

Pendidikan karakter untuk kepemimpinan inklusif: Tinjauan literatur sistematis tentang inklusi disabilitas, bias rasial, dan stereotip gender di sekolah

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Abstract: Character education reform in Indonesia frequently stops at normative values without addressing three forms of marginalization that persist in schools: the exclusion of students with disabilities, racial, ethnic, and religious bias, and gender stereotypes in leadership. These issues are typically examined separately in the character-education literature, leaving no integrative framework linking character formation to the capacity to lead inclusively. This study aims to synthesize evidence on how character education can cultivate inclusive leadership that addresses ableism, ethnic and religious bias, and gender stereotyping in schools. Following the PRISMA 2020 reporting guideline, a two-phase systematic literature review searched Scopus-indexed portals, ERIC, Google Scholar, DOAJ, OpenAlex, Semantic Scholar, and Crossref for sources published between 2016 and 2026; after staged screening and DOI-level verification of every record, 146 sources, 32 of them focused on Indonesia, were synthesized thematically. Four principal findings emerged: disability-inclusive school leadership depends on explicit accountability, a principal-level “inclusive consciousness,” and teacher capacity rather than on accessibility policy alone; anti-bias interventions succeed when integrated into leadership, curriculum, and egalitarian school cultures rather than delivered as light-touch training; gender stereotypes in educational leadership persist through structural double standards and role-incongruity bias rather than through women’s diminished capability; and these exclusions compound at their intersections through shared institutional mechanisms. Across all domains, the dominant obstacle was a gap between knowing and doing. The synthesis yields an integrative “character education for inclusive leadership” model positioning integrity, accountability, and an egalitarian orientation as the connecting character virtues. The study concludes that Indonesian character education, including the Pancasila Student Profile, should

integrate disability literacy, anti-bias awareness, and gender-equitable leadership into one coherent strand anchored in principal preparation, exemplar-based pedagogy, and inclusive curriculum materials.

Keywords: character education; inclusive leadership; disability inclusion; racial and ethnic bias; gender stereotypes; intersectionality

Introduction

A recurring image in Indonesian civic memory is that of General Sudirman directing a seven-month guerrilla campaign from a stretcher while suffering from tuberculosis, an episode that historians and character-education writers alike have treated as a demonstration that authentic leadership rests on will and integrity rather than on physical capacity (Wisang, 2024). The didactic use of this narrative in Indonesian civic and character-education discourse is not incidental: it condenses, in a single historical figure, the proposition that leadership legitimacy should not be contingent on a body, an ethnicity, or a gender that a society happens to valorize. Yet the distance between this normative proposition and the everyday operation of Indonesian and international schools remains wide. Students with disabilities continue to be treated as a “burden” rather than as learners with developable potential (Rahajeng et al., 2024); ethnic-minority students report being bullied specifically because of ethnicity, citizenship, or religious status (Sapouna et al., 2023); and the assumption that leadership is inherently masculine continues to shape who is imagined, and who imagines themselves, as a school leader (Shah, 2023).

The urgency of these questions is heightened by what Indonesian character-education scholars have described as a crisis of national role models, which Sidik argues makes character education more urgent and calls for coordinated action by families, schools, and communities (Sidik, 2024). A crisis of role models is, at bottom, a crisis of leadership, and it invites a sharper question than whether schools teach good values in the abstract: which leadership dispositions do schools model and reward, and for whom are leadership positions realistically open? A bibliometric analysis of two decades of research on student leadership character, also published in this journal, found gender dynamics to be one of the field’s principal thematic clusters (Hapsari et al., 2024), suggesting that leadership character cannot be studied separately from questions of who is included in leadership.

Character education, as a field, has generally treated three forms of exclusion as separate problems assigned to separate literatures. Scholarship on disability-inclusive schooling concentrates on accessibility, individualized support, and principal practices for students with special educational needs (DeMatthews et al., 2026). Scholarship on racial and ethnic bias concentrates on bullying prevention, implicit-bias training for teachers, and anti-racist curriculum reform (Breese et al., 2023; Legette et al., 2026). Scholarship on gender and leadership concentrates on the structural and ecological barriers that keep women underrepresented in principal positions despite comparable or superior management quality (Martinez Martinez et al., 2021). Each of these three literatures has matured largely on its own terms, with its own theoretical vocabulary, its own intervention studies, and its own systematic reviews. What has not been produced, and what this study addresses, is a synthesis that asks whether these three forms of school-based marginalization share a common developmental remedy in character education, and if so, which character virtues that remedy would need to cultivate.

This gap matters because character education is, definitionally, concerned with the formation of dispositions that outlast any single policy intervention. Lickona’s foundational formulation treats character as the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1991), while Peterson and Seligman’s classification catalogues strengths such as fairness, leadership, and open-mindedness as measurable, teachable components of good character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The empirical case that such dispositions can be cultivated is now considerably stronger. A meta-analysis of 214 controlled studies found a small but significant positive effect of character education programs ($g = 0.24$) that remained after correction for publication bias (Brown et al., 2023); a meta-analysis of 52 studies associated character education

with higher academic outcomes and with greater integrity, compassion, and self-discipline, with effects that did not differ by students' race (Jeynes, 2019); and meta-analyses of universal and whole-school social and emotional learning report improved skills, behavior, school climate, and peer relationships, moderated by implementation quality and by coordination across curriculum, ethos, and community (Cipriano et al., 2023; Goldberg et al., 2019). If disability inclusion, anti-racial-bias practice, and gender-equitable leadership each depend on identifiable character strengths, a curriculum that treats them as unrelated add-on modules is likely to under-deliver relative to one that cultivates the shared underlying dispositions coherently.

Indonesia's own character-education tradition, rooted in Ki Hadjar Dewantara's pedagogy of self-directed, dignity-respecting learning, was itself formulated partly as a response to a colonial education system that sorted students by race and class (Ferary, 2021), which makes the omission of race, disability, and gender from contemporary Indonesian character-education frameworks a striking historical irony rather than a neutral gap. The contemporary landscape is organized around the Strengthening of Character Education program and the Pancasila Student Profile, whose dimensions include noble character, mutual cooperation, and global diversity, and which was framed partly as a response to documented cases of intolerance in schools (Rusnaini et al., 2021; Susilo et al., 2022). Field studies, however, repeatedly find that implementation narrows these ambitions: character education in three Yogyakarta schools introduced standardized concepts without social practice and did not accommodate Indonesia's ethnic and religious diversity (Abdullah et al., 2019); senior high school teachers' enactments were largely unplanned and unassessed and constrained by a lack of professional development (Maulana, 2022); and EFL teachers' moral education was dominated by the religious values preferred by their school communities (Qoyyimah, 2016). The policy vocabulary for inclusion therefore exists, but the leadership and pedagogical dispositions required to enact it across disability, ethnicity, religion, and gender remain under-specified.

The novelty of this study is therefore twofold. First, it treats disability inclusion, racial-ethnic bias, and gender stereotyping in educational leadership not as parallel case studies but as three empirical windows onto a single theoretical question: what character-based leadership capacities allow a school leader, or a school system, to resist exclusionary defaults along more than one axis at once. Second, it uses a documented historical leadership narrative, General Sudirman's wartime leadership under physical incapacity, as an illustrative frame for the character virtues the review identifies empirically, while treating that narrative strictly as an illustrative device grounded in existing historical scholarship rather than as a source of new empirical evidence. The review does not claim that Sudirman's biography demonstrates anything about disability, race, or gender inclusion as such; it uses the biography only as a culturally resonant entry point for presenting findings that are otherwise drawn from the peer-reviewed literature.

The stakes of this gap extend into the everyday experience of students who sit at the intersection of more than one marginalized identity. A student who is both an ethnic-minority child and a wheelchair user, or a girl who aspires to lead a student organization in a school culture that reflexively assigns leadership roles to boys, does not experience disability, race, and gender as separable policy categories; the exclusion is lived as a single, compounding experience of not being seen as a legitimate leader or a full participant in school life. Intersectionality scholarship argues that systems built around a single identity marker fail to provide the support children need (Bešić, 2020), and empirical work agrees: among more than 11,000 high school students, disability and sexual-minority identities were associated with higher peer victimization and lower school connectedness across racial categories, with differences emerging at their intersections (Forber-Pratt et al., 2021), and among nearly 4,000 adolescents, youth with multiple stigmatized identities experienced the highest rates of identity-based bullying (Galán et al., 2021). A character-education program that addresses these domains through disconnected modules, an assembly on tolerance here, a disability-awareness week there, risks teaching students that inclusion is a checklist of separate sensitivities rather than a coherent disposition toward other people.

The Indonesian policy environment adds further urgency to this inquiry. National regulation already commits schools to inclusive education for students with disabilities, and national

character-education policy already commits schools to cultivating tolerance and anti-discrimination values, yet implementation research consistently finds that legal commitment and lived classroom practice diverge, a pattern documented both internationally and within Indonesia specifically in the sections that follow. A systematic review of school leadership research in Indonesia identified a lack of capacity to lead and manage schools and inappropriate principal-selection processes as crucial issues, and recommended principal training centers in every province (Lumban Gaol, 2023). Understanding why formally correct policy under-delivers, and what character-level leadership capacities close that gap, is therefore not only a theoretical contribution to the character-education literature but a practically consequential question for Indonesian education policy and teacher and principal preparation.

Three research questions guided the review. First, what does the empirical and conceptual literature say about the character-related leadership practices that enable disability-inclusive schooling? Second, what does the literature say about the character-related leadership and pedagogical practices that reduce racial, ethnic, and religious bias and bullying in schools? Third, what does the literature say about the character-related and structural conditions that either sustain or dismantle gender stereotypes in educational leadership? A fourth, integrative question follows from the first three: do the character virtues implicated across these three literatures converge on a common profile that a character-education curriculum could deliberately cultivate, and how does that profile behave where the three forms of exclusion intersect?

Based on preliminary reading, the review proceeded from a working proposition rather than a fixed hypothesis, consistent with the exploratory logic of a qualitative systematic review: that resilience, integrity, and an egalitarian orientation toward others would recur across the disability, race, and gender literatures as the character strengths most frequently implicated in inclusive-leadership outcomes, even though the three literatures rarely cite one another. This proposition is falsifiable in a meaningful sense: had the synthesis found that the three literatures instead converged on entirely distinct, non-overlapping character constructs, for instance patience as the operative virtue in disability contexts, courage in racial-bias contexts, and assertiveness in gender contexts, the resulting conclusion would properly have been that fragmented, domain-specific character modules are in fact appropriate, and an integrative model would not have been warranted. The purpose of this study is to test the working proposition through systematic, transparent synthesis rather than to assume its conclusion in advance, and to translate the result into a model that Indonesian character-education curricula, including but not limited to programs inspired by nationalist historical narratives such as Sudirman's, can use to design integrated rather than fragmented interventions.

Method

This study used a systematic literature review (SLR) design because the research questions concern what is already known across a body of published, peer-reviewed evidence rather than the collection of new primary data. The review followed the structure of the PRISMA 2020 reporting guideline, which specifies transparent reporting of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021), adapted here to a review conducted in two sequential search phases through academic search engines and open bibliographic databases rather than through a single bibliographic database export, a methodological limitation made explicit in the discussion of trustworthiness below.

The first search phase was conducted between August and September 2026 through structured searches combining the terms character education, inclusive leadership, disability inclusion, ableism, racial bias, ethnic bullying, gender stereotypes, educational leadership, servant leadership, and school principal across Scopus-indexed journal portals, ERIC, Google Scholar, DOAJ, and the platforms of major international publishers. Because the first-phase corpus was thin in its coverage of gender and school leadership, of Indonesian empirical studies, and of the evidence on character-education effectiveness, a second phase was conducted in October 2026, running more than 70 structured queries under five thematic strands (character education and moral leadership; disability inclusion; racial, ethnic, and religious bias; gender stereotypes and leadership; and inclusive, equity, and social-justice leadership) through OpenAlex, Semantic

Scholar, and Crossref, filtered to DOI-registered journal articles and reviews. A targeted search of the archive of *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter* (e-ISSN 2527-7014) was added so that the review would engage with the scholarly conversation of this journal. Both phases were restricted to sources published between 2016 and 2026, with two foundational texts on character-education theory retained as conceptual anchors, a deviation disclosed transparently rather than concealed.

Records were included if they (a) were published in a peer-reviewed journal, an internationally recognized encyclopedic or handbook source, or an applicable national legal instrument; (b) addressed at least one of the three review domains, disability inclusion in education, racial, ethnic, or religious bias in schooling, or gender stereotypes in educational leadership, or addressed character education, inclusive leadership, equity-oriented leadership, or intersectionality directly relevant to those domains; (c) provided a verifiable digital object identifier, publisher record, or official government publication reference that allowed the bibliographic details to be independently confirmed before inclusion; and (d) in the second phase, had an accessible abstract against which the claims attributed to the source could be checked. Records were excluded if their authorship, venue, or core claims could not be independently verified through the source platform itself, a deliberate and conservative exclusion rule adopted to guard against citation fabrication.

Screening proceeded in three stages in each phase, summarized in Table 1 and Figure 1. In the identification stage, the second phase retrieved approximately 820 records (approximately 490 from OpenAlex, 106 from Semantic Scholar, and 220 from Crossref, including the journal-archive search). In the screening stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed for topical relevance and venue reputability; many retrieved records concerned unrelated fields sharing search vocabulary, such as clinical medicine, artificial intelligence in education, and pandemic-era online learning, and these were removed together with duplicates, leaving 144 records for full-record verification. In the eligibility stage, the authorship, year, volume, issue, pages, and DOI of each candidate were confirmed against the Crossref registration record or the publisher's listing. Ten records were excluded because no abstract or complete author metadata could be retrieved, and 14 because they were editorials, focused exclusively on higher-education leadership, or duplicated a more comprehensive included review. Twenty-six first-phase and 120 second-phase sources, 146 in total, were retained for synthesis; their bibliographic profile is summarized in Table 2.

Data extraction recorded, for each included source, the authorship and year, the venue, the country or regional context, the methodological design, and the principal finding relevant to the research questions; the extraction matrix is summarized in Table 3. Synthesis followed a thematic approach: findings were grouped inductively into the three substantive domains named in the research questions, plus two cross-cutting categories concerned with character education and moral leadership and with inclusive, equity, and intersectional leadership theory, and read for recurring character constructs (Figure 2). The cross-domain convergence reported below was derived by identifying character constructs that recurred independently across at least two of the three domain-specific literatures, an analytic step made explicit so that the integrative model in Figure 3 can be traced back to the extraction rather than treated as an unsupported assertion. Sources from both phases were read against the same template, so that the second phase functioned as a test of whether the convergence observed in the first-phase corpus would hold in a corpus more than five times larger.

Trustworthiness in a single-reviewer synthesis of this kind rests on procedural transparency rather than on inter-rater statistics, which a multi-reviewer team would ordinarily report. Two safeguards were therefore applied throughout. First, every bibliographic detail reported in the reference list was cross-checked against the publisher's own listing, the journal's official page, or the source's DOI registration record at the point of inclusion, rather than accepted from a search-engine snippet, so that a reader consulting any citation in this review can independently verify it. Second, claims attributed to a given source in the Results and Discussion section were restricted to what that source's own abstract, findings, or conclusion explicitly stated, rather than extended through inference, so that the synthesis does not silently attribute conclusions to studies that did

not draw them. These safeguards do not substitute for the reliability checks a multi-reviewer systematic review would provide, and this limitation is acknowledged directly in the Conclusion.

Two limitations of this method are acknowledged directly rather than left implicit. First, because search and screening were conducted by a single reviewer using academic search engines and open databases rather than a multi-reviewer team with direct institutional access to Scopus or Web of Science export functions, the identification-stage counts reported in Table 1 and Figure 1 are approximate; they describe the actual search-and-screening process undertaken, not an idealized reconstruction. Second, the corpus of 146 sources, while substantially larger than the first-phase corpus, still falls short of an exhaustive census of the relevant literature; it is best understood as a purposively verified, thematically saturated sample rather than a complete bibliometric universe, a distinction that is returned to in the conclusion when discussing the limitations of the review.

Results and Discussion

Overview of the Included Literature

The 146 sources retained after screening span six thematic clusters (Table 2; Figure 2): racial, ethnic, and religious bias and bullying (41 sources), character education and moral leadership (32), disability inclusion (27), gender stereotypes in leadership (25), inclusive, equity, and intersectional leadership theory (20), and review methodology (1). Thirty-two sources examine Indonesia, wholly or as one of several national cases, and five were published in *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*. The second phase substantially corrected the imbalance of the first-phase corpus, in which gender-focused sources numbered only two; the gender cluster now includes systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and qualitative studies of women principals across several continents, together with Indonesian studies of the glass ceiling facing women principals and of gender bias in textbooks. Very few gender-focused sources, however, engage character-education theory directly, a gap returned to in the limitations. Within the character-education cluster, Hadi et al.'s systematic review of thirty-five Indonesian studies found that curriculum integration and whole-school environmental factors, rather than isolated value-based lessons, most consistently predicted successful character-education uptake, with teacher training and evaluation systems the primary implementation bottleneck (Hadi et al., 2025), and a review of teachers' beliefs found strong support for an integrated curriculum delivered through role-model pedagogy (Muzakkir et al., 2024). That institutional and exemplar-based emphasis anticipates the pattern this review finds independently across the three domains below.

What the Character-Education Evidence Base Implies for Inclusive Leadership

Before turning to the exclusion domains, it is worth establishing what the character-education literature suggests about how dispositions such as integrity and fairness are formed, since the integrative model depends on their being teachable. The effects of character education are reliable but modest and heterogeneous, moderated by implementation quality and by whether interventions extend into school ethos and community (Brown et al., 2023; Cipriano et al., 2023; Goldberg et al., 2019). A controlled evaluation with 1,226 students in England found that a virtues-based English curriculum significantly increased students' knowledge and understanding of virtues such as integrity and justice, whereas self-assessed character measures declined in both groups, though less steeply among program students; the authors argue that knowledge of virtue generally precedes its behavioral application (Pike et al., 2021).

This gap between knowing and doing is what moral psychology calls the knowledge-action gap. Darnell et al. critically examine single-component solutions such as moral identity and moral emotion and conclude that operationalizing a multicomponent model based on the neo-Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, would be a feasible and productive way of explaining how moral knowledge becomes moral action (Darnell et al., 2019). As the following sections show, the dominant failure mode in each exclusion domain is likewise not that educators lack inclusive values but that values fail to translate into practice. In bullying situations, adolescents' moral identity predicted defending of victims, particularly among those high in social self-efficacy (Patrick et al., 2019). Critics have characterized prominent character-education programs as individualist, a charge Kristjánsson rebuts as a misreading of their neo-Aristotelian

basis (Kristjánsson, 2021); the domain evidence nonetheless suggests that integrity, accountability, and egalitarian regard must be cultivated both as personal dispositions and as institutional practices if character education is to avoid that charge.

The same literature clarifies why leadership, rather than classroom instruction alone, is the appropriate level of analysis. An integrative review showed that ethical, authentic, and servant leadership are undergirded respectively by deontology, virtue ethics, and consequentialism (Lemoine et al., 2019), and a review of 285 servant-leadership articles offered a new definition of the construct and mapped its antecedents and outcomes (Eva et al., 2019). Process theory adds that moral leadership emerges when an individual takes a moral stance, requires the moral courage to offer an alternative to prevailing norms, and becomes consequential when it mobilizes others to change a moral system from within (Solinger et al., 2020). Inclusive school leadership, as the following sections describe it, is a specific instance of this process. Education in the virtues has also been argued to protect adolescent mental health by supplying moral and existential frameworks that clinical approaches tend to miss (McLoughlin & Kristjánsson, 2025).

Disability Inclusion Requires Accountable Leadership, Not Accessibility Alone

The disability-inclusion literature converges on a finding that runs against a common policy assumption: that inclusion is primarily a matter of physical accessibility and legal compliance. DeMatthews et al.'s synthesis of thirty-eight studies of principal practice across thirteen countries found that the leadership practices most consistently associated with successful inclusion were not infrastructural but relational and organizational, namely building a shared staff-wide commitment to inclusion, establishing inclusive organizational conditions, and building instructional capacity through sustained professional development (DeMatthews et al., 2026). This finding directly answers the first research question: the character-relevant leadership capacity implicated in disability-inclusive schooling is less a matter of resource allocation than of a principal's sustained, values-driven insistence on inclusion as a non-negotiable organizational norm, which requires the character strength of integrity in the specific sense of consistency between stated values and enacted practice.

A substantial body of principal-focused research reinforces this reading. Reviews of the United States literature identify effective inclusive leadership as consistent with established frameworks of principal practice and call for shared leadership practices linked to professional standards, licensure, and ongoing development (Billingsley et al., 2018; DeMatthews, Billingsley, et al., 2020). Case studies of principals who created effective inclusive schools identified creating a culture of change-oriented collaboration, planning and evaluating, building capacity, and revising plans as critical practices, sustained despite crises and fatigue (DeMatthews, 2021), and successful principals named beliefs and values, alongside knowledge and instructional leadership, as central to leading inclusive reform (DeMatthews, Kotok, et al., 2020). Most directly relevant to a character-based account, four effective inclusive principals described the foundation of their leadership as an "inclusive consciousness", a dogged determination to provide ethical and meaningful educational experiences to all students, demonstrated through a disposition for inclusion and consistent inclusive leadership behaviors (McMillan & Hoppey, 2025). This construct describes integrity and perseverance applied to disability, and its emergence from leadership rather than character-education research suggests that the two literatures describe the same phenomenon in different vocabularies.

Principals' own attitudes are therefore pivotal. A systematic review of 39 studies found principals' attitudes toward inclusive education ranging from positive to ambivalent and negative; positive attitudes reflected commitments to social justice and collaborative leadership, whereas negative attitudes were linked to resource limitations and doubts about teacher readiness (Tsirantonaki & Vlachou, 2026). Inclusive leadership is expected to operate through teaching quality and a school culture of high expectations (Crisol Moya et al., 2020), yet the field remains confused about the actions needed to move policy and practice forward (Ainscow, 2020), and a meta-review of 26 reviews called for more research on school leaders' attitudes (Van Mieghem et al., 2020).

This organizational reading is corroborated from the perspective of students themselves. Rahajeng et al.'s review of Indonesian higher-education students with disabilities found that assistive-technology optimization, active support-seeking, and relationship-building produced better outcomes than passive accommodation or unilateral adaptation by the student alone (Rahajeng et al., 2024), indicating that inclusive outcomes depend on an institutional environment that makes such strategies possible rather than on student resilience in isolation. Students with disabilities in Australia, Indonesia, and the Netherlands consistently emphasized having a friend and being accepted by peers, and did not automatically benefit from inclusive placement (Little et al., 2022), while a realist review of 72 studies located the mechanisms of school participation in identity, competence, and experience, shaped by school structures, peers, adults, space, and objects (Maciver et al., 2019). These findings shift the measure of inclusion from formal placement toward relational belonging, itself a function of the peer culture that leadership and character education shape.

Gal et al.'s interpretive phenomenological study of Israeli mainstream teachers found a persistent ideology-practice gap: teachers endorsed inclusion in principle but reported that insufficient training, inadequate institutional backing, and large class sizes undermined enactment, with acceptance varying by the perceived severity of a student's disability (Gal et al., 2025), a pattern that echoes DeMatthews et al.'s emphasis on instructional capacity-building as a leadership function rather than a matter of individual teacher goodwill. Teacher self-efficacy correlates moderately with inclusive attitudes ($r = .35$; Yada et al., 2022), and Australian teachers with high and low self-efficacy shared similar conceptual understandings of inclusion yet differed in practice, suggesting that informing teachers about inclusion has limited impact on what they do (Woodcock et al., 2022). In both cases, knowing the right thing is necessary but not sufficient.

Peer attitudes form the other half of the inclusion equation, and here the evidence points directly to character-relevant intervention. A meta-analysis found that direct ($d = 0.55$) and extended ($d = 0.61$) contact with people with disabilities improved children's attitudes, whereas media-based parasocial contact showed no evidence of effect (Armstrong et al., 2017); a developmental review treated disability perception as a case of in-group and out-group bias shaped at societal, family, school, and individual levels (Babik & Gardner, 2021); and inclusion appears to benefit students without disabilities socially through reduced fear, prejudice, and discrimination and increased tolerance and acceptance (Kart & Kart, 2021). The most direct bridge to character education is a controlled 16-week character-strengths intervention in 11 inclusive Finnish classrooms, in which students with special educational needs advanced most in consistency of interest and schoolwork engagement, and teachers reported greater group cohesion and a growing ability among students to name strengths in others and support one another (Vuorinen et al., 2019). Pedagogically, universal design for learning has been found effective in improving the learning process for all students, although its impact on educational outcomes has not yet been demonstrated (Capp, 2017).

The Indonesian legal context sets an explicit normative baseline against which these findings can be read. Law Number 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities obliges the state to guarantee equal access and reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, including in education (Undang-Undang Nomor 8 Tahun 2016, 2016), yet the World Bank's 2024 reporting notes that close to thirty percent of children with disabilities nationally still lack access to schooling, and that a rural pilot reached over one hundred students who had never received a formal learning-needs evaluation (World Bank, 2024). Among 243 Indonesian teachers, 79.4 percent held only moderate attitudes toward inclusive education (Ediyanto et al., 2021); among 1,477 teachers in East Java's inclusive schools, 61.1 percent held positive attitudes, which were more favorable with longer inclusive-teaching experience and after inclusive-education training (Ediyanto & Kawai, 2023); and good inclusion policy has not been matched by designated schools' readiness to provide adequate facilities and support (Efendi, 2018). Read together with DeMatthews et al. and Gal et al., this indicates that the gap between Indonesia's legal commitments and classroom reality reflects not an absence of policy but an absence of the leadership and teacher-capacity conditions

the international literature identifies as necessary, precisely the kind of gap character-education-oriented leadership training could be designed to close.

It is worth pausing on why this finding is somewhat counter-intuitive relative to how Indonesian schools often approach disability inclusion in practice, where investment tends to concentrate on physical infrastructure, such as ramps and designated seating, and on formal compliance documentation. None of the sources reviewed here dispute that physical accessibility matters; rather, they converge on the more specific claim that accessibility investment without a corresponding, sustained leadership commitment to inclusion as an organizational norm fails to translate into improved student experience, because staff attitudes, instructional adaptation, and peer culture, none of which a ramp can change on its own, are what students with disabilities actually encounter day to day. This interpretation reframes disability-inclusive character education away from a single lesson on empathy toward disability and toward sustained leadership modeling of the accountability DeMatthews et al. describe, combined with structured opportunities for genuine contact between students with and without disabilities, an implication carried forward into the integrative model presented later in this section.

Anti-Bias Efforts Succeed When Integrated into Leadership and Curriculum, Not Delivered as Isolated Programs

The racial and ethnic bias literature answers the second research question with a comparably clear pattern: interventions embedded in ongoing curriculum, teacher preparation, and school leadership consistently outperform interventions delivered as isolated, one-off programs. Sapouna, de Amicis, and Vezzali's systematic review of bullying victimization due to racial, ethnic, citizenship, or religious status found that victimization risk was shaped by durable features of school climate and composition rather than by discrete bullying incidents alone, implying that remediation needs to operate at the level of sustained school culture (Sapouna et al., 2023). Kuldass, Foody, and O'Higgins Norman's review of intra-ethnic bullying adds analytic precision to this picture, showing that ethnic-minority students are frequently bullied by peers from within their own ethnic group at least as often as by majority-group peers, which complicates any intervention that assumes bullying is purely an intergroup, majority-versus-minority phenomenon (Kuldass et al., 2022). Pliogou and Tromara similarly argue that resilience against racist bullying operates across individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels simultaneously, and that whole-school, culturally responsive approaches outperform fragmented interventions, explicitly naming teacher professional development and school-leadership commitment to equity as necessary components (Pliogou & Tromara, 2026). A representative survey of 2,139 Spanish adolescents found that ethnic-cultural and especially sexual minorities were more involved in bullying and cyberbullying than majority-group peers, and its authors called for educational policy focused on school-wide coexistence rather than incident management (Llorent et al., 2016).

The consequences of discriminatory climates extend to learning itself. In PISA 2018 data from 445,534 adolescents across 60 countries, a perceived discriminatory climate was associated with lower mathematics and reading scores among majority and minority pupils alike, partly through lower school belonging (Baysu et al., 2023), while cross-ethnic friendships buffered the harms of perceived discrimination (Benner & Wang, 2017). Because a discriminatory climate harms majority-group students as well, anti-bias character education is a whole-school good rather than a concession to a particular minority.

Evidence on teachers themselves reinforces why leadership-level, rather than merely curricular, intervention is required. Breese et al.'s qualitative study of 154 preservice educators undergoing mandatory anti-bullying training found frequent implicit biases toward Asian, Black, male, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and found that openness to discussing bias did not translate into strong motivation to change potentially prejudiced interactions with students (Breese et al., 2023). A review of 49 studies using implicit measures concluded that such measures hold potential for understanding differential treatment of students but need further validation (Denessen et al., 2022). Large-scale studies show why the stakes are institutional: United States counties in which teachers held higher implicit and explicit racial bias had larger White–Black test-score and suspension disparities (Chin et al., 2020), and county-level racial bias was associated

with disciplinary disparities across some 96,000 schools (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Teachers in a randomized study showed bias against Black, Hispanic, and female students when estimating mathematical ability, largest against Black and Hispanic girls (Copur-Gencturk et al., 2020), and a video experiment with 1,339 teachers showed Black and Latino boys facing a “double jeopardy” of individual teacher bias and racialized organizational climates of heightened blaming (Owens, 2022). Discipline disparities cannot be attributed solely to socioeconomic status or behavior but reflect the policies, practices, and perspectives of teachers and principals (Welsh & Little, 2018), and school-level discipline gaps were associated with Black students’ lower perceived equity and school belonging (Bottiani et al., 2017).

This evidence matters for the present synthesis because it shows that awareness-raising alone, the default content of many anti-bias trainings, is necessary but insufficient; character-relevant dispositions such as accountability and follow-through are required to convert awareness into changed practice. The prejudice-reduction literature makes the same point with unusual candor. A review of 418 experiments found that 76 percent evaluated “light touch” interventions of unclear long-term impact, with indications of publication bias (Paluck et al., 2021); enthusiasm for diversity training has outpaced the evidence of its effectiveness (Devine & Ash, 2022); and among implicit-bias interventions, perspective-taking appeared unfruitful while exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars was more promising, without weakening the case for structural and institutional change (FitzGerald et al., 2019). Legette et al.’s review of sixty-two studies likewise found that reducing discipline disparities requires understanding individual bias and institutional racism as distinct but linked phenomena, and that race-conscious approaches outperformed race-neutral ones (Legette et al., 2026). Lopez and Jean-Marie’s practice-oriented framework converges on the same institutional emphasis, proposing that educators name, own, frame, and sustain anti-racist commitments as an ongoing leadership discipline rather than a performative, time-limited initiative (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021).

Intergroup-contact research offers the most robust evidence of what does work, and it carries a lesson about the character of the institutions in which contact occurs. Contact typically reduces prejudice, although effects on ethnic and racial prejudice are weaker (Paluck et al., 2019), and it remains associated with reduced prejudice even under group threat and discrimination (Van Assche et al., 2023). Most relevant to the integrative model, a cultural meta-analysis of 660 samples across 36 cultures found the contact–prejudice association stronger in egalitarian cultures and weaker in hierarchical ones, over and above equal status in the contact situation itself (Kende et al., 2018). This provides independent support for treating an egalitarian orientation as a virtue in its own right: contact, the mechanism on which school integration rests, works better when the surrounding culture values equality.

The culturally responsive school leadership literature translates these findings into leadership practice. Khalifa et al.’s review framed culturally responsive school leadership around critical self-awareness, culturally responsive teacher preparation, inclusive school environments, and community advocacy, arguing that the entire school environment, not only teaching, must become responsive to minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016). A recent review of 30 studies found that educators’ multicultural beliefs and reflective leadership orientations shaped inclusive school climates, often more strongly than national policy frameworks (Jumaah et al., 2026). Trust built through regular interaction regulated how far equitable practices could be implemented in one district (Banwo et al., 2022); distributed leadership implied a commitment to social justice only when leaders became culturally responsive to their schools’ changing populations (Brown et al., 2019); historical context, training, and support shaped how culturally responsive leadership could operate in four European countries (Brown et al., 2022); and professional development, school participation, inclusive culture, and positive management of diversity characterized good practice in Spain and Chile (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021).

Two cautions anticipate the tension discussed later. First, preservice preparation for culturally responsive teaching relies mostly on stand-alone approaches aimed at attitudes and beliefs (Miller et al., 2024), the format the prejudice-reduction evidence suggests is weakest. Second, institutionalized equity can become symbolic: the role of school-district chief equity officer

risks signaling commitment without changing structures, policies, or practices (Lewis et al., 2023), and anti-racist leadership has not been explicitly prioritized in principal preparation (Genao & Mercedes, 2021). Integrity, as consistency between stated commitment and enacted practice, is thus a property of institutions as well as of individual leaders.

Karanikola et al.'s analysis of international intercultural teacher-education policy documents situates these classroom-level findings within a broader preparation pipeline, identifying culturally responsive pedagogy, critical reflection, and a values-based commitment to equity as the recurring themes across UNESCO and OECD guidance for preparing teachers to work in ethnically diverse classrooms (Karanikola et al., 2025), while Pegalajar Palomino et al.'s survey of teachers in globally oriented Spanish schools found that even highly ethically committed, innovation-oriented teachers were constrained by institutional resource limits and school climate, again pointing to leadership and systemic conditions, not individual teacher goodwill, as the binding constraint on turning anti-bias intention into anti-bias practice (Pegalajar Palomino et al., 2026).

The Indonesian literature shows these dynamics operating in an ethnically and religiously plural society in ways directly relevant to character education. Ethnographic research in Yogyakarta and Central Kalimantan found inconsistencies between the policies and practices of multicultural education, attributed to a lack of explicit policy and to decision-makers and teachers unequipped to implement it (Raihani, 2018). Unity in diversity, equality, cultural identity, and social justice are the core multicultural paradigms embedded in national documents (Jayadi et al., 2022), and curriculum reform, teacher training, and community engagement have been identified as priorities against institutional barriers and sociocultural prejudice (Mariyono, 2024). In post-conflict West Kalimantan, multicultural education helped students understand the past and present but was limited by stakeholders' anxiety and weak critical thinking that risked reproducing prejudice (Nakaya, 2018), and verbal violence among students has been traced to majority-group perceptions of their own language and culture as marks of local eminence (Dewantara et al., 2026). Teachers in Medan working with Chinese-Indonesian and non-Chinese students relied mostly on content integration and intergroup contact, with less critical engagement (Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2020). Nationally endorsed EFL textbooks represent respect for diverse ethnic, religious, and indigenous cultures (Setyono & Widodo, 2019), and religiosity was positively associated with religious moderation among students at state Islamic universities (Subchi et al., 2022). Indonesia thus has an unusually rich normative vocabulary for pluralism, from *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* to the Pancasila Student Profile, but its conversion into school practice depends, as elsewhere, on the preparation and commitment of teachers and leaders.

Gender Stereotypes in Leadership Persist Through Structure, Not Through Women's Capability

The gender-focused literature converges on a single answer to the third research question: gender stereotypes in educational leadership persist because of structural and ecological conditions rather than because of any deficit in women's leadership capability. Martinez Martinez, Molina-Lopez, and Mateos de Cabo's analysis of World Management Survey data from 1,800 school principals across eight countries found that greater school-level competition reduced the effect of a principal's gender on management quality, a pattern the authors interpret as supporting a demand-side double-standard explanation, in which women are held to a higher bar for promotion, over a supply-side explanation centered on women's self-efficacy (Martinez Martinez et al., 2021). Shah's ecological analysis of head teachers in Pakistan similarly found that women leaders had to actively navigate stereotypes and depended heavily on family support to sustain their authority, while male counterparts assumed leadership as a default entitlement yet paradoxically reported lower motivation, evidence that the burden of proving legitimacy, not a deficit of ambition or competence, is what differentiates women's and men's leadership trajectories in this context (Shah, 2023).

The expanded corpus extends this pattern across continents. A systematic overview of school leadership and gender in Africa found that organizational, social, and personal factors combine to inhibit women's accession, that embedded social attitudes confine women to domestic responsibilities, and that women principals were more collegial and collaborative than men, with

some evidence of greater effectiveness; the authors urged ministries to review recruitment and selection policies (Bush et al., 2022). Women leaders in developed countries and Vietnam still face largely the same barriers as in the past, with family and mentor support as key enablers (Maheshwari, 2023). Female principals in South Africa valued preparation and mentoring as sources of career and life resilience (de Bruyn & Mestry, 2020), and women principals in rural settings described role overload, conflict, and strain intersecting with gender and rurality (Hudson & Hickman, 2026). In Indonesia, women hold approximately 38.68 percent of principalships in compulsory education compared with 61.32 percent held by men, and a study of sixteen elementary principals traced the glass ceiling facing women to power and structure rather than to capability (Juwitasari, 2021).

Organizational psychology supplies the mechanism behind these structural barriers. Heilman, Caleo, and Manzi identify two pathways from gender stereotypes to discrimination: the descriptive characterization of women as communal but not agentic, which conflicts with the perceived demands of male-typed roles such as leadership, and prescriptive norms that penalize women who display counter-stereotypical attributes (Heilman et al., 2024). Role congruity theory now explains prejudice across a wide range of organizational roles beyond gender (Triana et al., 2024). Experimental evidence shows that stereotypes of women's communality persist and that women rate themselves as less assertive and less competent in leadership than they rate women in general (Hentschel et al., 2019), and women evaluated characteristics associated with female leaders more negatively when asked directly (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023). Women who break through face a further risk: three meta-analyses found evidence of a "glass cliff", in which women and members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups are more likely to be appointed to precarious leadership positions in times of crisis, an effect larger in more gender-unequal countries (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Even self-evaluated authenticity appears gendered, with male secondary heads rating themselves more positively than female heads in every area except relationships and connectedness (Lee, 2023).

This structural reading is consistent with, and extends, the general theory of inclusive leadership on which the present review's integrative model partly draws. Shore et al.'s influential review of inclusion and diversity in work groups theorizes that genuine inclusion requires satisfying two needs simultaneously, belongingness and uniqueness, and that leadership environments failing to satisfy both push members of underrepresented groups toward either forced assimilation or marginalization (Shore et al., 2011). A systematic review of 107 papers on inclusive leadership has since proposed a multilevel model in which inclusive leader behavior consists of fostering uniqueness, strengthening belongingness, showing appreciation, and supporting organizational inclusion efforts (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). Applied to gender and school leadership, this framework suggests that eliminating stereotype-driven barriers requires leadership cultures that value women's distinct contributions rather than merely tolerating their presence in numerically token roles, a more demanding standard than formal non-discrimination policy alone can satisfy.

The school is also where gender stereotypes about leadership are first learned, which brings the gender domain squarely within the remit of character education. Across 82 studies in 29 countries, young adolescents commonly expressed stereotypical gender attitudes shaped by family and peers, and schools may reinforce them (Kågesten et al., 2016). English textbooks from Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh showed a pro-male bias, although Indonesian textbooks were comparatively balanced at 44.1 percent female characters (Islam & Asadullah, 2018), while the visual content of Indonesian Islamic religious-education textbooks showed underrepresentation and stereotyping of women, with 83.3 percent of primary authors and 91.7 percent of reviewers male (Fawaid & Handayani, 2025). Teachers who were aware of stereotypes nonetheless strengthened them through their classroom strategies (Gajda et al., 2022), and teachers' gender stereotypes shaped their expectations of students' reading ability, which in turn predicted achievement (Muntoni & Retelsdorf, 2018).

The intervention literature is encouraging. A review of 71 interventions targeting gendered stereotypes found that peer engagement, multilevel approaches, agents of change, role models, co-

design, and multi-session formats strengthened impact beyond awareness-raising alone (Stewart et al., 2021); exposure to counter-stereotypical role models such as women leaders can shape girls' aspirations and choices (Olsson & Martiny, 2018); and the REFLECT teacher-training program increased teachers' capacity to promote girls and boys equally and students' perceptions of diversity fairness (Kollmayer et al., 2020). The role-model findings matter for a journal of character education, because exemplar-based pedagogy is already central to how Indonesian teachers understand character formation (Muzakkir et al., 2024): the question is whether the exemplars presented to students include women, people with disabilities, and members of minority groups exercising legitimate leadership.

Comparing Martinez et al. and Shah directly is instructive because the two studies were conducted in markedly different national and institutional contexts, Spain and seven other predominantly middle- and high-income countries surveyed through the World Management Survey in the first case, and Pakistan's public and private secondary-school sector in the second, yet they arrive at a structurally convergent explanation. The expanded corpus extends that convergence to Africa (Bush et al., 2022), Indonesia (Juwitasari, 2021), and the experimental literature on stereotypes and role incongruity (Heilman et al., 2024; Morgenroth et al., 2020). This cross-national convergence strengthens the credibility of the structural interpretation relative to a competing individual-deficit interpretation, which would predict that gender gaps in leadership quality or aspiration should vary unsystematically with local cultural attitudes toward women's competence; instead, the studies find the gap traceable to how institutions evaluate and support leadership candidates, a variable that is, at least in principle, amenable to deliberate institutional and character-education intervention in a way that broad cultural attitude is not.

Where Exclusions Intersect: Evidence from Intersectional Leadership Research

The integrative question posed in the Introduction is sharpest where the three forms of exclusion meet, and the expanded corpus contains substantial research on these intersections. On race and disability, principals of effective inclusive schools in a low-income Mexican American immigrant community found that race, disability, family background, language, and immigration status all affected their efforts, against a history of special education being used to maintain racial segregation (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Drawing on dis/ability critical race studies, DeMatthews argues that racism and ableism are built into educator and principal practice but that principals are positioned to challenge dominant narratives about race and ability (DeMatthews, 2020). Educators cited for racial disproportionality in special-education discipline interpreted the inequity in ways that neutralized its racial implications, producing symbolic, race-evasive compliance (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021). Pedagogically, cross-pollinating culturally sustaining pedagogy with universal design for learning has been proposed as a way to attend to intersecting markers of difference, including dis/ability, class, gender, race, language, and ethnicity (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016).

On the intersection of race and gender in leadership, the evidence is equally consistent. White women novice principals experienced tension between emotional labor and authority, whereas women of color treated the two as a blended project (Ispa-Landa & Thomas, 2019). Black women principals in England, South Africa, and the United States constructed success as overcoming racialized and gendered barriers in order to practice inclusive, fair, and socially just leadership (Moorosi et al., 2018), while Black women school leaders coping with gendered racism bore costs including self-doubt and resignation (Burton et al., 2020). Black women principals were associated with higher teacher collective responsibility and higher student mathematics achievement (Jang & Alexander, 2022), and intersectional leadership has been characterized as explicitly anti-racist and anti-sexist and committed to leveraging authority on behalf of historically underserved communities (Peters & Miles Nash, 2021).

Two conclusions follow for the integrative model. First, the intersectional evidence rules out the possibility that disability, race, and gender could be addressed by three separate character modules even in principle, because the same institutional mechanisms, deficit framing, race-evasive compliance, and the evaluation of leaders against a narrow default, recur across all three. Second, the intersectional literature describes the leaders who most effectively resist these

mechanisms in strikingly character-laden terms: commitment to fairness and justice, persistence under adversity, and the willingness to use authority on behalf of others. These are the same dispositions that emerge, independently, from each domain-specific literature.

Points of Convergence and Unresolved Tension Across the Three Literatures

Placing the three domain-specific bodies of evidence side by side surfaces both convergence and productive tension that a single-domain reading would miss. The clearest convergence is methodological: the strongest studies in each domain, DeMatthews et al. and Tsirantonaki and Vlachou in disability, Sapouna et al., Legette et al., and Paluck et al. in racial bias, and Martinez Martinez et al., Bush et al., and Morgenroth et al. in gender, are themselves systematic reviews, meta-analyses, or large-sample analyses rather than single-site case studies, which increases confidence that the leadership-level findings reported above are not artifacts of any one national or institutional context. A second convergence is substantive: all three domains locate the decisive variable at the level of sustained institutional practice rather than at the level of isolated individual attitude. DeMatthews et al.'s emphasis on organizational conditions, Legette et al.'s distinction between individual bias and institutional racism, Owens's demonstration that individual bias and organizational climate compound one another, and Martinez Martinez et al.'s finding that competitive market conditions, not individual women's self-efficacy, moderate the gender-quality relationship, all point away from individual-deficit explanations and toward institutional-design explanations, a pattern with direct implications for where character-education interventions should be targeted.

A third convergence, visible only in the expanded corpus, concerns the gap between knowing and doing: teachers with similar understanding of inclusion differed in practice (Woodcock et al., 2022), openness to discussing bias did not produce motivation to change (Breese et al., 2023), teachers aware of gender stereotypes reinforced them (Gajda et al., 2022), and awareness-only interventions were weaker than those using peers, role models, and multiple sessions (Stewart et al., 2021). This pattern corresponds closely to the knowledge-action gap in moral psychology and to the proposal that practical wisdom bridges it (Darnell et al., 2019), suggesting that character education contributes to inclusive leadership less by transmitting inclusive knowledge than by forming the practiced dispositions that turn such knowledge into consistent action.

The tension worth naming explicitly concerns intervention sequencing. The racial-bias literature, particularly Breese et al. and Pliogou and Tromara, suggests that awareness-raising is a necessary first step that becomes effective only when paired with sustained accountability, implying a two-stage model of awareness followed by institutionalized practice. The disability literature, by contrast, particularly Gal et al., suggests that many teachers already hold favorable inclusive attitudes in principle, such that the binding constraint is not awareness at all but institutional capacity, namely training, staffing, and class size, implying that awareness-building interventions in this domain may already have reached diminishing returns relative to capacity-building investment. The Indonesian evidence complicates this picture further: Indonesian teachers' attitudes toward inclusion appear more moderate than favorable in national samples but improve with training and experience (Ediyanto et al., 2021; Ediyanto & Kawai, 2023), suggesting that, in this context, awareness and capacity may need to be built together. Read together, this suggests that a single, undifferentiated character-education intervention applied uniformly across all three domains would misallocate effort. This is a genuine point of disagreement in emphasis across the reviewed literatures, and the integrative model proposed below is deliberately built to accommodate it by treating integrity, accountability, and egalitarian regard as a shared foundation applied through domain-specific and context-specific implementation, rather than prescribing an identical intervention sequence for all three.

Toward an Integrative Character Profile: What the Three Domains Have in Common

Read individually, the disability, racial-bias, and gender-stereotype literatures answer three separate questions. Read together, as intended by this review's design, they converge on a similar diagnosis: in each domain, formally correct policy consistently under-delivers unless school leaders enact character-level dispositions of sustained integrity (doing consistently, over time,

what a stated inclusive value requires), active accountability (treating bias or exclusion as an institutional responsibility rather than an individual failing to be quietly tolerated), and an egalitarian orientation that values difference rather than merely accommodating it. Servant-leadership and inclusive-leadership theory offer a plausible account of why these particular dispositions recur. Ouyang, Mat Rashid, and Li's systematic review of fifty-nine studies on servant leadership's benefits for teachers found consistent associations with improved wellbeing, professional behavior, and a more harmonious working environment when leaders prioritized empowering and supporting others as individuals (Ouyang et al., 2025), while D'Ascoli and Piro's qualitative study of educational servant-leaders found that facilitating others' growth required emotional intelligence and a willingness to hold the productive tension between individual and group needs (D'Ascoli & Piro, 2023). Dennehy, Cahill, and Moynihan's synthesis on inclusive school leadership and White, Lowery, and Johnson's systematic review of systemic school leadership both identify a comparable leadership orientation, one that treats equity and high-quality provision as inseparable rather than competing goals, as central to sustained school improvement (Dennehy et al., 2024; White et al., 2025).

The equity-leadership literature supports each element of the profile. A review of 63 empirical studies concluded that most practices in a well-developed framework of successful school leadership can be enacted to make schools more equitable, especially family and community partnership, ambitious and culturally responsive instruction, and leaders' willingness to take a critical perspective on their schools' own policies and procedures (Leithwood, 2021); its authors have also revisited their widely cited claims about what makes school leadership successful (Leithwood et al., 2020). Transformative leaders created schools in which minoritized and economically disadvantaged students felt affirmed, respected, and academically challenged (Shields & Hesbol, 2020); a review of 124 studies of leadership for social justice highlighted culturally responsive leadership and the tensions principals navigate between policy mandates and social-justice commitments (Chaaban et al., 2025); and the field has evolved toward outcomes such as equity and wellbeing for vulnerable groups (Karakose et al., 2023). On integrity specifically, comprehensive programs and administrative support are essential to fostering integrity among principals (Ak Bujang et al., 2025), and leadership for social-emotional learning has been framed around caring and equity for diverse learners (Kennedy, 2019). The egalitarian element is grounded in research on belonging, which can be cultivated through competencies, opportunities, motivations, and perceptions (Allen et al., 2021) and which requires evidence-based intervention for students at risk of alienation from school (Štremfel et al., 2024).

Figure 3 presents the integrative model that follows from this synthesis. At its core sits character formation as classically defined by Lickona and operationalized through Peterson and Seligman's strength taxonomy (Lickona, 1991; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), from which three pillars extend: disability-inclusive practice, anti-bias and anti-racist practice, and gender-equitable leadership practice, each grounded in the domain-specific evidence reviewed above. The three pillars converge on a single outcome construct, inclusive leadership capacity, mediated throughout by the three character virtues identified as recurring across all three domains: integrity, accountability, and an egalitarian orientation toward difference. The expanded evidence base strengthens each link in this chain: the meta-analytic literature indicates that character can be cultivated (Brown et al., 2023); the inclusive-consciousness and culturally responsive leadership literatures show that the dispositions in question are recognizable in effective leaders (Khalifa et al., 2016; McMillan & Hoppey, 2025); and the contact and role-model literatures show that egalitarian institutional cultures and counter-stereotypical exemplars amplify inclusive outcomes (Kende et al., 2018; Olsson & Martiny, 2018). It is at this point in the synthesis, rather than at the outset, that the historical figure of General Sudirman becomes analytically useful. Wisang's analysis of Sudirman's wartime leadership emphasizes precisely these qualities, integrity of purpose despite incapacitating illness and a leadership style referenced as a model for the national military precisely because it did not depend on physical dominance (Wisang, 2024), which is consistent with, even if it does not independently prove, the character profile this review derives

empirically from the disability, race, and gender literatures. The figure is used here strictly as an illustrative anchor for a model built from the reviewed evidence, not as a substitute for it.

Implications for Indonesian Character Education

The synthesis has specific implications for Indonesian character education, which already possesses many of the instruments the international literature recommends but deploys them in a fragmented way. The Pancasila Student Profile's dimensions of noble character, mutual cooperation, and global diversity (Rusnaini et al., 2021) map naturally onto integrity, accountability, and egalitarian regard; what the reviewed evidence adds is that these dimensions will be realized only if they are applied to disability, ethnicity and religion, and gender within the same school practices rather than taught as abstract values. Indonesian research identifies habituation and role modelling by principals and teachers as the dominant strategies of values education (Suyatno et al., 2019), alongside the integration of values into courses, exemplary conduct, and a value-based institutional vision (Fadli, 2021; Hidayati et al., 2020). These strategies suit the integrative model well, provided that the exemplars and habits in question include inclusive practice.

Leadership is the critical lever. In one case study, a principal's transformational leadership grounded in cultural, humanistic, and nationalist values was effective in optimizing the implementation of the Strengthening of Character Education program (Effendi, 2020), a finding consistent with the international evidence on principals' dispositions and with the Indonesian systematic review that identified weak leadership capacity and inappropriate principal selection as central problems (Lumban Gaol, 2023). Principal preparation is therefore the most efficient point at which to introduce an integrated inclusive-leadership character strand. The scarcity of role models identified by Sidik (2024), and the tendency of Indonesian character education to narrow character to the interests of the state while neglecting ethnic and religious diversity (Abdullah et al., 2019), point in the same direction: Indonesia does not lack exemplary figures such as Sudirman, but it needs a broader repertoire of exemplars, including women leaders, leaders with disabilities, and leaders from minority communities, presented not as exceptions but as ordinary expressions of the national character ideal.

Curriculum materials and teacher preparation are further levers. Evidence of multicultural values in nationally endorsed EFL textbooks (Setyono & Widodo, 2019) sits alongside evidence of gender bias in religious-education textbooks and their predominantly male authorship (Fawaid & Handayani, 2025), indicating that a review of character-education materials for representation across disability, ethnicity, religion, and gender is both feasible and overdue. Because Indonesian teachers' inclusive attitudes improve with training and experience (Ediyanto & Kawai, 2023), multicultural education falters where teachers are not equipped to implement it (Raihani, 2018), and teachers' enactment of character education is constrained by a lack of professional development (Maulana, 2022), an integrated professional-development strand built around the three shared virtues would address all three findings at once.

These findings tie directly back to the research questions posed in the Introduction. Disability-inclusive leadership, anti-bias leadership, and gender-equitable leadership are not three unrelated competencies that a school leader happens to need simultaneously; they are three applications of a single underlying character orientation. This has a direct implication for character-education curriculum design, taken up in the Conclusion: a curriculum, whether inspired by nationalist historical narrative devices such as Sudirman's biography or built from generic character-strength taxonomies, will under-deliver if it teaches integrity, accountability, and egalitarian regard as abstract virtues disconnected from their concrete application to disability, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender in school life, rather than teaching them through direct, combined engagement with all of these.

Table 1. Summary of the Two-Phase Search, Screening, and Inclusion Process

Phase	Stage	Process	Records
Phase 1 (Aug–Sep 2026)	Identification	Keyword searches across Scopus-indexed portals, ERIC, Google Scholar, and DOAJ	≈95
Phase 1	Screening	Titles/abstracts screened for topical relevance and venue reputability	58
Phase 1	Eligibility	Full text/publisher record retrieved; bibliographic details verified against publisher source	34
Phase 1	Included	Sources meeting all inclusion criteria	26
Phase 2 (Oct 2026)	Identification	70+ structured queries in OpenAlex, Semantic Scholar, and Crossref (2016–2026, DOI-registered), plus Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter archive	≈820
Phase 2	Screening	Duplicates and off-topic records (e.g., clinical medicine, AI in education, pandemic online learning) removed on title/abstract	144
Phase 2	Eligibility	Metadata verified against Crossref/publisher; excluded: no abstract or incomplete metadata (n = 10); editorial, higher-education-only, or redundant (n = 14)	120
Total	Included	Sources retained for thematic synthesis (Phase 1 + Phase 2)	146

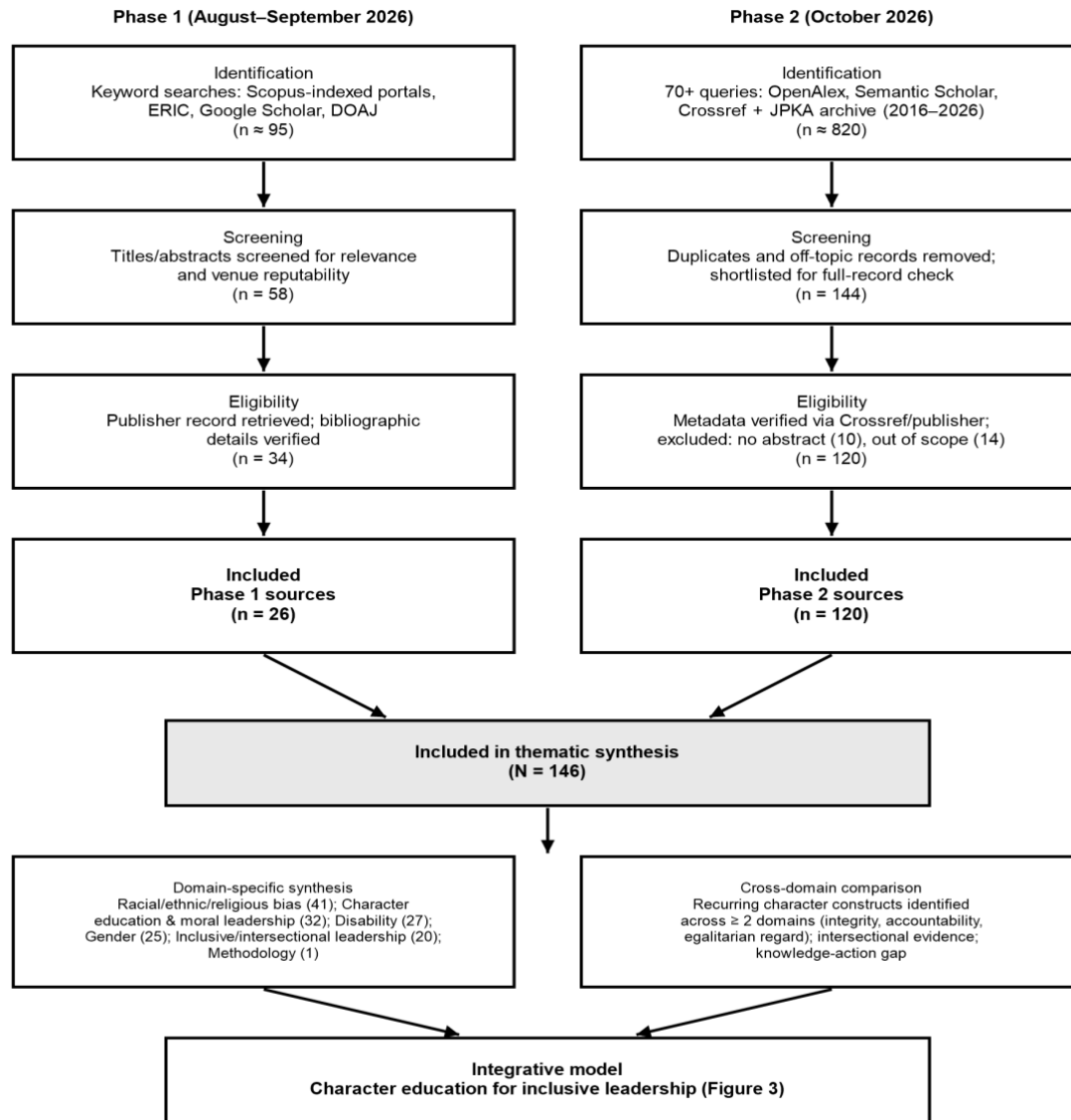


Figure 1. PRISMA-Informed Flow of the Two-Phase Search, Screening, and Synthesis Process

Table 2. Bibliographic Profile of the 146 Included Sources by Thematic Cluster

Thematic cluster	n	Representative sources	Venue type
Racial, ethnic, and religious bias & bullying	41	Sapouna et al. (2023); Paluck et al. (2021); Khalifa et al. (2016); Baysu et al. (2023); Raihani (2018)	Journal (systematic reviews, meta-analyses, experiments, ethnographies)
Character education & moral leadership	32	Brown et al. (2023); Hadi et al. (2025); Darnell et al. (2019); Lickona (1991); Peterson & Seligman (2004)	Journal (meta-analyses, reviews, case studies), book

Thematic cluster	n	Representative sources	Venue type
Disability inclusion	27	DeMatthews et al. (2026); Tsirantonaki & Vlachou (2026); Armstrong et al. (2017); Ediyanto & Kawai (2023); Law No. 8/2016	Journal, statute, institutional report
Gender stereotypes in leadership	25	Martinez Martinez et al. (2021); Bush et al. (2022); Heilman et al. (2024); Morgenroth et al. (2020); Juwitasari (2021)	Journal (systematic reviews, meta-analyses, qualitative studies)
Inclusive, equity & intersectional leadership	20	Shore et al. (2011); Veli Korkmaz et al. (2022); Leithwood (2021); Chaaban et al. (2025); Bešić (2020)	Journal
Review methodology	1	Page et al. (2021, PRISMA 2020)	Journal
Total (of which Indonesia-focused: 32)	146	—	—

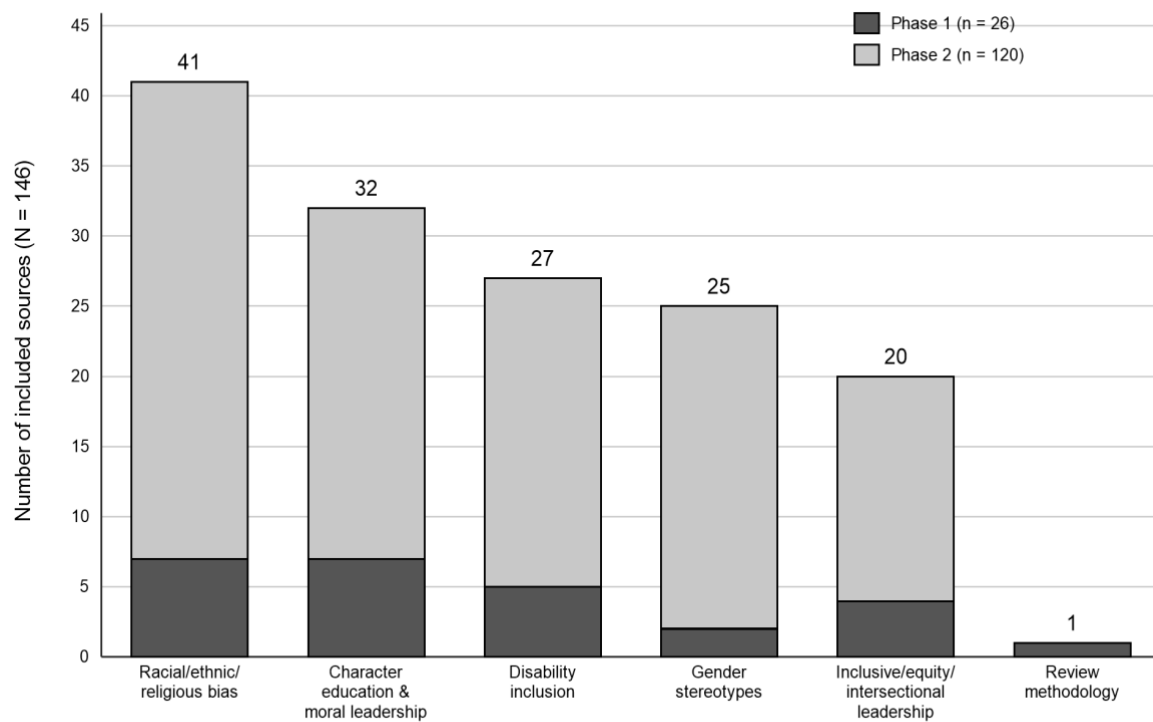


Figure 2. Thematic Distribution of the 146 Sources Included in the Review, by Search Phase

Table 3. Data Extraction Matrix: Methodological Designs and Contexts by Domain

Domain	Designs represented	Countries/regions studied	Key construct extracted
Disability inclusion	Systematic reviews (k = 38; k = 39; k = 72); meta-analyses (contact, self-efficacy, UDL);	13 countries (principal review); USA; Finland;	Accountable, sustained leadership

Domain	Designs represented	Countries/regions studied	Key construct extracted
	controlled intervention; surveys (n = 243; n = 1,477); qualitative principal studies	Australia; Indonesia; Netherlands; Israel	commitment; “inclusive consciousness”
Racial/ethnic/religious bias	Systematic reviews (k = 62; k = 418 experiments); PISA 2018 analysis (60 countries); field and video experiments (n = 390; n = 1,339); ethnographies	USA; Europe; 36 cultures (contact meta-analysis); Indonesia (Yogyakarta, Kalimantan, Medan)	Institutionalized anti-bias practice; egalitarian institutional culture
Gender stereotypes	Large-sample survey (n = 1,800 principals); systematic reviews (Africa; k = 82; k = 71); meta-analyses (glass cliff); textbook content analyses; qualitative interviews	8 countries (WMS); Pakistan; Africa; Indonesia; South Africa; Poland; Germany	Structural/organizational barrier; role incongruity; counter-stereotypical exemplars
Intersectional leadership	Qualitative case studies; national datasets (n = 11,353; n = 3,939); conceptual frameworks (DisCrit, intersectional leadership)	USA; England; South Africa	Compounding exclusion; race-evasive compliance
Character education & leadership theory (cross-cutting)	Meta-analyses (k = 214; k = 424); systematic reviews; controlled curriculum evaluation (n = 1,226); conceptual reviews	International; England; Indonesia	Knowledge-action gap; practical wisdom; belongingness + uniqueness; servant orientation

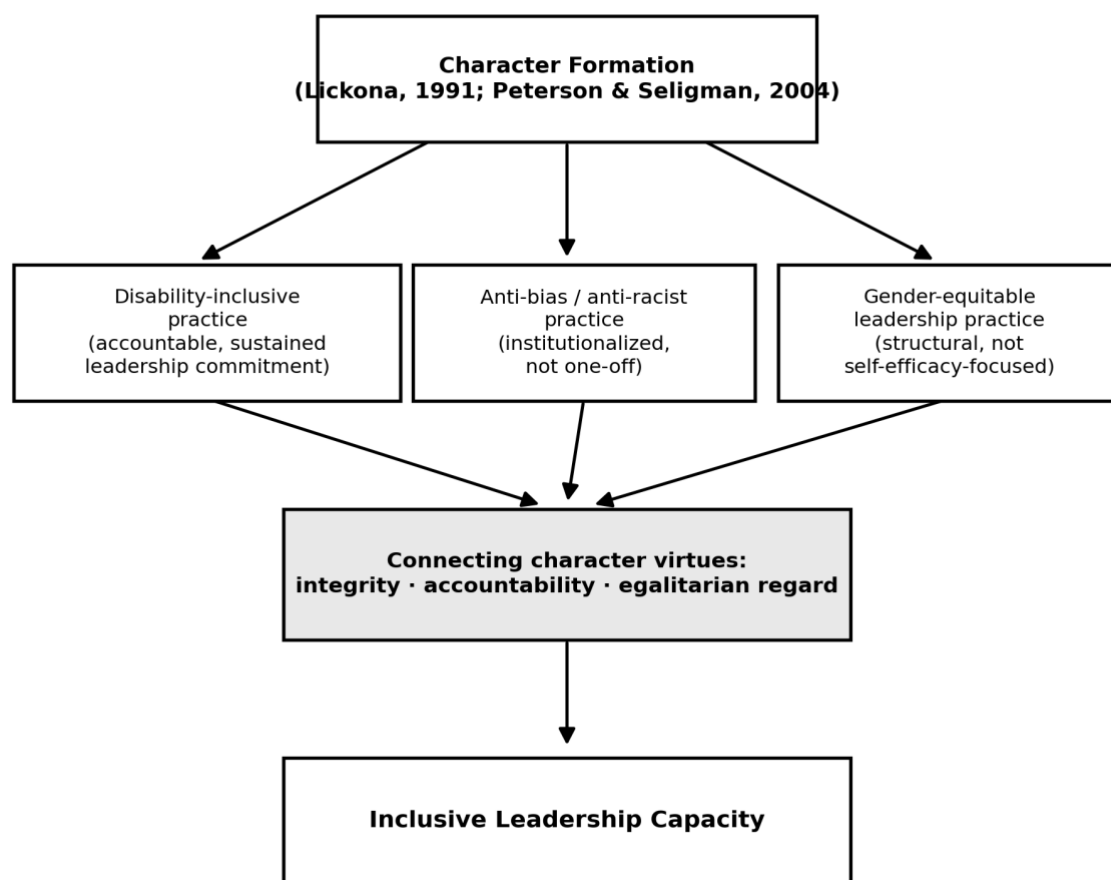


Figure 3. Integrative Model of Character Education for Inclusive Leadership

Conclusion

This review synthesized 146 verified sources, identified in two search phases, to examine how character education can support inclusive school leadership across three domains that are usually studied separately: disability inclusion, racial, ethnic, and religious bias, and gender stereotypes in leadership. Three domain-specific findings emerged. Disability-inclusive schooling depends on sustained, accountable leadership practice, which effective principals describe as an inclusive consciousness, rather than on accessibility policy alone. Reductions in racial, ethnic, and religious bias depend on anti-bias commitments embedded in leadership and curriculum over time and supported by egalitarian institutional cultures, rather than on light-touch training events. Gender stereotypes in educational leadership persist because of structural double standards and role-incongruity bias rather than because of any deficit in women’s leadership capability. A fourth finding, made visible by the expanded corpus, is that the three forms of exclusion compound at their intersections through shared institutional mechanisms. Across all domains, the same character virtues, integrity, accountability, and an egalitarian orientation toward difference, recurred as the conditions under which formally correct policy actually translated into inclusive practice, and the same knowledge-action gap recurred as the principal obstacle, yielding the integrative model presented in Figure 3.

The practical suggestion that follows is not that Indonesian schools need a further, separate character-education module on “leadership” alongside existing modules on disability awareness, tolerance, and gender equality, but that these should be redesigned as a single integrated strand built around the shared virtues this review identifies, with school-leadership preparation treating integrity, accountability, and egalitarian regard as transferable competencies applied consistently across disability, ethnicity, religion, and gender. For policymakers, this implies auditing character-

education materials, including the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile, and principal-training curricula for fragmentation across these domains, consolidating them where the underlying virtue content overlaps, and reviewing textbooks and exemplar narratives for the representation of women, people with disabilities, and minority communities in leadership roles. For school leaders and teacher-preparation institutions, it implies treating bias-awareness training as necessary but insufficient and pairing it with structures of ongoing accountability of the kind DeMatthews et al. and Legette et al. describe, with sustained intergroup and disability contact, and with multi-session, peer-engaged formats, since awareness alone was repeatedly found not to predict changed practice. For future research, the thin engagement of gender-focused sources with character-education theory suggests a need for primary research connecting character education to gender-equitable school leadership, ideally using Indonesian school-level data; intervention studies comparing integrated strands with domain-specific modules, and validation of measures of inclusive-leadership disposition for the Indonesian context, would test the proposed model most directly. Finally, rather than assuming that awareness-raising, capacity-building, and structural reform proceed in a fixed universal order, program designers should diagnose which of the three is the binding constraint in their own setting, since the reviewed literatures suggest that this constraint differs across domains and contexts.

This review is subject to limitations that qualify these conclusions. The search and screening process was conducted by a single reviewer using academic search engines and open bibliographic databases rather than a multi-reviewer team with direct export access to Scopus or Web of Science, which limits the precision of the identification-stage counts reported in Figure 1 and means that the corpus of 146 sources, while individually verified, should be read as a purposively saturated sample rather than an exhaustive census of the field. The reliance on abstracts and published conclusions for second-phase sources, adopted as a safeguard against over-interpretation, also means that methodological quality was not formally appraised study by study. Much of the strongest evidence on racial bias and intersectional leadership originates in the United States and Europe, and its transfer to Indonesia's ethnic and religious landscape should be treated as a hypothesis to be tested rather than an established fact. The illustrative use of General Sudirman's biography, while grounded in an existing peer-reviewed historical-leadership source, remains an interpretive device rather than independent empirical evidence for the review's claims, and should not be read as such. Despite these limitations, the convergence of independent, domain-specific literatures on a common character profile, a convergence that held when the corpus was expanded more than fivefold, offers a reasonably robust basis for the integrative recommendation this review makes: that character education aimed at producing genuinely inclusive future leaders needs to treat disability, race and ethnicity, religion, and gender not as separate units of instruction, but as applications of the same underlying character formation.

Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the institutional support of Universitas Insan Cita Indonesia in facilitating this research, and thanks the anonymous reviewers of *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter* for their constructive feedback during the review process. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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