

Teacher-Parent Collaboration in Strengthening Character Education in the Digital Era at the Elementary School Level

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Abstract

Character education at the elementary level has grown harder to sustain as children spend more of their lives on screens, and neither the school nor the family can shoulder the task alone. This study examines how teachers and parents collaborate to strengthen character education in the digital era, along with the factors that support and weaken that cooperation. The research used a qualitative descriptive approach at one elementary school, drawing on in-depth interviews with two teachers and three parents, participant observation, and document analysis, with findings verified through triangulation of source, technique, and time. Analysis followed the interactive stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Four collaborative practices emerged. Teachers and parents kept up steady two-way communication through real-time channels such as class messaging groups, supervised children's device use jointly across the classroom and the home, habituated character values through daily routines anchored in school rituals and home records, and modeled the digital conduct they expected children to adopt. The strength of the collaboration lay in its consistency, since a child met the same standard enforced in more than one setting. The main obstacle was not parental unwillingness but limited parental fluency with the platforms their children use. The study implies that shared digital supervision deserves recognition as a distinct area of home and school partnership, and it recommends that schools formalize collaboration through joint policy and invest in parents' digital literacy.

How to Cite:

Pulungan, I. M. E., Dalimunthe, S., Matondang, T. A., & Hamka. (2025). Teacher-Parent Collaboration in Strengthening Character Education in the Digital Era at the Elementary School Level. *Educazione: Journal of Education and Learning*, 3(1), 110–122.

Article History

Received : July 2025
Revised : August 2025
Accepted : November 2025

Keywords:

Character Education, Teacher-Parent Collaboration, Digital Era

INTRODUCTION

Children today learn to swipe a screen before they learn to write, and this reality has quietly rewritten what character education must contend with. Digital technology now reaches into nearly every hour of a child's day through mobile phones, social media, online games, and the open internet, offering easy access to knowledge while exposing children to content and habits that can pull their moral development off course (Gelman et al., 2018; Rawassizadeh et al., 2019). Elementary school marks the stage where character takes its earliest and most lasting shape, so the pressures of a digital childhood land hardest precisely where children are least equipped to manage them (Shoshani & Schwartz, 2018). Problems such as cyberbullying, plagiarism, and the spread of hoaxes are no longer distant concerns but daily risks that character education is expected to answer (Kaur & Saini, 2023; Prashar et al., 2024; Yavich & Davidovitch, 2024). What a child becomes is shaped by the home, the school, the surrounding society, and the child's own disposition, which means no single institution can carry the task of character formation alone (Nucci, 2019; Theron & van Breda, 2021).

A growing body of scholarship converges on one point: strong character formation

depends on the family and the school working as partners rather than as separate authorities. Empirical evidence from a large study of Chinese adolescents shows that positive parenting and supportive teacher and peer relationships each make distinct contributions to character attributes such as self-discipline and treating others well, which implies that family and school function as complementary assets rather than substitutes (Zhu et al., 2022). The digital environment, however, has complicated this partnership in ways older models did not anticipate. Research on home and school connections argues that meaningful engagement between teachers and parents has grown more contested and more difficult as learning spreads across physical and online settings, leaving parents oddly invisible in the very policies that call for their involvement (Hutchison et al., 2020). A study of Chinese parents during home-based online learning sharpens the point further, showing that digital technology redistributes the labor of education toward parents and unsettles the boundary that once kept teaching a school affair, so that parents come to feel a shared responsibility they had not carried before (Chen et al., 2025). Read together, these studies establish that collaboration matters, that the digital era strains it, and that the burden increasingly falls on parents who may be unprepared to bear it.

What these studies leave open is the question this research takes up. The existing work tends to treat collaboration either at the level of broad policy or in the specific setting of pandemic-driven remote schooling, and it says comparatively little about how teachers and parents actually coordinate, day to day, to steer a child's digital conduct toward good character in an ordinary elementary school. The mechanisms remain thinly described. We know that partnership helps, but not much about the concrete practices through which it operates once devices are woven into the fabric of school and home life. This study addresses that gap by examining collaboration not as an abstract principle but as a set of observable practices, and by treating the shared supervision of children's digital activity as a distinct area of cooperation that established partnership frameworks tend to fold into general communication rather than naming in its own right.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how teachers and parents collaborate to strengthen character education at the elementary level in the digital era, together with the factors that support and hinder that collaboration. Rather than measuring outcomes, the research seeks a close understanding of the forms the cooperation takes, the channels through which it runs, and the obstacles that weaken it in practice. This focus lets the study extend the partnership literature into digital territory, specifying how communication, supervision, habituation, and role modeling are enacted jointly across the home and school boundary. The relevance of this inquiry is both academic, in refining how school and family collaboration is understood for a digital age, and practical, in surfacing what schools and families can do to guide children toward responsible and ethical use of the technology that now surrounds them.

The central argument developed here is that the effectiveness of character education in a digital childhood rests less on the strength of any single intervention than on the consistency a child encounters when the same standard is upheld at school and at home. Where a teacher's guidance in the classroom is matched by a parent's reinforcement at home, moral expectations begin to feel settled rather than situational. The following account draws on interviews, observation, and documentation at a single elementary school to trace how this consistency is built in practice, and where it breaks down. The method section that follows sets out how the study was designed and how its data were gathered and analyzed.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, chosen because the aim was to understand and portray the collaboration between teachers and parents in its natural setting rather than to measure it (Mathope et al., 2023; Stenberg & Maaranen, 2022). A qualitative design suited a question about how cooperation actually unfolds, since the meaning of practices such as supervision or role modeling lies in how the people involved carry them out

and talk about them, not in numerical frequency (Williams, 2021; Zhang, 2024; Ziskin, 2019). The research was conducted at one elementary school, and informants were chosen through purposive sampling, meaning that participants were selected because they were knowledgeable about and actively involved in strengthening students' character education (Hasmarita et al., 2023). The final informants were two class teachers and three parents of students, a composition that allowed the perspectives of both the school and the home to be weighed against each other, as set out in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Profile of Research Informants

Code	Role	Interview Time	Focus of Information
G1	Class teacher	Morning (school hours)	Communication, habituation, and role modeling
G2	Class teacher	Morning (school hours)	Supervision of digital use and digital literacy
OT1	Parent of a student	Afternoon (outside work hours)	Teacher-parent communication and home behavior
OT2	Parent of a student	Evening (at home)	Supervision of device use at home
OT3	Parent of a student	Midday (at home)	Role modeling and inhibiting factors

Source: Research data, 2024.

Table 1 identifies the five informants whose accounts form the interview basis of this study, drawn deliberately from both sides of the collaboration so that no finding rests on a single vantage point. The two class teachers spoke to how character work was organized within the school, while the three parents reported on what happened once the child returned home, which let each claim from one side be weighed against the other. The varied interview times were not incidental but part of the study's time triangulation, since teachers were interviewed during the school day and parents in the afternoon and evening when they were with their children (Natow, 2020). This spread of informants and moments is what allowed the study to test whether the practices reported in the findings held consistently across different voices and settings rather than surfacing in only one account.

Data were gathered through three techniques so that each finding could be checked against more than one source (Smit et al., 2020; Spry & Pich, 2020). In-depth interviews with teachers and parents drew out how character education was implemented, what obstacles arose, and what efforts were made to sustain it in a digital environment. Participant observation was carried out at school during lessons and breaks to see the collaboration as it happened, from the morning gadget locker routine to a teacher's on-the-spot correction of a student's device use. Documentation supplemented these accounts with material evidence, including screenshots of the class WhatsApp group, the revised Student Code of Conduct, and the daily control logbook kept between home and school. Because the three techniques were applied at different times of day, in the morning at school and in the evening at home, the data captured the collaboration across the settings where it actually operated.

The collected data were analyzed through the interactive stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Bingham, 2023; Nicmanis, 2024). In the reduction stage, the raw interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were sorted and simplified to retain only what bore on the research focus, so that the volume of material became manageable without losing what mattered. The retained data were then displayed as descriptive narratives and grouped into themes, which made the patterns across informants and techniques easier to read and interpret. From these displayed patterns, conclusions were drawn and then tested against the full body of evidence before being treated as findings, rather than being accepted on a first reading. To secure the credibility of the analysis, the study applied triangulation of source, technique, and time: accounts from teachers and parents were compared against each other, interviews were cross-checked against observation and documentation, and practices reported in the morning at school were confirmed against those observed in the evening at home. This

layered checking is what allowed the themes reported in the following section to be treated as consistent findings rather than as the impression of any single informant, moment, or method.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation conducted at the elementary school, the data indicate that collaboration between teachers and parents is decisive in strengthening students' character education in the digital era. This collaboration was sustained through mutually supportive activities across both the home and school domains, and it extended well beyond classroom instruction into habituation, supervision, communication, and role modeling in daily life. To secure the credibility of these findings, the data were triangulated across three sources: teacher informants (G1, G2) and parent informants (OT1, OT2, OT3), and across three techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, gathered at different times of day. The findings are organized below into four themes that emerged consistently across all data sources.

Communication between Teachers and Parents in Strengthening Character Education

Communication functioned as the operational spine of teacher–parent collaboration, determining whether the other forms of cooperation could be coordinated at all. Rather than being confined to formal reporting moments such as the distribution of report cards, communication here was continuous, bidirectional, and increasingly mediated by digital platforms. Teachers used the class WhatsApp group as a real-time channel for both flagging problems and recognizing positive behavior, while parents reciprocated by relaying observations of the child's conduct at home. This constant exchange allowed the two parties to align their expectations before minor behavioral concerns could escalate, positioning communication less as information transfer than as the mechanism through which a shared standard of conduct was negotiated and maintained across the home–school boundary.

The teacher informant described this channel as a routine instrument of evaluation rather than an occasional one. As G1 explained: *"We now rely heavily on the WhatsApp group. If a child starts to look addicted to playing on the phone in class, or an online assignment is not done, I immediately message the parent directly. We do this evaluation routinely, not only when report cards are issued"* (G1, Interview). This account was independently confirmed from the parents' side, indicating that the responsiveness was experienced, not merely intended. OT1 stated: *"That is right, the homeroom teacher is very active. Sometimes even at night, if there is important information, it is shared. So I know how my child behaves at school, and it connects with how he acts when using a device at home"* (OT1, Interview).

The documentation corroborated these converging accounts with material evidence of two-way exchange. A screenshot of the class WhatsApp group dated 15 October recorded the homeroom teacher sharing an article on the dangers of a harmful TikTok "challenge" trend and requesting that parents monitor their children's viewing history, to which several parents responded with thanks and a commitment to check their children's phones periodically (Documentation, WhatsApp Group Archive). The convergence of the three sources is summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Triangulation of Communication Practices Across Data Sources

Data Source	Evidence of Communication	Direction	Code
Interview (Teacher)	Direct messaging to parents when a child shows phone dependence or misses online tasks; routine evaluation	School → Home	G1
Interview (Parent)	Confirms teacher is highly active, sharing information even at night; links school and home behavior	Home ↔ School	OT1
Documentation	WhatsApp screenshot: teacher shares warning on a harmful trend; parents commit to monitoring	School → Home → School	WA, 15 Oct

Source: Data processed from interviews and document analysis, 2024.

Table 2 demonstrates that communication in this setting was genuinely reciprocal rather than a one-directional flow of school announcements. The teacher's initiating messages (G1) were met with parental acknowledgment and behavioral commitments (the WhatsApp archive), while the parent's own testimony (OT1) confirms that the information received at home was actively used to interpret the child's digital conduct. What the triangulation makes visible is a closed feedback loop: a concern raised by the teacher travels to the home, prompts a parental response, and returns to the school as a report on the child's behavior. This circulation is what allowed guidance to remain consistent across settings, since neither party was acting on a partial picture. The timing evidence — messages exchanged during school hours and again in the evening — further indicates that the collaboration was not bounded by the school day but extended into the hours when children are most exposed to unsupervised digital use.

Collaborative Supervision of Digital Technology Use

Supervision emerged as the most operationally visible form of collaboration, functioning less as occasional intervention than as a continuous division of monitoring labor across the school and home domains. Rather than treating digital access as something to be prohibited outright, teachers and parents coordinated to regulate how and when devices were used, framing supervision as a means of cultivating integrity and digital ethics rather than mere restriction. The data show this coordination operating simultaneously through classroom instruction, formal school policy, and parent-enforced rules at home. Their convergence indicates that supervision was systemic and mutually reinforcing rather than dependent on any single actor, so that students encountered the same boundary whether in the computer laboratory, under the school's written rules, or in the family living room.

Within the school, the teacher framed supervision as inseparable from digital-literacy instruction. G2 recounted: *"At school we teach digital literacy. I always tell the children, 'Child, using the internet is for finding assignment materials, not for playing games all the time or watching things that are inappropriate.' We temporarily confiscate the phone if someone secretly plays on it during lesson hours"* (G2, Interview). This account was directly corroborated by observation: during a literacy session in the computer laboratory, a student was found opening an online gaming site on a school tablet, whereupon the teacher approached persuasively, closed the tab, and issued a reminder on integrity and the ethics of using digital facilities (Observation, OBS/03/AWS). At home, the parallel enforcement was equally deliberate. OT2 explained: *"Children these days are in danger if they are not monitored. I apply strict rules: the phone is only allowed after Maghrib until eight at night, and even then it must be in the family room, not in the bedroom with the door closed. I often check the YouTube history"* (OT2, Interview).

The three loci of supervision are consolidated in **Table 3** to make the distribution of roles explicit.

Table 3. Triangulation of Collaborative Digital Supervision Across Data Sources

Locus of Supervision	Actor	Supervisory Action	Data Source	Code
School (instruction)	Teacher	Teaches digital literacy; sets purpose for internet use; temporary confiscation for covert phone use.	Interview	G2
School (enforcement)	Teacher	The intervention involved persuasive correction, the closing of gaming tabs, and reminders regarding integrity and digital ethics.	Observation	OBS/03/AWS
School (institutional)	Principal + Parent Committee	Formal ban on in-school gadget use; temporary-confiscation clause	Documentation	Student Code of Conduct
Home	Parent	Device use was limited to a set window,	Interview	OT2

confined to the family room, and
subject to YouTube history checks.

Source: Processed from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis data (2024).

Table 3 shows that supervision was distributed across four complementary points, with each actor operating through a distinct mechanism yet enforcing an identical underlying norm of bounded, purpose-driven device use. The teacher's stated policy of confiscation (G2) was not merely rhetorical; it was witnessed in practice in the laboratory (OBS/03/AWS) and formally ratified in the jointly signed Student Code of Conduct, which converts an individual teacher's discretion into a collectively endorsed rule that parents themselves approved. Meanwhile, OT2's home regime — a fixed time window, a shared physical space, and history checks — reproduces the same logic of controlled access in the domestic setting. The analytical significance lies in this redundancy: a child meeting the same limit in three settings, monitored by two authorities and one written rule, experiences device regulation as a stable moral expectation rather than a constraint that applies only under a teacher's gaze. Notably, the parents' emphasis on explanation over blunt prohibition indicates that supervision here operated through dialogue, which is what allowed it to function as character formation rather than simple control.

Habituation of Character Values in Daily Life

Habituation operated as the means by which character values were converted from stated expectations into embedded behavior, relying on the steady repetition of positive conduct at home and school rather than on isolated instruction. The data indicate that this repetition was deliberately structured, most clearly through institutional routines that fixed the boundaries of acceptable behavior and made them predictable to children. Where communication set expectations and supervision enforced limits, habituation gave those limits a daily rhythm, so that compliance became automatic rather than negotiated anew each day. The strongest evidence for this theme came from participant observation and document analysis, which captured the routinized practices directly, while the in-depth interview data situated these routines within a conscious pedagogical intent to make discipline a matter of habit rather than reminder.

Participant observation captured habituation as a fixed opening ritual of the school day: before instruction began, the homeroom teacher instructed students to place all gadgets in a dedicated locker at the front of the room, establishing a repeated, predictable boundary on digital access at the very threshold of learning (Observation, OBS/01/TLD). This routine was underwritten by document analysis that formalized the boundary as a standing rule rather than a daily whim, since the revised Student Code of Conduct prohibits in-school gadget use except under teacher instruction and specifies a temporary confiscation sanction, signed by both the principal and the Parent Committee (Documentation, Student Code of Conduct). The home counterpart of this habituation was likewise documented: in the daily control logbook, a parent checked the indicator *"limiting screen-time to a maximum of two hours"* and added a margin note that the child had at first refused to stop playing games but was subsequently reasoned with (Documentation, Student Control Logbook).

Table 4 sets out how the same habituated standard was reproduced across settings and sources.

Table 4. Triangulation of Character Habituation Across Settings

Setting	Habituated Practice	Data Source	Code
School (daily ritual)	Gadgets are placed in a locker before lessons begin, a process repeated at the start of each day.	Observation	OBS/01/TLD
School (formal rule)	The school enforces a codified ban on in-school gadget use, which includes confiscation as a sanction and is jointly signed by stakeholders.	Documentation	Student Code of Conduct
Home (daily evaluation)	Screen time is capped at two hours and logged, with parents reasoning with the child when resistance occurs.	Documentation	Student Control Logbook

Source: Processed from observation and documentation data (2024).

Table 4 illustrates that habituation drew its force from the alignment of an enacted routine, a written rule, and a home evaluation record, each reinforcing a single standard of bounded device use. The morning locker routine (OBS/01/TLD) shows the practice in its lived, repetitive form, while the Code of Conduct supplies the institutional permanence that keeps the routine from depending on any one teacher's initiative, and the logbook demonstrates that the same discipline was tracked and evaluated at home. A revealing detail is the logbook's honest record of resistance: the child's initial refusal, followed by parental reasoning rather than punishment, shows habituation as an active formative process rather than passive compliance. This convergence indicates that the character value being instilled — self-regulation around digital use — was not left to chance repetition but was deliberately structured into the daily architecture of both settings, which is precisely what allows a repeated act to settle into disposition.

Role Modeling by Teachers and Parents

Role modeling functioned as the most direct pedagogical strategy in this collaboration, resting on the recognition that young children absorb observed conduct more readily than verbal instruction. Both teachers and parents in this study articulated an awareness that their own behavior, particularly their own use of digital devices, served as a living example that either reinforced or undermined the values they sought to teach. This awareness distinguishes role modeling from the other themes, since it required the adults to regulate themselves rather than the children, treating their own conduct as part of the curriculum. The interview data were especially strong here, capturing an explicit, self-conscious reasoning about consistency between what adults demanded and what they demonstrated, and the observation data confirmed that this reasoning translated into visible practice.

The teacher informant framed modeling as a matter of basic consistency between rule and conduct. G1 reflected: *"Children are expert imitators, If I forbid them from playing on the phone while studying, then I myself must not hold a phone while teaching in front of the class. Setting an example is the key"* (G1, Interview). This stated principle was verified in the field, where observation recorded the teacher placing a personal phone on silent in a drawer and not touching it throughout the lesson (Observation, OBS/01/TLD). A parent voiced the same logic while candidly acknowledging how difficult it is to sustain. OT3 admitted: *"It is hard, Sometimes I am the one busy replying to work chats, and the child follows suit and asks for the phone. So now I make it a habit — when it is time to eat or gather as a family, all phones are put on the table. I have to set the example first"* (OT3, Interview). **Table 5** aligns the stated modeling principles with their observed enactment.

Table 5. Triangulation of Role Modeling Between Stated Intent and Observed Practice

Actor	Stated Modeling Principle	Corroborating Evidence	Data Source	Code
Teacher	Teachers must not use a phone while teaching if students are forbidden from doing so.	The phone is placed on silent in a drawer and remains untouched during the lesson.	Interview + Observation	G1 / OBS/01/TLD
Parent	Phones set aside during family meals; adult must model first	Self-reported routine, which acknowledges personal lapses as the catalyst for change.	Interview	OT3

Source: Data processed from interviews and observations, 2024.

Table 5 demonstrates that role modeling in this setting was not an abstract ideal but a practiced discipline verified across the stated and the observed. The teacher's articulated rule (G1) was matched precisely by observed conduct (OBS/01/TLD), closing the gap between profession and practice that so often undermines modeling as a strategy. The parent's account (OT3) is analytically valuable for a different reason: it surfaces a disconfirming pressure within the theme, since OT3 identifies her own device use as the very stimulus that prompted the

child's demands, and reports adopting the shared "phones on the table" rule as a corrective. Rather than weakening the theme, this candid admission strengthens it, showing that effective modeling here was born of a recognized failure and a deliberate self-correction rather than effortless virtue. Taken together, the evidence indicates that adults in this study understood their digital behavior as continuously observed, and that the credibility of every value they taught depended on their willingness to embody it first.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how teachers and parents collaborate to strengthen character education at the elementary level in the digital era, and the findings converge on four interlocking practices: reciprocal communication, collaborative supervision of digital technology, structured habituation of character values, and role modeling of digital conduct. What unites these practices is that none operated in isolation; each was sustained jointly across the home and school domains and was verifiable through more than one source of data. The most consequential finding is that collaboration functioned as a *system of redundancy*: a child encountered the same behavioral standard enforced through a teacher's correction, a written school rule, and a parent's household regime, rather than as a set of parallel but disconnected efforts. This redundancy, rather than the intensity of any single intervention, appears to be what rendered character guidance coherent and durable across the settings in which children move.

This study asked how teachers and parents work together to strengthen character education at the elementary level now that children grow up online, and the answer that emerged has four parts: reciprocal communication, joint supervision of digital use, structured habituation, and role modeling of the adults' own screen behavior. None of these worked on its own. Each was carried by both sides, at home and at school, and each showed up in more than one kind of evidence. The finding that matters most is that the collaboration worked through repetition across settings. A child met the same rule in the teacher's correction, in the written school policy, and in the parent's household routine. It was this overlap, rather than the force of any single measure, that kept the guidance steady wherever the child happened to be.

Communication as the groundwork

That communication held everything else together is not a new claim, but the way it now runs is worth pinning down. Indonesian research has long treated teacher and parent cooperation as central to character formation, with the connecting book as its classic instrument (Aziz et al., 2023). Our data agree, then push the point further. The connecting instrument has moved onto real-time platforms, and that shift changes what the exchange can do, not just how fast it travels. A connecting book moved on a daily or weekly rhythm. The class WhatsApp group let a teacher flag a child's phone dependence within the hour and let a parent answer that same evening. This fits the case for blended communication made by Shi and Deng (2024), though our findings add a wrinkle that earlier work tends to skip: instant messaging is best for routine monitoring, while anything sensitive still moves to a quieter, face-to-face channel. When the family and the school send the child the same message, developmental theory predicts a firmer result (Martinello, 2020).

Supervision, shared and written down

The second pattern, supervision spread across the classroom, the school's rulebook, and the household, speaks to a gap in the field. The literature has mapped the harms of unsupervised device use far more carefully than it has mapped the collaboration that holds those harms in check. Studies warn that heavy gadget use dulls empathy and weakens face-to-face skills in children (Alqifari & Albarrak, 2024), and nothing in our data argues otherwise. What we add is evidence that the risk gets managed not by banning devices but by watching over their use from several directions at once. The teacher's literacy lessons and confiscation policy, the Student

Code of Conduct signed by both the principal and the parent committee, and the parent's time-bound, room-bound rules at home all enforced one standard. This develops the technology-integration argument in Cuong et al. (2021) by showing that a written, parent-endorsed policy lifts supervision out of one teacher's hands and turns it into something the whole community owns. The parents also paired their limits with explanation rather than bare prohibition, which suggests that supervision does its real work through conversation, not surveillance (Lawall et al., 2022).

Habituation and the making of routine

The third pattern shows character forming less through lectures than through the same actions repeated, held in place by school ritual on one side and home record-keeping on the other. This supports the familiar position that moral formation depends on habituation, on repeating disciplined and respectful acts until they settle into character (Asih & Sunarso, 2020), and it sits comfortably with Indonesian work treating habituation as the ground of elementary character formation (Asih & Sunarso, 2020). Our contribution is to capture habituation working in a specifically digital key. The morning ritual of locking away phones before class, the codified ban on in-school devices, and the home screen-time log are not generic discipline. They are built around learning to govern one's own digital use. The control logbook gives the clearest window into this, as it recorded a child who at first refused to stop gaming and was then persuaded rather than punished. That small detail resists a purely mechanical reading of habituation. Here the repetition came with reasoning attached, which may be why the routine held even when no one was watching.

Role modeling in full view

The fourth pattern, adults teaching by how they themselves used their phones, both confirms social learning theory and extends it into new territory. Children learn by watching and copying the adults who matter to them (de la Fuente et al., 2023), and our data show this happening at the level of digital habits in particular. The teacher who silenced a phone and left it in a drawer through the whole lesson, and the parent who put every phone on the table at mealtimes, were read as examples, not as people issuing rules. That specificity is the contribution. Earlier Indonesian work on modeling in character education tends to praise teacher example in broad strokes (Sciacca et al., 2022). Our findings suggest something narrower: what children track and reproduce is the adult's observable digital conduct, how the grown-ups around them handle notifications, screen time, and what they post. OT3's honest admission that her own work chats set off her child's demands matters here. It casts modeling not as easy virtue but as a correction the parent had to make on purpose, the kind of thing the digital environment keeps in plain sight and therefore keeps mattering.

Two conditions shaped whether any of this held. On the helpful side were mutual trust and a shared sense that character is a job both parties own, which aligns with partnership research showing that cooperation lasts only when neither side treats it as the other's problem (Nicmanis, 2024). The main obstacle was parental capacity. OT3's account of being pulled between work and her child, and the wider habit of busy parents leaning on teachers to carry character work, echo barriers already documented in developing-country settings (Nicmanis, 2024). Our data sharpen that barrier into something more specific. Several parents wanted to supervise but could not keep up with the platforms their children used, so the will was there while the skill was not. That points to parental digital literacy, not parental motivation, as the tighter constraint, and it suggests that help should build capability rather than simply ask parents to do more.

The study offers three contributions to the literature on collaborative character education. First, it names collaborative digital supervision as its own area of cooperation, one that established school and family partnership frameworks, built around communication, home

learning, and volunteering, do not account for (Sari et al., 2025). When childhood runs through screens, watching over online activity together is not a corner of communication. It is a practice in its own right. Second, the study reads habituation and modeling in digital terms, arguing that character work now means routinizing and modeling online conduct, not only face-to-face conduct. Third, it recasts the image of the absent, busy parent as a question of digital skill rather than commitment. Taken together, these move toward a small revision of theory: models of school and family collaboration written before the smartphone need an explicit place for shared digital supervision, and they need to recognize that the adult behavior children copy now happens largely on a screen.

The larger point is clear. Character education in a digital childhood cannot be handed to the school or the family alone. It works when both enforce the same standard by different means, so that the child keeps meeting it wherever they go. Reciprocal messaging, shared and written-down supervision, digital habituation, and modeled online behavior lean on one another, and pulling any one loose leaves a gap the rest have to cover. For schools, that means writing collaboration into jointly agreed policy and putting real effort into parents' digital skills rather than assuming those skills are already there. For policy, it means treating digital-literacy support for parents as part of the character-education job, not an add-on. For future research, studies that follow several kinds of schools over time would show whether this overlap between home and school holds beyond one site, and whether it leaves any lasting mark on how children actually behave online.

CONCLUSION

When children spend their days moving between a classroom and a home that are both saturated with screens, the question is no longer whether character should be taught but who holds responsibility for teaching it, and this study set out to see how that responsibility is shared. The fieldwork at one elementary school shows that neither side carries it alone. Teachers and parents built their cooperation on four practices that reinforced one another: they kept in steady, two-way contact through channels that now run in real time; they watched over children's device use from the classroom, school regulations, and the household at once; they turned discipline into routine through daily rituals at school and logged habits at home; and they taught most powerfully by modeling appropriate screen behavior, as children more readily emulate adult behavior than verbal instruction. What made the arrangement work was the overlap itself, a child meeting the same standard in three places rather than one, so that guidance held even when no single adult was watching. The clear implication is that character education in a digital childhood cannot be delegated to the family or the school by itself, and that the weakest link in the chain is not parents' willingness but their fluency with the platforms their children live on. Schools would do well to write this collaboration into policy that parents help ratify and to invest in parents' digital skills rather than assume them, while future studies could follow several kinds of schools over time to test whether this shared oversight leaves any lasting mark on how children actually conduct themselves online.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank the principal, teachers, and parents at the research site for their willingness to participate and share their experiences. Appreciation is also extended to all parties who supported the completion of this study.

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