

BASIC EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: PREPARING QUALITY HUMAN RESOURCES WITH CHARACTER FOR THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY; LITERATURE REVIEW METHOD

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Abstract

Basic education is the main foundation in preparing quality human resources that will determine the sustainability of national development. At this level, children are not only equipped with basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also instilled with moral, social, and national values as the basis for character building. This study uses a literature review method by examining various references in the form of books, scientific journals, and relevant policy documents to analyse the role of basic education in preparing quality human resources with character. The results of the study show that basic education contributes greatly to improving literacy, numeracy, emotional intelligence, and social skills, which are important indicators of human resource quality. On the other hand, basic education also serves to build national character by instilling the values of discipline, responsibility, mutual cooperation, tolerance, and integrity, which are essential for maintaining national unity. Therefore, strengthening basic education in terms of access, curriculum, teaching staff, and learning environment is a strategic investment to realise the vision of Indonesia Emas 2045 with a generation that is competent, has noble character, and is globally competitive.

Keywords: basic education, national development, human resources, quality, character, literature review.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental aspect of national development. Since ancient times, the quality of human resources has always been a determining factor in whether a country is able to compete and survive in the rapidly changing world. Education is not only a process of knowledge transfer, but also the formation of character, values, and culture that will be passed on to the next generation (Judijanto & Aslan, 2025) ; (Purike & Aslan, 2025) . In the Indonesian context, national development cannot be separated from the quality of human resources. Therefore, primary education, as the foundation of the entire national education system, has a very strategic position. It is at this stage that students are introduced to basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, as well as various moral and ethical values that will prepare them for their future lives (Sagala, 2024) .

Within the framework of national development, focusing on primary education is crucial because the quality of education during this period will determine the direction of a child's development in the next level of education. Children who receive a good primary education will be better prepared to face academic, social, and emotional challenges at the secondary and higher education levels (Komari & Aslan, 2025) ; (Firmansyah & Aslan, 2025a) ; (Firmansyah & Aslan, 2025b) . Conversely, a fragile basic education system can cause serious problems, such as low literacy rates, weak numeracy skills, and a lack of critical understanding of social issues. This ultimately results in a low-quality workforce, slow development, and low national competitiveness in the global arena. Empirical evidence from various countries shows that a nation's progress is generally directly proportional to the quality of its basic education (Aditya, 2024) .

In addition to preparing intellectually intelligent individuals, basic education also plays a significant role in shaping the character of the nation. Values such as honesty, discipline, tolerance, responsibility, and a spirit of mutual cooperation begin to be instilled at this stage. Children who grow up with a strong character foundation will become a generation that is not only competent but also has integrity in carrying out their roles in society (Sari, 2024a) . In the context of globalisation, which often brings challenges in the form of cultural liberalisation, technological penetration, and the degradation of traditional values, basic education serves as an important filter so that the younger generation can sift through foreign values without losing their national identity. Thus, basic education is not only a means of producing a superior workforce, but also a bastion of civilisation that preserves the nation's existence (Caroline & Aslan, 2025) .

Various studies have shown that the largest and most productive investment in education is in primary education. *Human capital* theory emphasises the importance of knowledgeable and skilled human capital as a determining factor in a country's economic growth (Sari, 2024a) . Without a strong primary education, development in other areas will struggle to flourish optimally. Children who lack a foundation in literacy and numeracy tend to have difficulty adapting to higher education or the modern job market. Therefore, strengthening primary education is no longer just a moral and social obligation, but a long-term development strategy oriented towards national competitiveness (Lestari, 2023) .

In the Indonesian context, significant challenges still plague the implementation of basic education. Classic problems such as the inequality of access to education between urban and rural areas, the uneven quality of teachers, limited school infrastructure, and the frequent changes to the curriculum often become obstacles in developing the quality of basic education (Elmahasina, 2025) . In addition, differences in the socio-economic conditions of the community mean that some children are unable to access basic education in its entirety. This has resulted in high dropout rates, low

literacy rates, and weak basic skills among some of Indonesia's younger generation. Given these conditions, a serious evaluation of the implementation of existing basic education policies is needed, as well as innovative steps to strengthen its position as the foundation of national development (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

On the other hand, the Indonesian government has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening basic education, including by mandating a 9-year basic education programme, which has now been extended to 12 years. This policy effort is in line with the mandate of Article 31 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution, which states that every citizen has the right to education (Kadrina, 2025). However, achieving the goals of basic education requires not only access policies, but also quality implementation. The quality of basic education must be ensured not only in terms of producing graduates quantitatively, but also in terms of producing students who are able to compete at the global level and have strong character as citizens. This means that the development of basic education must touch on the dimensions of curriculum, teaching staff, learning processes, and assessments that are oriented towards competence and character (Putra, 2022).

Basic education is also closely related to national cultural development. Every child is born with different potentials, and basic education as the initial formal phase can be a space to appreciate, develop, and integrate the nation's cultural diversity. In primary school, children are introduced to regional songs, regional languages, the history of the archipelago, and national values that strengthen their sense of nationalism (Aslan & Sidabutar, 2025); (Rokhmawati et al., 2025). Thus, basic education becomes a vehicle for learning about national identity while building unity in diversity. In the context of national development, this national character is as important as academic ability, because a great nation is not only superior in technological knowledge, but also strong in values, identity, and culture (Putra, 2022).

The role of teachers in primary education cannot be separated from the success in shaping the quality and character of children. Teachers are not merely conveyors of information, but also role models, guides in moral values, and motivators in the development process of students. Research shows that positive emotional relationships with teachers during primary education can shape students' social attitudes, learning motivation, and even long-term achievements (Yandri, 2022a). Therefore, strengthening the competence of primary school teachers in terms of professionalism, pedagogy, and personality is the key to successfully building a generation of high-quality and characterful individuals. Without teachers of integrity and high quality, primary education will not be able to deliver the optimal results expected. Apart from the teacher factor, the involvement of parents and the community is also very important in supporting the success of primary education. The education process does not only take place at school, but is also reinforced in the family and community environment (Zuhdi, 2014). Children who receive full support from their

parents in learning tend to have higher motivation, a disciplined attitude, and better academic achievement. At the community level, a safe, harmonious social atmosphere that values education will facilitate the growth of a generation that is eager to seek knowledge. This shows that basic education cannot be separated from the broader social system, and the success of basic education is actually the responsibility of all parties, not just the government or schools (Cahyono & Aslan, 2025) .

Entering the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution and 5.0 society, the urgency of basic education is increasing. Children need to be equipped with critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration skills from an early age. Basic education should not only emphasise conventional cognitive aspects, but also the ability to deal with technological changes, adapt to digital culture, and strengthen character so as not to be swept away by the negative currents of globalisation. Thus, basic education must be designed not only as a space for learning basic knowledge, but also as a laboratory for shaping modern humans who are intelligent, adaptive, and moral (Saputra et al., 2024) .

Strengthening primary education is also in line with the Indonesia Emas 2045 vision, in which Indonesia is expected to become a developed country with a large economy and a highly competitive society. To achieve this, the preparation of quality human resources is a must. Superior human resources are born from a long process that begins in primary education (Zuhdi, 2014) . Children who receive good learning, strong moral support, and a conducive educational environment during primary school will develop into a productive, innovative, and highly principled generation. Thus, the quality of primary education provided today will greatly determine the quality of the Indonesian nation in the coming decades (Suwartini, n.d.) .

Based on this description, it is clear that primary education has a strategic role as the foundation for national development. Significant, serious, and continuous attention to primary education is a long-term investment that supports the creation of a generation with character and quality. Through a literature review, this study will discuss the role of primary education in preparing quality human resources and shaping the character of the nation.

Research Method

The research method used in this study is library research, which is research that utilises literature sources as the main data for analysis. Data was obtained from scientific books, indexed journals, academic articles, national education policy documents, and previous research results relevant to the themes of basic education, national development, human resource quality, and character building (Elijah & Aslan, 2025) . The analysis was conducted using *content analysis* techniques, namely examining, selecting, and synthesising findings from various literature to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of basic education as the foundation of national

development. With this approach, the research did not collect field data but focused on exploring ideas, theories, policies, and empirical evidence that had been produced previously for critical and comprehensive analysis (Ferrari, 2020).

Results and Discussion

Basic Education and Human Resource Quality

Primary education plays a vital role in shaping the next generation with a solid foundation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The primary school age period is a critical phase in a child's development that determines the quality of their intellectual, emotional, social, and moral growth (Linda, 2020). At this stage, learning is not limited to reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also includes the process of introducing basic life values that will shape the identity of students. Thus, primary education is the starting point for the formation of human resources (HR) quality, which will determine the nation's competitiveness in the future (Aslan & Rasmita, 2025); (Pongpalilu & Aslan, 2025).

One important aspect of basic education is literacy. Reading, writing and numeracy are fundamental skills that students must master. The low level of basic literacy in Indonesia has long been a concern, especially given the results of international surveys such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which show low achievements compared to other countries. If the literacy problem is not addressed in primary education, the academic gap at higher levels of education will widen. Therefore, improving basic literacy is a strategic step in ensuring the quality of human resources who are ready to face global competition (Linda, 2020).

In addition to literacy, primary education also plays a role in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. With an active, creative, and learner-centred approach to learning, children are encouraged to understand concepts, explore experiences, and dare to ask questions. This shapes analytical thinking from an early age, which is essential in facing the complexities of modern life. A nation that wants to progress needs a generation that can not only memorise, but also process knowledge to innovate and create solutions (Sudarma, 2022).

The quality of human resources is also determined by the mental and emotional health of students. Basic education, through learning activities and social interactions at school, plays an important role in shaping mental resilience, social skills, and the ability to manage emotions. If children are accustomed to a supportive, inclusive, and appreciative educational environment, they will grow up to be confident individuals who are able to collaborate well (Renyaan et al., 2025). This is invaluable because the future world of work demands communication skills, teamwork, and high emotional intelligence.

In addition to cognitive and emotional aspects, the development of psychomotor skills is also emphasised in primary education. Practical activities, sports,

artistic skills, and simple technology training enhance physical coordination while fostering creativity in students. Children who actively hone their physical skills from an early age will be better prepared to face more complex levels of education. It is this balance of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development that produces high-quality human resources as a whole (Suryadi & Aslan, 2025) ; (Fitriyanti & Aslan, 2025) .

Improving the quality of human resources through basic education cannot be separated from the quality of teachers. Teachers are the main agents who guide the learning process and instil educational values in children. Teachers who have good pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies will be able to guide students to develop their full potential. Therefore, teacher training and professional development programmes must be a major concern for the government so that the quality of basic education can truly produce a superior generation (Sudarma, 2022) .

The basic education curriculum also plays an important role in guiding the quality of human resources. A curriculum that burdens students with excessive material will only encourage memorisation without understanding. Conversely, a competency-oriented curriculum—such as literacy, numeracy, life skills, and character—can produce a generation that is ready to face the challenges of real life (Syadiah, 2009) . The Merdeka Curriculum currently being implemented in Indonesia seeks to address these challenges by encouraging project-based learning, emphasising numeracy literacy, and strengthening character. In addition to the curriculum, basic education facilities and infrastructure also have a major impact on the quality of human resources (Aslan & Nur, 2025) ; (Aslan & Naba, 2025) . Schools with adequate facilities such as comfortable classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and access to technology will be better able to foster an optimal learning experience. Unfortunately, in many remote areas of Indonesia, limited facilities remain a major obstacle. The equitable distribution of basic education facilities is an important challenge so that the quality of human resources in all regions can develop equally (Syadiah, 2009) .

Basic education is also an important instrument in reducing structural poverty. Children from poor families who receive quality basic education have a greater opportunity to improve their standard of living through further education. Basic education enables them to acquire the literacy and numeracy skills needed to find better jobs, thereby facilitating positive social mobility. Thus, investment in basic education not only builds human resources but is also part of a strategy to reduce poverty and social inequality (Muharrom, 2025) .

From an economic development perspective, the quality of basic education directly contributes to national productivity. Workers with good literacy and numeracy skills can work more efficiently, receive training more easily, and adapt to technological changes. Developed countries with superior human resources show that their commitment to basic education is the key to sustainable economic growth. From this,

it can be seen that improving basic education is not merely an academic issue, but a national economic and political strategy (Zulkarnaen, 2024) .

The role of basic education is also increasingly significant in addressing the demographic bonus experienced by Indonesia. A large productive-age population can be a blessing if accompanied by competent human resources. However, if the majority of the younger generation lacks adequate basic skills and knowledge, the demographic dividend could instead become a social burden. Therefore, strengthening basic education is key to transforming the potential of the young population into a driving force for national development (Wiratama, 2023) .

It is undeniable that globalisation and technological developments present new challenges. Children who are currently undergoing basic education will one day face a world dominated by artificial intelligence, big data, and robotics. If basic education does not instil the foundations of digital literacy, critical thinking, and technological ethics from an early age, they will find it difficult to compete with global human resources. This is where the urgency of equipping the younger generation with basic competencies relevant to the demands of the future becomes apparent (Mahardani & Basalamah, 2018) .

The relationship between basic education and the quality of human resources can also be seen from a social development perspective. Primary school is not only a place for academic learning, but also a space for social interaction where children learn to appreciate differences, work together with friends, and internalise social norms. Quality human resources are not only intellectually intelligent, but also capable of becoming democratic, tolerant citizens who care about their environment. Therefore, the integration of character education in primary education is very important in order to develop well-rounded individuals (Setyawan, 2025) .

As a foundation, primary education also has a long-term role. The impact of the quality of primary education is not only seen during school years but also shapes a child's development into adulthood. Children with a strong educational foundation will find it easier to continue their education, be more productive in the world of work, and have the potential to contribute positively to community development. Conversely, if children lose the opportunity to obtain quality basic education, the negative consequences will last a lifetime and have an impact on the development of the nation as a whole (Faizi, 2022) .

Efforts to improve basic education to produce superior human resources require collaboration from all parties. The government, schools, teachers, parents, and the community must support each other in creating a conducive educational atmosphere. Without such cooperation, it will be difficult to realise truly quality basic education. Basic education cannot be viewed solely as a matter for schools, but as the collective responsibility of the entire nation in preparing for the future of the country (Jayadi et al., 2023) ; (Aslan & Azizan, 2025) .

Thus, basic education is a strategic instrument in preparing quality human resources that will determine the direction of national development. Strengthening education at this level will determine Indonesia's success in facing global challenges, managing the demographic bonus, and realising the vision of Indonesia Emas 2045. Investing in basic education means investing in the nation's competitiveness. Through an appropriate curriculum, qualified teachers, adequate facilities, and community support, basic education can produce a generation that is intelligent, healthy, skilled, adaptive, has integrity, and is ready to lead Indonesia towards sustainable progress.

Basic Education and Character Building

Basic education is not only about imparting knowledge, reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, but also a crucial stage in shaping the character of the nation's generation. At this stage, children are in the golden age of personality development, where moral, ethical, and social values are most easily instilled. Therefore, primary school is not merely an academic institution, but also a vehicle for instilling good behaviour that will remain with them throughout their lives. The character formed from an early age will become the basis of an individual's personality, which plays a role in building a civilised society and nation (Sagala, 2024).

Within the family, a child's character begins to be shaped through the example set by their parents. However, when they enter primary education, the child's socialisation space expands, and the school takes on an important role as the second educator after the home. Teachers, as the main figures in school, not only function to teach subject matter but also serve as models of moral behaviour. Teachers' exemplary attitudes of honesty, discipline, responsibility, and respect for others will have a major influence on the internalisation of character values in children. Therefore, the quality of teachers is very important for the success of character education in primary schools (Aditya, 2024).

Character education at the primary level is also reinforced through integration into the curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum, for example, not only emphasises academic achievement but also places the development of the Pancasila Student Profile as the orientation of learning. Religious values, mutual cooperation, tolerance, nationalism, and independence are sought to be internalised by children. This shows that primary education is actually a phase of instilling national values while preparing a generation with strong character to face global challenges (Sari, 2024b).

Discipline is one of the most important aspects to instil from primary school. Children who are accustomed to arriving on time, doing their homework, and following classroom rules will carry these habits into adulthood and the world of work. Discipline strengthens a nation's work ethic because orderly and responsible individuals will increase national productivity (Lestari, 2023). Primary schools play a crucial role in acclimatising children to consistent routines, from study hours and dress codes to daily

etiquette. In addition to discipline, a sense of responsibility is also essential. Through group assignments, extracurricular activities, and roles in the classroom, children learn to fulfil individual and collective responsibilities (Elmahasina, 2025). Responsibility is not only academic, but also social ethics, such as maintaining environmental cleanliness, living orderly, and respecting others. Children who have a sense of responsibility will grow into adults who are able to carry out their duties well, both in community life and in managing the country (Nasution & Aslan, 2025); (Sampe & Aslan, 2025).

Basic education is also the starting point for developing tolerance and mutual respect. Classroom life, which brings together children from diverse social, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, is an important multicultural laboratory. In these classrooms, children are taught to respect their peers' differences, work together without discrimination, and build social solidarity. Basic education that instils the value of tolerance will create a generation that is ready to maintain Indonesia's unity in its rich diversity (Elmahasina, 2025).

The character of mutual cooperation is also a hallmark of Indonesian character education. Basic education through group work, joint projects, and school social activities provides a real arena for children to learn to work together. If instilled from an early age, this habit will produce a generation that is not selfish and understands that personal success cannot be separated from togetherness (Rahmawati et al., 2023). At the national level, this spirit of mutual cooperation becomes the spirit of collective strength that enables society to face challenges together. In addition to social values, basic education contributes directly to the formation of independent character. Children are trained to organise their school equipment, complete tasks without dependence, and dare to make decisions in learning activities. Independence that is nurtured from an early age will train individuals' fighting spirit and self-confidence in the future. An independent nation is born from individuals who have been accustomed to taking initiative since childhood. Therefore, strengthening independent character must be an important part of basic education (Kadrina, 2025).

Integrity is also a character value that must be upheld from primary education. Honesty, consistency between words and actions, and fairness need to be introduced to children from an early age. For example, by teaching children not to cheat, to speak honestly in various situations, and to act fairly in games and group assignments. Human resources with integrity are the nation's main asset in building a social and governmental system that is free from corruption and injustice (Putra, 2022).

Primary education can implement character education through habituation methods, educational games, and project-based learning methods. Character cannot be taught through theory alone, but must be practised in real-life contexts. Simple activities such as queuing in the canteen, taking turns to read, or keeping the classroom clean are practical examples of character values that will shape children's personalities.

Thus, character building in primary schools must be carried out in everyday life, not only in the classroom (Yandri, 2022a) .

The role of parents is also crucial to the success of character education. Primary schools only function for a few hours a day, while the family is the main environment in which children grow up. If schools instil positive character, but families do not support this, the internalisation process will be uneven. Therefore, collaboration between schools and families is absolutely necessary so that the character values instilled in schools can be reinforced in everyday life (Yandri, 2022b) .

A successful basic education that shapes positive character will produce a generation with noble morals. This is very important in facing global challenges, where many foreign values enter and have the potential to erode national identity. With a strong character foundation, the younger generation will not be easily swayed, but will be able to filter global values in accordance with their nation's culture and ideology. Strong character will ultimately preserve cultural sovereignty while strengthening national identity (Zuhdi, 2014) .

Furthermore, character education from an early age is also closely related to national resilience. A generation with strong character, such as honesty, discipline, tolerance, mutual cooperation, and independence, is a socio-psychological factor that strengthens national unity. In Indonesian history, national character strength has been an important asset when facing colonialism and national crises. Therefore, primary education that fails to instil character will weaken the foundations of nationality in the long term (Mudzakir & Aslan, 2025) ; (Zainudin & Aslan, 2025) .

Thus, it can be asserted that basic education has a strategic role in shaping the character of the younger generation, which will determine the direction of the nation. The values of discipline, responsibility, tolerance, mutual cooperation, independence, and integrity must be strengthened from the basic education stage so that children grow up to be individuals who are not only academically competent but also have noble personalities. A nation with a strong character will find it easier to achieve its national development goals and maintain its sovereignty amid global competition.

Conclusion

Primary education is a very important foundation in national development, because it is at this stage that children acquire basic skills in literacy, numeracy, social skills, as well as moral and character values. Through a meaningful learning process, basic education not only prepares children to continue to higher levels of education but also prepares them to become productive members of society. Improving the quality of basic education means strengthening the nation's competitiveness in the future, because intelligent, healthy, and competent human resources are the main capital in economic and social development.

In addition to quality, primary education also plays a strategic role in shaping the character of the nation's future generations. Values such as discipline, responsibility, mutual cooperation, integrity, and tolerance must be instilled from an early age so that children grow up to be individuals with noble character and a spirit of nationalism. Strong character serves as a bulwark for the nation in facing the challenges of globalisation, the penetration of foreign cultures, and moral crises that often threaten modern social life. By having a generation that is both competent and strong in character, Indonesia can ensure sustainable development that is not only technology-based but also imbued with humanity and patriotism.

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that the success of national development in the future is largely determined by how the state manages basic education today. Equal access to education, improving teacher quality, relevant curricula, and synergy between schools, families, and communities must continue to be strengthened. Investment in basic education is essentially a long-term investment towards the realisation of the Indonesia Emas 2045 vision. By strengthening basic education, the Indonesian nation can produce high-quality human resources with strong character, enabling the country to become advanced, highly competitive, and sovereign on the global stage.

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