psychology's recommendations to facilitate active engagement and personal meaning for students. Strengthening discipline and responsibility is also consistent with findings that self-control strongly contributes to academic performance and adaptive behavior.

In the realm of character education, strategies that link moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions through the habit formation of values, role modeling, and collaborative practices are in line with Lickona's principles of systematic and continuous character education. Reference to the "*Six Pillars of Character*" framework (trustworthiness, *respect*, *responsibility*, *fairness*, *caring*, *citizenship*) helps map the focus of intervention in each school and facilitates the operationalization of indicators that can be monitored.

Trustworthiness

Honesty is the main foundation in building healthy and sustainable social relationships. In the context of education, *trustworthiness* not only includes honesty in communication, but also integrity in daily actions. Research shows that students who are taught the value of honesty tend to be more capable of admitting mistakes and taking responsibility for their actions. This is in line with Lickona's (1991) view that effective character education must involve the habit of honest behavior in real contexts. In practice, Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers can apply methods such as *role-play* and group discussions to help students understand the consequences of dishonesty and encourage them to internalize the values of honesty in their daily lives.

Respect

Respect is a value that teaches students to value the dignity and rights of others. In the school environment, respect is demonstrated through polite behavior, the ability to accept differences, and tolerance for diversity. The guidance counselors at play an important role in creating an environment that supports the development of respect through activities that encourage students to respect and understand each other's perspectives. By integrating the value of respect into the curriculum and extracurricular activities, schools can shape a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also highly empathetic and tolerant.

Responsibility

Responsibility is a character trait that encourages students to complete their tasks independently and with commitment. In the context of education, the development of a responsible attitude can be achieved through assignments that require students to manage their time and resources well. Research shows that students who are taught to take responsibility for their actions tend to have higher motivation to learn and are better

able to face challenges. Guidance counselors can facilitate the development of this responsibility by providing guidance on time management and task completion techniques. In addition, implementing a reward system for students who demonstrate responsibility can reinforce this positive behavior, creating a school culture that supports independence and integrity.

Fairness

Justice emphasizes equal and fair treatment of all individuals. In education, it is important to teach students about their rights and obligations, as well as the consequences of unfair actions. Guidance counselors act as mediators in resolving conflicts between students, ensuring that each party has an equal opportunity to express their views. By integrating the value of justice into every aspect of learning, schools can create an inclusive and fair environment where every student feels valued and safe.

Caring

Caring is a value that shapes empathy and compassion towards others. In the context of education, the development of caring attitudes can be done through social activities and community service. Research shows that students who are involved in social activities tend to have higher levels of empathy and are better able to interact positively with others. Guidance counselors can facilitate the development of this caring attitude by organizing programs that encourage students to help their friends and get involved in activities that benefit the community. By fostering a sense of caring, schools not only shape individuals with good character, but also create a supportive community.

Citizenship

Civics teaches students to become responsible members of society. In education, it is important to teach students about their rights and obligations as citizens, and encourage them to contribute positively to society. Research shows that students who are involved in citizenship activities, such as community service and environmental programs, tend to have a higher sense of social responsibility. Guidance counselors can play a role in facilitating these activities, creating opportunities for students to learn about the importance of active participation in society. By developing civic attitudes, schools can shape a generation that is not only intelligent, but also caring and responsible for their social environment.

This framework provides a universal language for assessing and communicating core character values that are relevant across cultural contexts and educational institutions. For example, SMPN 2 Warungkondang's focus on discipline and responsibility can be closely linked to the pillar of responsibility, while SMPN 1 Gekbrong's focus on empathy and honesty is consistent with caring and trustworthiness. By referring to these pillars, guidance counselors can more easily establish measurable indicators, develop value-based learning activities, and conduct consistent monitoring and evaluation. In addition, this framework also encourages continuity between character education in schools and the social values expected in the wider community, so that the internalization of character in students has high practical and social relevance.

4.3 Consistency of Field Findings

Interview data shows consistency between program design and outcomes: Mrs. Siti (SMPN 2 Warungkondang) emphasized the regular scheduling of topics on responsibility accompanied by reflection sessions; Mr. Fajar (SMPN 1 Gekbrong) emphasized the effectiveness of storytelling and short plays to foster empathy and honesty, supported by high student participation (85–88%) (Guidance Counselor Interviews; see also the principle of service continuity in Prayitno, 2012) [38]. Triangulation-based evaluation (observation, self-assessment, and teacher assessment) showed a 12–15% increase in character questionnaire scores and a decrease in cases of violations (e.g., tardiness, cheating) within one year of service procedures in line with the standards of qualitative data validity according to Lincoln & Guba and the interactive analysis model according to Miles & Huberman.

Differences in focus between schools can be understood as a response to context: SMPN 2 Warungkondang places greater emphasis on discipline, so services focus on self-regulation; SMPN 1 Gekbrong faces interpersonal issues that encourage a focus on empathy and honesty. The literature confirms that character formation is influenced by the interaction of many elements (family, community, school culture) and therefore strategies need to be contextual.

4.4 PDCA as a Managerial Framework for Services

The application of the PDCA (*Plan–Do–Check–Act*) cycle places guidance counseling services within the paradigm of *continuous improvement*. Needs-based planning, thematic participatory implementation, periodic evaluation, and follow-up (e.g., strengthening effective methods, forming "BK Friends") reflect Deming's principles of quality management that are adaptive to data (Deming, 1986). In the *Act* phase, decisions are made participatively involving guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, and school principals, boosting commitment to implementation while expanding support for the learning ecosystem.

4.5 The Role of Guidance Counselors and Collaboration

The multiple roles of guidance counselors as counselors, development facilitators, service coordinators, mediators, and values educators are evident in both schools. The quality of implementation improved thanks to multidimensional collaboration between guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, and parents, which strengthened the continuity of guidance from school to home. The needs-based service model, as recommended by national literature (Prayitno & Amti, 2004), makes interventions more meaningful for students, thereby increasing the chances of value internalization.

4.6 Validity, Accountability, and Policy

Triangulation of sources/methods, program document audit trails, and the use of clear indicators strengthen the credibility of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In

addition, the program design that refers to Permendikbud No. 111 of 2014 demonstrates compliance with the mandate for comprehensive services that include personal, social, learning, and career development, which contributes to the accountability and acceptability of the program at the school level.

4.7 Limitations and Further Research Agenda

The main limitations lie in the availability of guidance counselors and the scope of cases; cross-context generalization must be done carefully. Future research could explore *quasi-experimental* designs to map the specific effect sizes of each strategy, as well as utilize longitudinal analytics to assess the sustainability of behavioral changes. Measuring richer non-cognitive indicators (*e.g., self-regulation, compassion*) is also worth considering.

Overall, the researchers concluded that comprehensive, collaborative BK services based on the real needs of students and managed through the PDCA cycle have a real impact on character building. Field findings and theoretical references reinforce each other in showing that character change does not happen instantly, but rather through a directed process that provides space for meaningful experiences, reflection, social support, and continuous feedback.

5 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Guidance and Counseling (BK) services play a strategic role in shaping the character of students at SMP Negeri 2 Warungkondang and SMP Negeri 1 Gekbrong. Comprehensive, collaborative, and needs-based G&C services through the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) cycle have a tangible impact on improving character indicators, such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, empathy, and other social and moral skills. These findings are in line with major theories in character education and developmental psychology. Kohlberg's framework emphasizes that value-based decision-making exercises and social interactions encourage more mature moral reasoning, while Maslow shows that fulfilling self-esteem and belonging needs strengthens students' internal motivation to internalize positive values. Lickona's principles of character education and the "Six Pillars of Character" emphasize the importance of integrating knowledge, feelings, and moral actions, which are reflected in guidance counseling practices through role-play, storytelling, and participatory reflection. Santrock's perspective also emphasizes that active engagement and meaningful experiences effectively support adolescent character development. This study also identifies gaps in previous literature, where many studies are partial and have not explored in depth the strategies for planning, implementing, evaluating, and following up on guidance counseling services in schools. By using a contextual approach to examine both schools, this study presents new contributions in the form of a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of guidance counseling services, the integration of theory and practice, and effective adaptive strategies for strengthening student character. Practically, this study confirms that successful character building requires

continuous collaboration between guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, parents, and school leaders, accompanied by systematic evaluation and the use of interventions based on student needs. With such an approach, character education becomes more than just a theoretical concept; it is realized in the positive and adaptive behavior of students in school and community life.

6 References

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