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Ideological Integration in Higher Education: Insights from Indonesia's Leading State Universities

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ABSTRACT

Growing concerns over declining character values among Indonesian university students drive this study, which asserts that ideology-based character development model at two prominent public universities effectively enhance student integrity, ethics, and social responsibility. By analyzing these institutional strategies through interviews and document analysis, the research highlights how leadership values, social responsibility, and integrity are strengthened via ideology-based model. The findings indicate that these models boost ethical awareness and leadership skills, embedding national values in campus life. The study urges further research to validate these findings and provides universities with actionable guidance on reinforcing student character in the age of digital transformation.

Keywords: character development, ideological integration, leading state university, national values, university ideology

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INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of digital transformation has contributed to the erosion of character values among university students, as they are influenced by the influx of diverse external information and cultural factors. Higher education institutions, as centers for personal and intellectual development, face significant challenges in preserving and strengthening character ideology through activities such as school programs (Bridges, 2020). Universities must respond to systemic changes by formulating strategic missions that require support, training, and resource mapping to ensure effective, efficient, and equitable learning-teaching processes (Vicars, 2020; Saleh et al., 2020). Empirical studies report a decline in character values within university environments, as evidenced by reduced academic honesty (Baker et al., 2011; MacLeod & Eaton, 2020), increased incidents of bullying (Vaill et al., 2020, 2023), and student involvement in criminal cases (Burton et al., 2024; Ott & McTier, 2020). This trend highlights the need for universities to serve not only as academic institutions but also as key agents in character formation (Pabbajah et al., 2020). In Indonesia, the decadence of moral and character values among students is particularly concerning, as students face complex social, political, and cultural challenges that test their ethical standards and integrity. Manifestations of this decline, such as academic dishonesty, lack of empathy, and reduced social responsibility, indicate the urgent need for character development in higher education (Abdullah et al., 2019). Therefore, universities are responsible for fostering both intellectual growth and students' ethical development.

Extensive research on character education has produced various strategies to promote ethical values in educational settings. Several studies focus on incorporating character education into university curricula, often through structured, value-based courses such as the DACDUA approach (Haniah et al., 2020; Saefulloh et al., 2021; Juhansar et al., 2025). Additional studies highlight the pivotal role of lecturers and counselors as role models, exemplifying integrity, professionalism, and social responsibility (Mujiyanto, 2022; Usanto et al., 2023; Li & Chen, 2026). Aligning character education with a university's values and culture is also identified as a means to establish a robust foundation for character development (Bai & Balinas, 2024). However, character education is frequently confined to specific courses, such as religious studies (Tobroni et al., 2020; Alimron et al., 2023; Evi Gusliana & Nurlela, 2022), and is not yet fully integrated across all academic disciplines. Although the significance of lecturers as role models is acknowledged (Wei & Yang, 2026; Miller et al., 2022; Astuti et al., 2023), limited research exists on leveraging university ideologies to guide character education. Consequently, comprehensive systems rooted in institutional ideology are still underdeveloped.

This study aims not only to respond to earlier research but also to examine the ideology-based character development models implemented by two leading

state universities in Indonesia. By exploring how these universities integrate their core ideologies and values into the framework of character education, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of effective character-building strategies as conceptualized by the institutions. The analysis aims to show practical lessons and recommendations that can serve as a model for other institutions interested in ideology-based approaches to character development. Furthermore, it seeks to identify strategies that higher education institutions can employ to strengthen students' character through institutional ideological approaches. By leveraging the ideological values upheld by the universities, this study aspires to foster an educational environment conducive to cultivating more robust student character, harmonizing local values with nationally integrated principles.

This study assumes that an ideology-based approach within higher education can serve as an effective tool for strengthening students' character. The ideology of a university, which reflects its vision, mission, and core values, is believed to provide a foundation for addressing the challenges posed by the decadence of character and moral values. By aligning character education with institutional values, universities can create an environment that reinforces ethical principles and social responsibility. In other words, character education driven by ideology can lead to more integrated and lasting impacts on students' character, aligning individual growth with broader societal values. Consequently, students' character can be developed more deeply, sustainably, and in a way that is harmonized with the identity and ideology inherent in each higher education institution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Character Development

Character development is a process through which a set of values or character traits is adopted, internalized, and reflected in one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in everyday life (Rawana et al., 2011). It is not reliant on an explicit framework of character but on the role of social dynamics within a community, representing an interconnected process aimed at shaping character (Widyatmoko et al., 2020). This demonstrates how the dimensions of character are 'lived', 'practiced', and 'retrained' within any given context or setting (Edwards et al., 2024). Within educational institutions, the effective introduction and development of values, morals, ethics, and character in the younger generation is routinely entrusted to teachers, administrators, parents, and school members (Ellenwood, 2007). Alexander (2001) asserts that the principles of character building include responsibility, discipline, patience, and perseverance.

In the context of character development, the family is regarded as the primary and most influential environment for instilling character values (Subianto, 2013). Schools have evolved beyond serving as sites for knowledge dissemination

and now play a vital role in shaping attitudes, behaviors, character, and leadership among youth (Rokhman et al., 2014). Religious institutions are identified as more central to character development than other entities (Nurmalisa & Adha, 2016). Religious-based educational institutions, particularly, prioritize moral education (Jubba et al., 2021). In Protestant Christian schools in Jakarta, character formation is notably underscored by discipline (Hoon, 2014). Hoon further asserts that Christian educational environments can cultivate critical reflection and appreciation for diversity, thereby fostering a tolerant, peaceful, and multicultural Indonesia. In the United Kingdom, intersections between citizenship education and character education arise, especially when the latter is excessively broadened (Davies et al., 2005).

Higher Education Ideology

Higher education encompasses broader institutions, such as universities, which have distinct learning systems, degree-granting authority, and research excellence (Sintayehu, 2018). particularly, higher education is categorized into two types of institutions: (1) institutions based on fields of study and education systems, such as universities, colleges, institutes, academies, and polytechnics; and (2) institutions based on management systems, such as public universities (*Perguruan Tinggi Negeri*, PTN), private universities (*Perguruan Tinggi Swasta*, PTS), and vocational higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Kedinasan*, PTK) (Arifin, 2017; Handayani, 2015). All types of higher education institutions contribute to sustainable development, particularly by facilitating the dissemination of sustainability principles (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). The ideology, vision, mission, knowledge, and capacity to drive change are reflected in the sustainability values adopted by higher education institutions (Ramísio et al., 2019). The realization of sustainable and effective higher education has implications for students' competencies, careers, and even their well-being and economic prosperity at individual, institutional, and national levels (Schneider & Preckel, 2017).

As a learning-teaching institution, higher education upholds an ideology aimed at preparing students to become beneficial members of society (Chinta et al., 2016). Smolentseva (2023) identifies two fundamental dimensions of higher education's contribution to society. The first is the axiological dimension, which comprises three key elements: knowledge and skills, norms and values, and social values. The second is the phraseological dimension, which involves the internal dynamics of higher education institutions, including objects, processes, practices, and activities (Smolentseva, 2023). To realize these goals, higher education institutions require effective education management and governance (Wibowo, 2019). Each institution's management system includes programs, strategies, objectives, targets, methods, and forms of community engagement (Pochtovyuk, 2015). Technological innovation also plays a crucial role in advancing higher

education objectives (Daniela et al., 2018; Menon & Suresh, 2022; Singh & Hiran, 2022). Thus, the ideology of higher education serves as both a driving force and a source of knowledge for student development.

Leading State University

A leading university is characterized by well-defined institutional criteria and structured organizational traits that meet educational needs (Haryanto et al., 2022). The hallmark of excellence in a university reflects a system that demonstrates operational methods and performance outcomes aligned with its core values. This includes the capacity, connectivity, and active participation of educators and all other educational elements within the institution. Higney (2022) asserts that institutions shape individuals, and individuals, in turn, shape institutions. An institution generates social value through various innovations as part of its value proposition, reflecting the complexity of its inherent characteristics. Thus, the traits of an excellent university inherently establish an ecosystem that fosters ideal interactions to achieve social innovation goals (Gerli et al., 2022).

The hallmark of excellence in a university contributes significantly to both individual and institutional development and well-being. For instance, top public universities in the United States are encouraged to adopt more practical approaches and actively engage with their communities to foster and expand social mobility (Douglass, 2016). This excellence is also closely linked to the success rates of university graduates, supported by accreditation processes that aim to maintain institutional reputation. Mazzarol & Soutar (2012) argue that a “strong reputation” serves as a key competency for educational institutions to remain competitive in the global market. As noted by Casidy (2013), Brown and Geddes highlight that many universities engage in image reconstruction strategies to reposition themselves in the education market and enhance their reputations, striving for excellence. Therefore, reputation is not limited to the institution itself but also extends to its educators and students, and can be strategically developed.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case study to examine how two major Indonesian public universities, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta and Universitas Hasanuddin (UNHAS) in Makassar, develop student character through their respective ideologies. The qualitative method helps provide a deep understanding of how each university’s values shape its character education policies and practices. These universities were selected since they have strong, distinct ideologies and represent leading institutions in both western and eastern Indonesia. They are also known for weaving ideological values into their courses and university life.

This study analyzes ideology-based character development as implemented at two leading public universities in Indonesia: UGM and UNHAS. These universities are characterized by their strong ideological foundations in character education. UGM is renowned as a national and populist university that emphasizes the instillation of national values, whereas UNHAS is deeply rooted in local wisdom and excels in maritime affairs. This ideological distinction shapes their unique approaches to character development. Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, several key themes related to the character development approaches adopted by these universities were identified.

To achieve the research goals, the study gathered data through interviews with vice rectors, lecturers, and staff, as well as direct university observations and analysis of documents like curricula and policy statements. Thematic analysis was used to find key themes such as leadership, social responsibility, and integrity. Results were linked to existing theories and literature. To make the findings reliable, data from different sources were compared. The study faced some limits, like restricted access to sensitive information and possible bias from informants. To address this, the researcher kept informants' identities confidential and regularly checked the data. This approach aims to give a detailed look at how ideology-based character development works in Indonesian public universities and to suggest ways to improve character education elsewhere.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Ideological Values into the Curriculum and Student Activities

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in shaping students' character through both academic and non-academic programs (Tang et al., 2019), including the reinforcement of ideology. At UGM, national values such as Pancasila and nationalism are integrated into academic and non-academic activities, with the Community Service Program (KKN) focusing on character development, including teamwork, leadership, and social sensitivity, as an informant from the Faculty of Philosophy highlighted. This approach asserts that value-based nationalism fosters students' sense of national identity. At UNHAS, maritime ideology, rooted in the Bugis-Makassar people's cultural heritage, is used as the foundation for character development, with mentoring programs and social activities aimed at instilling values of respect and social responsibility. This approach reflects Ernst's (2024) findings that local values strengthen students' identity, and McKenna et al. 's (2021) argue that indigenous knowledge should be emphasized in education. This is also reflected in the statement by an informant, who noted that:

“When it was established, it aimed to address our own needs. Moreover, there are issues related to our identity as Indonesians in Eastern

Indonesia, which has its own set of values. Therefore, when we interact with others, people can recognize that this is someone from UNHAS and know that our students' character is like this.” (Interview, RM, 2025)

The statement demonstrates that the educational systems at both universities cannot be separated from their ideologies. Universitas Hasanuddin, for example, has a distinctive maritime culture, which serves as the foundation for shaping the university's vision and mission. When this concept was developed, the approach was based on efforts to understand and meet the specific needs, particularly those related to the identity of the people in Eastern Indonesia. This region has unique values that set it apart, making them essential to preserve and integrate into the institution's character. In this way, Universitas Hasanuddin (UNHAS) strives to create a distinctive identity that reflects both its cultural and academic heritage. As a result, when interacting outside the university, individuals from UNHAS can be recognized by their unique characteristics, which reflect these values, making them ambassadors of the excellence and identity of Eastern Indonesia as a whole. This is further emphasized by the informant who stated that:

“From this, a concept was born called “Benua Maritim Indonesia” (The Maritime Continent of Indonesia), which means that people from UNHAS view Indonesia from various aspects, both structural and archipelagic.” (Interview, RM, 2025)

From this line of thought, a concept known as Benua Maritim Indonesia (The Maritime Continent of Indonesia) emerged, shaping Universitas Hasanuddin (UNHAS) 's distinctive perspective on Indonesia. This concept reflects a holistic approach that integrates both structural and archipelagic perspectives to understand Indonesia as a maritime nation. By incorporating various aspects, this concept not only represents Indonesia's geographical wealth but also emphasizes the importance of managing resources and the diverse socio-cultural dynamics across the archipelagic region (Moeis et al., 2022). This approach highlights UNHAS's commitment to developing relevant academic insights and to contributing to national development, grounded in Indonesia's maritime characteristics. In implementing university ideology within the curriculum, this can be achieved by integrating ethics reinforcement. Ethics education is included in the courses of each study program as a compulsory university course, as one informant stated:

“Yes, because previously the ethics course was only available in a few study programs, but after we revised the curriculum in 2023, it was made applicable to all programs and became a compulsory course.” (Interview, RM, 2025)

This statement reinforces that the strengthening of morals within higher education cannot be separated from the underlying ideological foundation. Previously, the ethics course was taught only in certain study programs, so not all students had the opportunity to study it. However, with the revision of the 2023 curriculum, the ethics course has now been established as part of the core curriculum, mandatory for all study programs. This policy is designed to provide all students with a deep understanding of ethics, given the importance of moral values as the foundation for higher education and professionalism across various disciplines. This effort reflects the university’s commitment to producing graduates who are not only intellectually competent but also possess strong moral integrity. Ideological influences in higher education learning shape not only curricular content but also pedagogical approaches and institutional culture, as illustrated in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Ideology in Higher Education Learning

Informant	University	Position	Statements
Lecturer	UGM	Coordinator of MKWK (Compulsory Courses in the Curriculum)	“At UGM, national values and Pancasila are integrated into academic and student programs, with initiatives like the Community Service Program (KKN) teaching students to apply these principles in their interactions.”
Vice Rector 1	UNHAS	Vice Rector for Academic Affairs	“Rooted in maritime culture, UNHAS promotes local values like mutual cooperation and resilience. Through maritime activities, students learn about coastal and marine life, fostering openness, courage, and responsibility.”
Lecturer	UGM	A Professor of Faculty of Philosophy	“We teach nationalism and national values through courses like Pancasila Education and Nusantara Philosophy, and integrate discussions on national issues into the curriculum to foster students’ critical awareness.”
Lecturer	UNHAS	Coordinator of MKWK (Compulsory Courses in	“Maritime culture at UNHAS plays a key role, with frequent student engagement in coastal projects to promote understanding of maritime local wisdom. This fosters

Informant	University	Position	Statements
Lecturer	UGM	the Curriculum) Coordinator of MKWK (Compulsory Courses in the Curriculum)	resilience, empathy towards coastal communities, and ecological awareness.” “One challenge is aligning national values with the global context that students face today. However, we continue to strive to ensure that students maintain a character rooted in national identity, despite having a global perspective.”
Vice Rector 1	UNHAS	Vice Rector for Academic Affairs	“We use reflection and project-based assessment. After the maritime program, students are required to write a reflection on their experiences and how values such as hard work, courage, and solidarity were applied during the program.”
Lecturer	UGM	A Professor of Faculty of Philosophy	“As a national university, UGM strives to produce graduates with a strong sense of patriotism. Through the curriculum and community service activities, students are expected to understand the importance of their contributions to the nation.”
Lecturer	UNHAS	Coordinator of MKWK (Compulsory Courses in the Curriculum)	“Lecturers at UNHAS play a role as guardians of maritime culture. We often organize field lectures to coastal areas so that students can directly interact with fishing communities and understand the maritime cultural values we instill at UNHAS.”

Note: Data collected by authors in 2025

Involvement of Lecturers and Academic Faculties as Ideological Role Models

Lecturers and academic faculties play a crucial role as ideological role models in shaping students' academic and personal development (Vicars & Sesta, 2023). Their influence extends beyond knowledge transfer to instilling values, ethics, and ideology in students. At both UGM and UNHAS, lecturers serve as key

figures in promoting university ideological values. At UNHAS, lecturers integrate local Bugis-Makassar cultural values into daily interactions, while at UGM, they actively promote Pancasila values. Susanti and Wibowo (2019) emphasize the importance of lecturers' active involvement in character education, as students' understanding and application of these values are often strengthened through close relationships with faculty.

“For courses related to ethics, such as anti-corruption and sexual violence, we also provide these topics during the new student orientation.” (Interview, RM, 2025)

Courses focusing on ethical aspects, such as anti-corruption and sexual violence prevention, receive special attention from the outset of new student orientation. This material is intended to foster early moral and ethical awareness while providing students with a foundational understanding of integrity and respect for human rights. This approach not only seeks to create a healthy and ethical academic environment but also instills ethical principles relevant to societal life and future professionalism (MacGill et al., 2024). Through this approach, the institution strives to ensure that students have a strong moral foundation as part of holistic character development. Additionally, ethical reinforcement is also implemented through the Semester Learning Plans (RPS) for citizenship and religious courses, as one informant noted:

“Ethics and character-related topics are included in citizenship and religious education. For example, attitudes towards corruption and the obligation to pay taxes are incorporated into the semester learning plan (RPS).” (Interview, RM, 2025)

Ethics and character are integral components of the Citizenship and Religious Education courses. In these courses, students are provided with an understanding of moral values and the responsibilities of being a good citizen, including attitudes towards corruption and the importance of fulfilling tax obligations (Jover & Gozávez, 2024). These topics are explicitly integrated into the Semester Learning Plan (RPS) to ensure that these values are not only taught theoretically but also understood as principles relevant to daily life. Thus, the institution ensures the systematic development of students' character through a structured learning approach focused on strengthening ethics and social responsibility.

Collaborative Approach with the Community

Collaborative activities with the community have become a key approach adopted by both universities to strengthen students' character. The KKN program

at UGM and community service activities at UNHAS aim to cultivate empathy, responsibility, and social engagement among students. A UGM student remarked, “During KKN, we were confronted with challenging social realities requiring the application of character values such as empathy and leadership.” This aligns with research by Segal & Peled-Avram (2024), which demonstrates that student involvement in social activities enhances ethical awareness and adaptability to various social conditions. Field findings reveal that UGM and UNHAS provide inspirational success, particularly in developing students’ character through ideologies rooted in national values and local culture. The integration of these values into the curriculum, student activities, faculty involvement as role models, and collaborative community approaches has proven effective in nurturing ethically responsible students (Handoyo et al., 2020). However, challenges in program evaluation and comprehensive implementation highlight the need for a more adaptive and comprehensive approach. As part of the university’s efforts to shape students’ characters in response to societal needs, the continuation of the KKN program as a collaborative project, which contributes to academic evaluation, remains essential, as one informant expressed:

Yes, it is still available. The KKN course can be converted into other courses, and the evaluation is entrusted directly to each lecturer, who later connects it to the LPP, which oversees it. (Interview, RL, 2025)

This statement highlights that the Community Service Program (KKN) remains part of the curriculum but can be adapted into other relevant activities. The evaluation is the responsibility of the lecturers, with oversight from the Quality Assurance Agency (LPP) to ensure quality. This flexible approach maintains academic standards while supporting the development of student competencies (Aramburuzabala & Cerrillo, 2023). The models from these universities can inspire others to implement character development grounded in local and nationalist values, shaping students who are not only intellectually capable but also of high integrity and ready to contribute to society.

CONCLUSIONS

The decline in student character values presents a significant challenge for Indonesian universities, which must balance intellectual and ethical development. This study examines the ideological approach to character development at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) and Universitas Hasanuddin (UNHAS), focusing on the integration of ideological values into curricula and student activities to promote ethics, integrity, and social responsibility. The role of lecturers as ideological role models and student involvement in community service programs, such as KKN, further enhance character formation. The study

contributes to the field by proposing a new model of character education grounded in institutional ideology, demonstrating that both local and national values can serve as a strong foundation for character development. It aligns with the literature on the need for a multidimensional approach that integrates curriculum, university culture, and community collaboration. However, the study's limited sample size suggests the need for further research with larger datasets, particularly to evaluate the impact of such programs across a broader range of universities. Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs with mixed-method approaches and both quantitative and qualitative indicators, involving more universities with diverse ideological backgrounds to better capture the complexities of character development in Indonesia's varied regional and societal contexts.

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