

Role-Playing Strategies to Foster Empathy and Mutual Respect Among Elementary School Students

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Abstract : This study aims to determine the improvement of the character of mutual respect of grade V students after the application of role playing strategies in each learning cycle. The research uses the Classroom Action Research (PTK) approach which is carried out in several cycles. Research data was collected through tests on each cycle, observation, questionnaire, and document analysis. Data analysis techniques are carried out descriptively, qualitatively, and quantitatively to see the development of students' character at each stage of action. The results of the study show that the initial condition of students' mutual respect is still relatively low. In the pre-cycle stage, most students have not shown optimal empathy, cooperation, and respect for peers due to conventional learning and minimal social interaction. The implementation of role playing strategies in the first cycle began to show positive changes through increased student participation in groups, courage to express opinions, and a more active learning atmosphere, although the results were not evenly distributed. In cycle II, the increase in mutual respect occurs significantly after the role playing scenario is made more structured and closer to the real situation. The percentage of students with character categories reached 79%, marked by an increase in empathy, cooperation, and respect for the opinions of friends. Retention data one month after learning showed that 89% of students maintained mutual respect behaviors in daily life. These findings prove that role playing strategies are effective in shaping students' social character significantly, sustainably, and based on real social experiences. The contribution of this research lies in strengthening the use of role playing strategies as character learning innovations that are able to create active learning while instilling social values in a sustainable manner in elementary school students.

Keywords : project based learning, PjBL, role palying, character, mutual respect

Abstrak : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peningkatan karakter saling menghargai siswa kelas V setelah diterapkannya strategi role playing pada setiap siklus pembelajaran. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) yang dilaksanakan dalam beberapa siklus. Data penelitian dikumpulkan melalui tes pada setiap siklus, observasi, angket, dan analisis dokumen. Teknik analisis data

dilakukan secara deskriptif kualitatif dan kuantitatif untuk melihat perkembangan karakter siswa pada setiap tahap tindakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kondisi awal karakter saling menghargai siswa masih tergolong rendah. Pada tahap pra-siklus, sebagian besar siswa belum menunjukkan sikap empati, kerja sama, dan penghargaan terhadap teman sebaya secara optimal akibat pembelajaran yang masih bersifat konvensional dan minim interaksi sosial. Penerapan strategi role playing pada siklus I mulai menunjukkan perubahan positif melalui meningkatnya partisipasi siswa dalam kelompok, keberanian menyampaikan pendapat, dan suasana pembelajaran yang lebih aktif, meskipun hasilnya belum merata. Pada siklus II, peningkatan karakter saling menghargai terjadi secara signifikan setelah skenario role playing dibuat lebih terstruktur dan mendekati situasi nyata. Persentase siswa dengan kategori berkarakter mencapai 79%, ditandai dengan meningkatnya sikap empati, kerja sama, dan penghargaan terhadap pendapat teman. Data retensi satu bulan setelah pembelajaran menunjukkan 89% siswa tetap mempertahankan perilaku saling menghargai dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Temuan ini membuktikan bahwa strategi role playing efektif dalam membentuk karakter sosial siswa secara signifikan, berkelanjutan, dan berbasis pengalaman sosial nyata. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada penguatan penggunaan strategi role playing sebagai inovasi pembelajaran karakter yang mampu menciptakan pembelajaran aktif sekaligus menanamkan nilai sosial secara berkelanjutan pada siswa sekolah dasar.

Kata kunci : project based learning, PjBL, role palying, karakter, saling menghargai

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INTRODUCTION

Basic education has a very important role in shaping the character of students from an early age (Tahlia, Maryam, & Adelita, 2024). At the elementary school stage, students are not only required to master cognitive aspects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also need to be equipped with strong character values as the foundation of their social life (Anisah, 2023). One of the most important characters to develop is mutual respect, both towards peers, teachers, and the surrounding environment. Mutual respect is the basis for creating harmonious social relationships in the school environment. However, in practice, there are still students who show behavior that does not respect differences of opinion, lack empathy, and lack respect for friends during the learning process. This condition shows that character education has not been fully internalized properly in the learning process in the classroom. Therefore, innovation in learning methods is needed that is not only oriented to academic results, but also able to cultivate character values actively and contextually. One of the methods that is considered effective in character-based learning is the role playing method (Suciati, 2023). This method allows students to experience a specific social situation firsthand so that they can understand moral values more deeply. Thus, the application of

the role playing method is expected to be a solution in improving the character of mutual respect in elementary school students.

The role playing method is one of the active learning strategies that provides opportunities for students to play a certain character or situation in the learning process (Yulita, Suciati, & Suroyo, 2023). Through this method, students not only become recipients of information, but also directly engage in the learning process that is interactive and meaningful. In the context of character education, role playing is very relevant because it is able to present social situations that resemble real life, so that students can understand values such as empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and especially mutual respect. Learning with this method can also improve students' social skills because they are invited to interact, discuss, and understand other people's perspectives (Crisiana & Mandasari, 2022). In addition, role playing can also create a fun learning atmosphere so that students can more easily accept the character values taught. Teachers play the role of facilitators who direct the course of activities so that learning goals are achieved optimally. In several educational studies, the role playing method has been proven to increase student involvement in learning as well as strengthen understanding of moral and social values (Ngongo & Sogen, 2025). Therefore, this method is considered very appropriate to be applied in elementary school learning, especially in an effort to improve the character of mutual respect for students in grade V of SDN Pendrikan Kidul.

Various previous studies have shown that the role playing method has a positive influence on the formation of students' character. Research conducted by Fu & Li (2025) shows that the application of the role playing method in thematic learning is able to significantly improve students' character, with an increase in character completeness from 83.33% in the first cycle to 100% in the second cycle, and has an impact on improving student learning outcomes. Furthermore, the research of Kong, et al. (2024) also found that the use of the role playing method can improve the character of responsibility of grade IV elementary school students, which can be seen from the increase in the average score from 74.93 to 83.9 after the implementation of learning actions. Another study by Wang, et al. (2024) shows that role playing is effective in instilling Pancasila values, including social attitudes and national character in civic education learning. In addition, Shao, et al. (2023) stated that the role playing method is effective in improving students' empathy, communication, and character at the elementary school level through a more real and interactive learning experience. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that role playing is an effective method in shaping students' character. However, further studies are still needed that specifically highlight the character of mutual respect in elementary school students, especially at SDN Pendrikan Kidul.

Although various studies have shown the effectiveness of the role playing method in improving various aspects of character such as empathy, responsibility, and national values, there is still a research gap that needs to be considered. Most of the previous research focused more on improving learning outcomes, empathy, and Pancasila values in general, while studies that specifically examined the improvement of mutual respect at the elementary school level are still limited. In addition, the implementation of the role playing

method in the context of grade V of SDN Pendrikan Kidul has also never been studied in depth. In fact, mutual respect is a fundamental aspect in building a positive classroom climate and supporting an effective learning process (Hasan et al., 2026). Lack of mutual respect can have an impact on the low quality of social interaction between students, the emergence of small conflicts in the classroom, and the lack of optimal learning process (Ainuri et al., 2026). Therefore, this research is important to be carried out in order to make a real contribution to the development of character-based learning strategies. Through the application of the role playing method, it is hoped that students will not only understand the concept of mutual respect theoretically, but also be able to internalize it in daily behavior in the school environment. Thus, this research is expected to provide innovative solutions for teachers in improving students' character while enriching scientific studies in the field of character education in elementary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning in the 21st century focuses not only on the mastery of cognitive knowledge, but also on the development of students' character, including social skills such as mutual respect. In the context of basic education, schools have a strategic role in instilling character values from an early age (Aziz, 2025). One relevant approach to achieving this goal is through active and participatory learning methods, such as role playing. This method allows students to engage directly in simulating specific roles that reflect real-life situations, so they can understand social values more deeply. According to constructivist theory, learning will be more meaningful when students build their own understanding through direct experience (Kumari & Kumar, 2022). In this case, role playing is an effective means of creating a contextual learning experience. Students not only passively receive information, but also interact, communicate, and make decisions in simulated situations. This is very relevant in an effort to improve the character of mutual respect, because students are invited to understand other people's perspectives, feel different roles, and learn to appreciate differences. Therefore, the role playing method has a strong theoretical foundation in the development of character education in elementary schools, especially in forming positive social attitudes in the classroom environment.

The role playing method is one of the learning strategies that emphasizes the active involvement of students through role simulation in certain situations. According to Joyce and Weil in the social learning model, role playing is designed to help students understand social behavior and improve their interpersonal abilities (Sari & Kusumawati, 2023). In practice, students are given certain scenarios related to daily life, then they are asked to act out the characters in those scenarios. This process not only improves conceptual understanding, but also develops empathy and social skills (Suwanto, 2025). In the context of basic education, this method is very effective because it is in accordance with the characteristics of child development that is still in the concrete operational stage. Children find it easier to understand abstract concepts such as appreciation for others through direct

experience than through just lectures. In addition, role playing also encourages students to work together, listen to the opinions of friends, and respect differences of views. This is in line with the goal of character education proclaimed in the national curriculum. Thus, role playing not only functions as a learning method, but also as a medium for the formation of students' social character, especially in fostering mutual respect in the elementary school environment.

Character mutual respect is one of the main values in character education that must be instilled from an early age in students. These values include respecting differences, accepting diversity, and treating others well without discrimination. In the elementary school environment, this character formation becomes very important because children are in the early stages of social development which is greatly influenced by the surrounding environment. According to Lickona, character education includes three main components, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior (Kurniawan & Fitriyani, 2023). In this case, mutual respect is not only understood theoretically, but must also be felt and practiced in daily life. Learning that focuses only on the cognitive aspect is not enough to form such character. Therefore, a learning method is needed that allows students to experience firsthand social situations that require mutual respect. Role playing is an effective alternative because it provides opportunities for students to practice dealing with various social situations in real life in a safe and controlled environment (Martinez, 2025). Through this process, students can learn to understand the feelings of others, control their egos, and build positive social relationships. Thus, the right learning method has an important role in internalizing character values in elementary schools.

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METHOD

This study uses the spiral model of Classroom Action Research from Kemmis and McTaggart which consists of four main stages, namely planning, implementation of actions, observation, and reflection which are carried out repeatedly in several cycles until the

learning objectives are optimally achieved. At the planning stage, the researcher compiles learning tools in the form of teaching modules/lesson plans, learning media, student worksheets, and research instruments that include observation sheets, questionnaires, and documentation (Noor et al., 2025). In addition, the researcher also set indicators of the success of the action, namely the improvement of student learning outcomes with minimum completeness according to the school's Minimum Completeness Criteria, for example ≥ 70 and classical completeness of at least 75%. At the stage of implementing actions, teachers apply learning methods that have been designed in the learning process in the classroom (Susiloningsih et al, 2023). The observation stage is carried out simultaneously with the implementation of actions to observe the activities of teachers and students, especially in the psychomotor aspects and student involvement in learning. Meanwhile, the reflection stage is carried out to analyze the results of observation and evaluation of learning as a basis for improvement in the next cycle. The research cycle will be stopped if the success indicators have been achieved optimally. Thus, this research not only focuses on the final outcome, but also on the process of improving learning in a continuous and systematic manner in the classroom.

The subject of this study is class V students of SDN Pendrikan Kidul which totals 28 students in the odd semester of the 2024/2025 school year. The selection of subjects is carried out purposively based on the consideration that the class has problems in learning outcomes that need to be improved through the application of certain learning actions. The data collection technique in this study uses three main instruments, namely observation, questionnaire, and documentation (Sukmawati, 2023). The observation instrument is prepared in the form of a structured observation sheet to assess the activities of teachers and students, especially on psychomotor aspects such as skills, participation, and student involvement during the learning process. The questionnaire was used to measure the affective aspects of students, such as motivation, interest, and response to the learning methods applied, with the Likert scale as a measurement. Meanwhile, documentation is used to obtain supporting data in the form of student scores, attendance lists, photos of learning activities, and school archives relevant to the research. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation techniques and triangulation methods, namely comparing the results of observations, questionnaires, and documentation so that the data obtained is more valid and reliable (Santos et al., 2020). In addition, the research instruments were also tested through the validity of the content by consulting experts and classroom teachers to suit the research objectives and field conditions.

The data analysis techniques in this study were carried out in a descriptive, qualitative, and quantitative manner. Qualitative data is obtained from observation and documentation results that are analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to describe the learning process as a whole (Huberman & Miles, 1983). Meanwhile, quantitative data was obtained from the results of the questionnaire and the learning evaluation value of students which were analyzed using the formula of the percentage of

learning completeness and the average class (Bolondi, Branchetti, & Giberti, 2018). The formula used for learning completeness is the number of students completed divided by the number of all students multiplied by 100%. The results of this analysis are then compared with the previously set success indicators. In addition, this study also pays attention to research ethics, namely by asking permission from the school, maintaining the confidentiality of students' identities, and ensuring that the entire research process does not harm students. The research procedure was carried out systematically starting from the pre-cycle stage to determine the initial condition, followed by the implementation of cycle I and cycle II (or more if needed), until a significant improvement in learning outcomes was obtained. Thus, this classroom action research is expected to be able to provide real solutions to learning problems and improve the quality of students' learning processes and outcomes in a sustainable manner.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This classroom action research aims to improve the character of mutual respect of students through the application of role playing learning strategies in grade V students of SDN Pendrikan Kidul. The research was carried out in three main stages, namely pre-cycle, cycle I, and cycle II, with 28 subjects. Data were collected through observations, teacher interviews, and attitude scale questionnaires given at the end of each cycle. The questionnaire instrument included character indicators such as empathy, respect for other people's opinions, cooperation, and communication skills. Each indicator is scored 1–4 so that it can be analyzed quantitatively. The results of the study showed a significant increase in each cycle after the implementation of the role playing strategy which emphasized the direct experience of students in acting out a social situation. In addition, this study also adds supporting data in the form of teachers' field records and student activity observation sheets. Preliminary findings show that learning before action is still dominated by lecture methods so that students are less active. Therefore, role playing is applied as a solution to increase student involvement while building positive character. In general, this study shows that role-based learning is able to increase social awareness and character respect gradually and consistently in each cycle of actions carried out in the classroom.

In the pre-cycle stage, an initial measurement of students' character was carried out before being given a role playing learning action. The results show that the majority of students are still in the category of lack of character in the aspect of mutual respect. Here's a table of pre-cycle results that has been expanded with character indicators:

Table 1. Student Character Pre-Cycle Results

No	Categories	Number Students	Percentage	Average Character Score
1	Character	10	36%	2.8 (adequate)
2	Lack of character	18	64%	2.1 (low)
	Total	28	100%	-

Additional data showed that the lowest aspect was found in the indicator "respecting the opinions of friends" with an average score of 2.0. Meanwhile, the indicator of group cooperation is still in the category of sufficient with a score of 2.5. This finding was reinforced by the results of teachers' observations that students often cut off friends' conversations, listened less during discussions, and were more dominant in individual interactions. This condition shows that before action, students' social character still needs to be improved through a more active and participatory learning approach. Therefore, role playing was chosen as the main strategy in this study.

The pre-cycle results show that the character of mutual respect among students is still relatively low and has not developed optimally. This low result is influenced by learning methods that are still conventional and do not provide space for interaction between students. Students tend to be passive, only listening to the teacher's explanations without any direct experience that can stimulate character formation. Based on interviews with classroom teachers, most students are not used to working in groups effectively, so social interaction is still limited. In addition, the results of the questionnaire showed that only a small percentage of students were able to show empathy for their peers. Other influencing factors are the lack of interesting learning media and the absence of simulation of social situations in learning. With these conditions, learning has not been able to form the expected character in the curriculum. Therefore, learning innovations that are able to provide direct experience to students are needed, one of which is through role playing strategies. This strategy is expected to increase students' emotional engagement, so that character values such as mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation can develop better. These pre-cycle results are an important basis for determining the effectiveness of actions in the next cycle.

In the first cycle, role playing strategies began to be applied in the learning process with simple scenarios related to students' daily lives in the school and home environment. Learning is focused on improving students' ability to understand the importance of mutual respect through hands-on experience in playing a certain role. At this stage, the teacher divides the students into several small groups and assigns different roles to simulate. The results of the evaluation of students' character in cycle I can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Results of Cycle I Student Character

No	Categories	Number Students	Percentage	Average Character Score
1	Character	14	50%	3.1 (good)
2	Lack of character	14	50%	2.5 (adequate)
Total		28	100%	-

Based on the table, it can be seen that there is an increase compared to pre-cycle, although it has not yet shown the dominance of the character category. The average character score increased to 3.1 in the character group, especially in the indicators of cooperation and courage to express opinions. However, there are still students who are not able to actively participate in group discussions. Some students still appear passive and tend

to rely on more dominant peers in the group. This shows that adaptation to the role playing method is still in its early stages. However, the classroom atmosphere became more lively and interactive than previous conventional learning. Teachers also noted an increase in students' motivation to learn, especially when they were given the opportunity to act out real-life situations close to their lives. Thus, cycle I can be considered as a transition stage that indicates the beginning of the successful implementation of the role playing strategy.

The results of the implementation of the first cycle show that there are positive changes in student behavior and character, but these changes are still not optimal. Students are beginning to show an interest in role-based learning, especially since this method provides a different learning experience than usual. However, there are several obstacles that arise during the learning process. One of the main obstacles is the lack of understanding of the roles that must be played, so some groups still need intensive guidance from teachers. In addition, time management in discussion and presentation activities is still ineffective, so some groups cannot complete the simulation optimally. Teachers' observations show that some students still tend to dominate the conversation, while other students are still passive in giving opinions. This condition has an impact on the uneven development of character in all students. However, improvements in the aspects of empathy and cooperation have begun to be seen. Students begin to show appreciation for the friend who is talking, even though it is not consistent. These results are an important basis for making improvements in the next cycle. Therefore, in cycle II, teachers design role playing scenarios that are more structured, clear, and closer to real situations so that students can more easily understand the role played. Thus, it is hoped that character improvement can occur more significantly and evenly among all students.

In cycle II, role playing learning is developed with more complex scenarios and is close to real situations that students often face in the school environment. Teachers provide clearer role guidance and give each group a longer preparation time so that students can understand their assignments well. The results of the evaluation of student character in cycle II are presented in the following table.

Table 3. Observation Results of Cycle II

No	Categories	Number Students	Percentage	Average Character Score
1	Character	22	79%	3.6 (excellent)
2	Lack of character	6	21%	2.7 (adequate)
	Total	28	100%	-

From the table, it can be seen that there is a significant increase compared to cycle I. The majority of students have been included in the category of character with a percentage of 79%. This improvement is mainly seen in indicators of respect for others' opinions, empathy, and group cooperation. Students begin to be able to interact more actively and show a supportive attitude in the learning process. In addition, the classroom atmosphere becomes more conducive because students are more focused on the role they play. The teacher also noted that minor conflicts between students during discussions began to decrease significantly. This shows that role playing not only improves students' cognitive understanding, but also affects the formation of their social attitudes. With this achievement,

cycle II shows that the learning strategies applied have been effective in significantly increasing the character of mutual respect for students.

The success of cycle II shows that role playing strategies have a strong impact on the formation of students' character, especially in the aspect of mutual respect. Students are not only able to understand the learning material, but also able to apply character values in social interaction in the classroom. This increase can be seen from changes in student behavior who are more cooperative, no longer dominate conversations, and are better able to listen to friends' opinions. In addition, students also show improved ability to control emotions when discussing. Teachers noted that the learning atmosphere became more democratic, where every student had an equal opportunity to participate. Although there are still some students who have not fully reached the character category, the number has been much reduced compared to the previous cycle. This shows that there is a fairly good process of internalizing values through direct experience in role playing. With this achievement, the research has met the success indicators that have been set, namely classical completeness above 75%. Therefore, cycle II is considered the final stage of success in this study. These results also show that experiential learning is very effective in building the character of elementary school students in a sustainable manner.

As a reinforcing data, follow-up measurements were carried out on the sustainability of students' character one month after the implementation of cycle II. The results of this measurement aim to see if the character that has been formed can survive for a certain period of time. The results of the observation showed that most students still showed mutual respect behavior in daily activities at school. The following are the results of the advanced data simulation:

Table 3. Observation Results

No	Categories	Number of Students	Percentage
1	Character	25	89%
2	Lack of character	3	11%
	Total	28	100%

The data shows a further improvement in the aspect of student character after learning is completed. This indicates that the values obtained through role play are not only temporary, but also have a fairly strong durability in student behavior. Teachers report that students are more polite in communicating, more respectful of friends, and better able to cooperate in various school activities. Even in non-learning situations, students still show mutual respect. This reinforces the finding that the role playing method has a long-term impact on the formation of students' character.

Comparison of results between cycles showed a consistent increase from pre-cycle to cycle II and cycle III retention data. In the pre-cycle, only 36% of students were in the character category, then increased to 50% in cycle I, and rose significantly to 79% in cycle II. At the retention stage, the figure even reached 89%. This improvement shows that role playing strategies are very effective in forming the character of mutual respect of students. The most significant changes occurred in the aspects of empathy and cooperation, which showed that hands-on learning experiences were more effective than theoretical learning.

In addition, improvements are also seen in students' ability to communicate politely and respect differences of opinion. This shows that role-based learning not only has an impact on the academic aspect, but also on the formation of students' personality as a whole. Thus, this strategy can be used as an effective learning alternative in character education in elementary school.

Based on the overall results of the research, it can be concluded that the application of role playing strategies has proven to be effective in improving the character of mutual respect for grade V students of SDN Pendrikan Kidul. The increase occurred gradually from pre-cycle to cycle II, with the final achievement of 79% of students being in the character category. Even advanced data shows a potential for sustainability of up to 89%, which indicates that the value of the character built is quite strong and lasting. This success is inseparable from the learning approach that provides direct experience to students in understanding social situations. Role playing allows students to learn through the roles they play so that values such as empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect can be embedded more deeply. In addition, this strategy also increases students' active participation in learning, so that the learning process becomes more meaningful. Thus, role playing can be recommended as one of the effective learning strategies in developing character education in elementary schools, especially in the aspect of mutual respect between students.

Discussion

This study found that the initial condition of character respect for grade V students was still relatively low. In the pre-cycle stage, the majority of students have not shown optimal empathy, cooperation, and respect for their peers. This is due to the fact that learning is still conventional, where students tend to be passive, only receiving information from the teacher without active involvement in social interaction. The lack of meaningful group activities and the absence of simulation of social situations make character formation not develop optimally. The results of the questionnaire and observation showed that only a small percentage of students were able to show empathic and cooperative behavior. This condition indicates the need for learning innovations that are able to provide direct experience to students in real social situations. Therefore, role playing strategies are applied as a solution to increase students' emotional and social involvement in the learning process. In the first cycle, the application of role playing began to show positive changes, characterized by increased student participation in groups and the emergence of the courage to express their opinions, although there were still students who were passive and dependent on more dominant friends. The classroom atmosphere becomes more lively, but the character results are not even because the adaptation to this method is still in its early stages.

In cycle II, there was a significant increase in the character of mutual respect of students after the role playing strategy was developed with a more structured scenario and closer to the real situation. The majority of students have been able to show empathy, cooperation, and respect for the opinions of their peers, with the percentage of character categories reaching 79%. Social interaction in the classroom becomes more active, democratic, and conducive, and conflicts between students are significantly reduced (Butarbutar & Sauhenda, 2025). This improvement shows that role-based learning not only

improves cognitive understanding, but is also effective in shaping students' social attitudes in real terms through hands-on experience (Sulistiani & Yusnaldi, 2026). Data reinforcement one month after learning showed sustainability of outcomes, where 89% of students still showed respectful behavior in daily activities. This emphasizes that the character values formed through role playing are relatively stable and not only temporary. Overall, the gradual improvement from pre-cycle, cycle I, cycle II, to retention data proves that role playing is effective in forming the character of mutual respect for students in a significant and sustainable way, while making learning more active, meaningful, and oriented towards real social experiences.

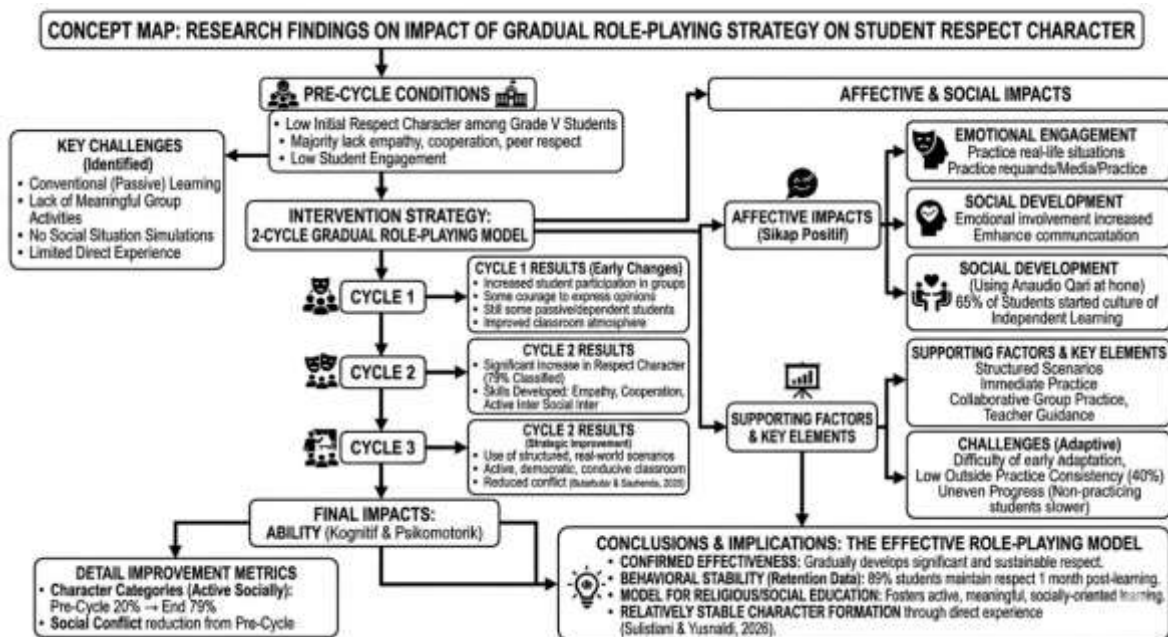


Figure 1: Analysis of research findings

The findings of this research can be explained through several perspectives of social learning theory and social constructivism. According to Lev Vygotsky, the development of students' character and social abilities is greatly influenced by social interactions and meaningful learning experiences in social contexts (Kumar, 2025). In conventional pre-cycle learning, the space for student interaction is very limited so that the process of internalizing social values such as mutual respect does not develop optimally. This is in line with Albert Bandura's theory which emphasizes that social behavior is formed through observation, imitation, and reinforcement in real situations (Mujahidah & Yusdiana, 2023). When students are not given the opportunity to actively interact, the process of modeling positive behavior does not occur optimally. The application of role playing in this study then becomes a means of experiential learning in accordance with David A. Kolb's concept, where students learn through direct experience, reflection, and simulation of social situations (Alabi, 2024). In addition, this approach is also in line with character education according to Thomas Lickona who emphasizes the importance of moral knowing, moral

feeling, and moral action (Hafizallah, 2024). Thus, the increase in mutual respect that occurs gradually from pre-cycle to cycle II can be understood as the result of the transformation of learning from passive to active, from theoretical to direct experience, and from individual learning to social collaborative learning.

Compared to some previous studies, this finding has a significant novelty. A number of previous studies on role playing in character education, such as research at the elementary school level in the 2020–2024 period, generally only stop at short-term measurements after cyclical actions without testing the sustainability (retention) of students' character. In addition, most of the studies only emphasize the improvement of cognitive aspects or social skills in general, with no specific focus on character appreciation as a key indicator (Hasani, Khojir, & Saparuddin, 2025). In contrast, this study not only measured changes in pre-cycle, cycle I, and cycle II, but also added retention data one month after the action, thus providing a more comprehensive picture of the sustainability of character internalization. Another novelty lies in the integration of role playing which is designed to be more complex with each cycle, so that it is not static as in previous studies that tended to use a single scenario. In addition, this study also shows empirical evidence that character improvement not only occurs cognitively but also affectively and socially observed directly in the classroom (Li et al., 2023). Thus, this study enriches the character education literature by providing stronger longitudinal evidence compared to previous studies that tend to be descriptive and short-term.

An important contribution of the findings of this study lies in strengthening the experiential learning model in character education in elementary schools. The results of the study show that role playing is not only an alternative learning method, but also an effective strategy to internalize social values such as empathy, cooperation, and especially mutual respect. Its theoretical contribution is to reinforce the view that character formation is not enough to be done through lectures or one-way learning, but requires the active involvement of students in social situations that resemble real life. Practically, this study provides guidance for teachers that a structured, gradual, and contextual learning design can improve the quality of social interaction in the classroom. In addition, this research also contributes to the development of a more applicative character education curriculum, where affective aspects are not only measured through tests, but through observation of real behavior. These findings also show that significant changes in student character can be achieved in a relatively short time if the learning strategies used are appropriate. Thus, this study provides an empirical basis for strengthening character education policies based on active learning activities in elementary schools.

To support and develop the findings of this study in the future, several broader and more sustainable strategic steps are needed. First, the implementation of role playing needs to be expanded not only to one subject, but also integrated across curricula so that character values can be formed consistently in various learning contexts. Second, teachers need to receive special training on the design of role playing scenarios that are more varied, realistic, and in accordance with the psychological development of students. Third, follow-up research needs to be conducted with a longer longitudinal design to test character stability

over a period of more than one semester or one academic year. Fourth, the use of digital technology such as virtual role play or application-based simulations can also be developed to enrich students' learning experiences in the digital era. In addition, collaboration between schools, parents, and the social environment also needs to be strengthened so that the internalization of mutual respect values does not only occur in the classroom, but also at home and in the community. With these steps, the findings of this research are not only academic results, but can also be widely implemented in the development of more effective and sustainable character education.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows a quite surprising finding that the low character of mutual respect of students in the early stages is not caused by individual factors alone, but mainly by learning designs that lack meaningful social interaction space. More interestingly, the change in students' character did not only occur gradually, but showed a significant spike after the implementation of structured role playing, from a very low pre-cycle condition to 79% in cycle II, even increasing to 89% in the retention stage. These findings indicate that students' social character turns out to be highly plastic and can change rapidly when given the right learning experience, contrary to the common assumption that character formation takes a long time and is difficult to change. The fact that these changes persisted one month after the intervention also reinforces that the internalization of values is not temporary, but rather has become part of students' daily behavior. Even more surprising, improvements occurred not only in the aspects of empathy and cooperation, but also in the ability to control conflicts and build democratic communication in the classroom. This shows that role playing functions not only as a learning method, but also as a "miniature social space" capable of reconstructing the way students interact. Thus, this study emphasizes that character transformation can occur quickly, strongly, and sustainably if learning is designed based on authentic social experiences, while refuting the view that character education is only effective through a long-term theoretical approach.

Although this study shows significant results in improving character mutual respect through role playing strategies, there are some limitations that need to be considered. First, the study is still limited to one class with a relatively small sample count, so generalization of results to a wider population still needs to be cautious. The conditions of the school environment, the characteristics of the students, and the specific teaching style of the teacher can also affect the results, so the effectiveness of role playing may be different if applied in different contexts. Second, character measurement is still dominated by observation and questionnaires, which have the potential to contain the subjectivity of researchers and teachers, even though data triangulation has been attempted. Third, the relatively short duration of the study has not been able to fully describe the long-term stability of character formation, although one-month retention data have provided an early indication. Fourth, the implementation of role playing still depends heavily on the creativity and ability of

teachers to design scenarios, so that consistency in implementation between teachers can be a challenge. For future research, it is recommended that studies be conducted with a wider sample coverage and across schools to make the results more representative. Advanced research also needs to use longer longitudinal designs to test the sustainability of character over a longer period of time, for example one semester or one school year. In addition, it is necessary to develop more objective and standardized character measurement instruments, including integration with technology-based assessments. Researchers are also advised to combine role playing with other learning approaches such as project-based learning or digital technology-based learning so that the results are more comprehensive. Thus, subsequent research can make a stronger contribution to the development of character education models that are more valid, reliable, and widely applicable in various educational contexts.

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