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Integrating Sakubun Writing Instruction with Character Education: A Case Study in Japanese Language Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates the integration of sakubun writing instruction with character education in Japanese language pedagogy at Manado State University, exploring implementation strategies and student responses to this integrated approach. A qualitative descriptive design was employed with 30 fifth-semester students as participants. Data were collected through classroom observations (12 sessions), semi-structured interviews (15 students), and document analysis of sakubun compositions. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in integration practices and student perceptions. Findings reveal three primary integration strategies: thematic writing assignments incorporating moral values, reflective journal activities, and collaborative peer feedback emphasizing respectful communication. Students demonstrated enhanced awareness of character values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy while developing their Japanese writing proficiency. Students reported increased motivation and meaningful engagement in writing tasks. Key challenges included time constraints and difficulty in assessing character development alongside linguistic competence. This study provides empirical evidence of character education integration within Japanese writing pedagogy, an underexplored area in foreign language education research. It offers a practical framework for language educators seeking to implement values-based instruction while maintaining focus on linguistic objectives, contributing to holistic approaches in second language writing instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

Language education functions not only as a foundation for developing linguistic competence but also as a holistic framework for nurturing learners' cognitive capacities and character formation. Contemporary educational paradigms increasingly emphasize that effective pedagogy must cultivate both intellectual and moral dimensions of learning (Berkowitz & Bier, 2017). This perspective is especially relevant in foreign language education, where learners simultaneously engage with new linguistic systems, cultural values, and communicative norms. Recent scholarship underscores the necessity of embedding twenty-first-century competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and character into language curricula to prepare students for complex global realities (Zheng & Yu, 2023).

Writing instruction occupies a central position in language learning because it uniquely activates cognitive, linguistic, and ethical dimensions at once. Graham et al. (2020) describe writing as a multidimensional process requiring the integration of lexical, grammatical, and discourse knowledge with metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation. These demands position writing as an inherently metacognitive task that requires awareness of one's thinking and strategic decision-making (Galbraith & Baaijen, 2018). Recent research further conceptualizes writing from socio cognitive perspectives, viewing it as a socially situated activity involving collaboration, negotiation of meaning, and the cultivation of interpersonal awareness (Hyland, 2019).

Critically, the writing process also involves ethical considerations that lie at the intersection of cognitive development and moral reasoning. Writers must navigate issues such as honesty, intellectual integrity, responsibility, and audience awareness as

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they construct meaning—making decisions that reflect both cognitive skill and ethical judgment (Arthur et al., 2017). Neurocognitive research indicates that writing activates brain regions associated with moral reasoning, perspective-taking, and empathy, suggesting biological underpinnings for the connection between writing practices and ethical development (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019). Thus, the cognitive and ethical demands of writing are inseparable, requiring students to manage complex information while considering the social and moral implications of their textual choices.

The theoretical integration of writing, cognition, and ethics is further supported by sociocultural learning theories that emphasize the dialectical relationship between individual cognitive development and socially-mediated ethical practices. Vygotskian perspectives highlight that higher-order thinking emerges through collaborative activities that require learners to negotiate meaning, justify positions, and consider alternative perspectives processes that simultaneously develop cognitive sophistication and moral awareness (Lantolf et al., 2020). In writing contexts, these theoretical principles manifest as learners engage in peer collaboration, provide constructive feedback, and revise their work in response to social and ethical considerations, thereby developing both metacognitive competence and character attributes within unified learning experiences.

The relationship between writing pedagogy and character formation has gained substantial empirical support in recent literature, justifying integrated instructional approaches that address cognitive and ethical development simultaneously rather than as separate educational objectives. Process-oriented writing approaches, which emphasize prewriting exploration, collaborative drafting, peer revision, and reflective editing, naturally cultivate dispositions associated with strong character development while enhancing cognitive-metacognitive competencies (Graham et al., 2020). Through iterative drafting cycles, learners develop perseverance and resilience—traits identified as crucial for both academic success and ethical maturity (Duckworth & Yeager, 2022). Peer feedback activities foster empathy, respect, and constructive communication while requiring metacognitive awareness of how one's language affects others, thereby uniting cognitive skill development with ethical practice (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023). Revision processes demand critical self-reflection, intellectual honesty, and metacognitive monitoring—competencies that bridge cognitive development and moral reasoning. Thus, writing instruction provides authentic opportunities for students to practice and internalize character values within cognitively demanding academic contexts that mirror real-world communicative challenges (Myhill & Newman, 2021).

(Van Waes et al., 2022) demonstrate that digital writing environments and collaborative technologies have transformed writing pedagogy, enabling real-time peer interaction and multimodal composition that enhance both writing quality and learner engagement while creating spaces for ethical negotiation and shared responsibility. Recent sociocultural perspectives further illuminate how writing instruction serves as a site for identity development, moral agency, and cognitive growth occurring in integrated rather than isolated fashion. (Yasuda, 2021) argues that genre-based writing pedagogy in foreign language contexts enables learners to negotiate cultural values and develop intercultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency and metacognitive awareness. (Kubota & Okuda, 2020) demonstrate that reflective writing activities promote self-regulation, metacognitive awareness, and ethical reasoning competencies central to both academic success and character formation confirming that these dimensions develop synergistically rather than independently.

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The theoretical justification for integration is further strengthened by research demonstrating that artificial separation of cognitive skill development from ethical considerations produces incomplete learning outcomes. When writing instruction focuses exclusively on linguistic accuracy without addressing the moral dimensions of communication such as honesty, responsibility to audiences, and respect for diverse perspectives students develop technical competence without the ethical framework necessary for responsible communication in complex social contexts (Arthur et al., 2017). Conversely, character education divorced from authentic cognitive challenges risks becoming abstract moralizing without practical application. The integrated approach addresses these limitations by embedding ethical development within cognitively demanding writing tasks that require learners to exercise moral judgment while managing complex compositional processes, thereby fostering transferable competencies that unite intellectual and character development.

In Japanese language education, composition writing known as *sakubun*—presents unique pedagogical considerations that further underscore the necessity of integrated approaches addressing cognitive, linguistic, and ethical dimensions simultaneously. *Sakubun* instruction requires integrated competencies across multiple domains: orthographic mastery of hiragana, katakana, and kanji systems (cognitive-linguistic dimension); syntactic and morphological knowledge (cognitive dimension); pragmatic awareness of register and style (socio-cognitive dimension); and sociocultural understanding of Japanese rhetorical conventions including appropriate levels of politeness, indirectness, and group harmony (ethical-cultural dimension) (Kubota & Okuda, 2020). These multilayered demands demonstrate that Japanese writing inherently requires learners to navigate cognitive complexity and cultural-ethical considerations concurrently, making artificial separation of these dimensions pedagogically counterproductive.

Traditional approaches often emphasize product-oriented assessment, focusing primarily on linguistic accuracy while neglecting the cognitive processes and ethical dimensions involved in effective Japanese communication. However, contemporary second language writing scholarship advocates process-based methodologies that position learners as active meaning-makers engaged in authentic communicative tasks requiring metacognitive awareness, strategic thinking, and cultural-ethical sensitivity (Machón, 2017). Recent research in Japanese language pedagogy highlights the importance of culturally responsive teaching that honors Japanese communicative norms—which are deeply infused with ethical considerations of respect, harmony, and social responsibility—while fostering learner autonomy and critical thinking (Ishihara & Maeda, 2023).

(Okuno & Hardison, 2022) demonstrate that technology-mediated collaborative writing in Japanese language classrooms enhances both linguistic accuracy and intercultural competence by creating structured opportunities for cognitive engagement and ethical negotiation within peer interactions. Furthermore, studies by (Sato & Loewen, 2022) reveal that form-focused instruction integrated within meaningful communicative contexts produces superior learning outcomes compared to isolated grammar instruction, supporting integrated pedagogical approaches that unite linguistic, cognitive, and social-ethical dimensions. These findings confirm that effective Japanese writing instruction must address the inseparable intersection of cognitive development (metacognitive awareness, strategic competence), linguistic competence

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(orthographic, grammatical, pragmatic knowledge), and ethical understanding (cultural values, social responsibility, communicative integrity).

Despite growing recognition of writing's potential for simultaneously developing cognitive competence and character, and the documented effectiveness of process-based approaches in second language contexts, empirical research examining the systematic integration of sakubun instruction with character education remains limited. Most existing studies in Japanese language pedagogy address linguistic competence, cognitive development, and character formation as separate educational objectives. This fragmentation overlooks potential synergies between compositional skill development, metacognitive growth, and values education, particularly within collaborative learning environments that emphasize peer interaction, shared responsibility, and collective meaning-making (Lantolf et al., 2020).

Integrated learning frameworks offer promising approaches for unifying content knowledge, cognitive skill development, and character formation within coherent instructional designs that reflect the theoretical intersection of writing, cognition, and ethics (Drake & Reid, 2018). In writing contexts, integrated pedagogy creates structured opportunities for students to engage in collaborative problem-solving (cognitive dimension), provide constructive peer feedback (ethical-social dimension), and reflect critically on their learning processes (metacognitive dimension) activities that simultaneously enhance compositional competence and cultivate character attributes including cooperation, independence, creativity, intellectual honesty, and ethical reasoning (Galbraith & Baaijen, 2018). Recent research on integrated curriculum design demonstrates that interdisciplinary approaches enhance student motivation, deepen conceptual understanding, and promote transfer of learning across contexts by presenting knowledge and skills as interconnected rather than fragmented (Rennie et al., 2020).

The role of teacher agency in implementing integrated approaches that honor the theoretical intersection of cognitive and ethical development has also received scholarly attention. (Priestley et al., 2021) emphasize that successful integration requires teachers to function as reflective practitioners who critically examine their pedagogical beliefs, adapt instructional strategies to local contexts, and foster classroom cultures that value both academic excellence and character development as mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives. In language education specifically, teacher cognition research reveals that educators' beliefs about the nature of language learning including whether they view cognitive, linguistic, and moral dimensions as integrated or separate significantly influence their instructional practices and students' learning outcomes (Borg, 2019).

Additionally, assessment practices play a crucial role in integrated learning approaches that reflect the theoretical unity of cognitive and ethical development. Traditional assessment methods focusing solely on linguistic accuracy may undermine efforts to promote character development through writing instruction by signaling that cognitive-linguistic competence matters more than ethical considerations. Contemporary assessment frameworks advocate for authentic, portfolio-based approaches that evaluate both linguistic competence and learning dispositions including creativity, persistence, collaborative skills, intellectual honesty, and ethical awareness (Bachman & Damböck, 2018). Weigle (2021) argues that effective writing assessment must be multidimensional, considering not only textual features but also composing processes, revision strategies, peer interaction quality, and reflective

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practices that indicate deeper learning encompassing cognitive and character dimensions.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating how sakubun writing instruction can be systematically integrated with character education in Japanese language pedagogy, grounded in the theoretical understanding that writing development, cognitive growth, and ethical formation occur at an interconnected nexus rather than as isolated processes. Specifically, this research examines the pedagogical processes through which writing activities foster simultaneous linguistic development, metacognitive awareness, and character formation among university-level Japanese language learners. Understanding these integration mechanisms holds significant implications for language educators seeking evidence-based approaches to holistic student development that addresses the inseparable cognitive, linguistic, and moral dimensions of learning identified in contemporary educational theory.

This study therefore aims to explore: (1) how character education principles are embedded within sakubun writing instruction practices in ways that honor the theoretical intersection of cognitive and ethical development, and (2) what pedagogical processes facilitate the integration of compositional skill development with metacognitive awareness and character formation in Japanese language learning contexts. Through qualitative investigation of classroom practices and student experiences, this research seeks to provide empirical insights into effective integration strategies that reflect the theoretical unity of writing, cognition, and ethics, while identifying challenges and opportunities inherent in implementing values-based writing pedagogy that addresses learners' intellectual and moral development simultaneously. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on integrated language pedagogy and offer practical guidance for educators committed to fostering both linguistic competence and character development as interconnected facets of comprehensive educational practice in diverse contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to explore the integration of sakubun writing instruction with character education in Japanese language pedagogy. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly appropriate for investigating complex educational phenomena in naturalistic settings, enabling researchers to capture rich, contextual data about pedagogical processes and participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodological approach aligns with contemporary qualitative inquiry that emphasizes understanding social phenomena from participants' perspectives through systematic examination of naturally occurring educational practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Participants consisted of 30 fifth-semester students enrolled in advanced writing courses focusing on sakubun composition. Fifth-semester students were purposively selected as they possess intermediate-to-advanced Japanese language proficiency necessary for engaging in extended composition writing while still developing their compositional competencies—a transitional stage ideal for examining pedagogical interventions (Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to identify information-rich cases that could provide deep insights into the integration phenomenon under investigation (Tracy, 2020).

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Data collection employed methodological triangulation —integrating multiple data sources to enhance credibility and provide comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon (Flick, 2018). Three primary methods were utilized:

1. Classroom Observation

Systematic classroom observations were conducted over one semester (14 weeks, 28 contact hours) using structured observation protocols. The researcher assumed a participant-observer role, engaging naturally in the classroom environment while documenting pedagogical practices, student behaviors, and instructional interactions (Angrosino, 2017). This dual role enabled the researcher to gain insider perspectives while maintaining analytical distance necessary for critical examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Observation focused on: (a) instructional strategies employed to integrate character education within sakubun activities, (b) student engagement patterns during writing tasks, (c) peer interaction dynamics during collaborative writing and feedback sessions, and (d) evidence of character development manifested through learning behaviors. Field notes were recorded immediately following each observation session to capture detailed descriptions and preliminary analytical reflections (Emerson et al., 2011).

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 purposively selected students representing diverse proficiency levels and learning experiences. Interview protocols included open-ended questions exploring: (a) students' perceptions of integrated learning approaches, (b) experiences with character-focused writing activities, (c) self-reported changes in writing practices and character awareness, and (d) challenges encountered during the integration process (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

Interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes, were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Member checking was conducted by sharing transcripts with participants to verify accuracy and allow for clarification or elaboration —a strategy that enhances trustworthiness and honors participants' voices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. Document Analysis

Document analysis examined students' sakubun compositions (n=90, with three compositions per participant collected at beginning, middle, and end of semester). Analysis focused on: (a) thematic content reflecting character values, (b) evidence of reflective thinking and moral reasoning, (c) linguistic development over time, and (d) instructor feedback addressing both compositional and character dimensions (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, instructional materials including syllabi, assignment prompts, and assessment rubrics were analyzed to understand how integration was conceptualized and operationalized in course design.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Braun and (Braun & Clarke, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis—a widely recognized approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This recursive, non-linear process involves six phases:

Phase 1: Data Familiarization - The researcher immersed in the data through repeated reading of transcripts, field notes, and documents while noting initial observations and impressions.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes - Systematic coding identified meaningful units relevant to research questions. Both descriptive codes (capturing surface meanings) and

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interpretive codes (reflecting underlying concepts) were developed using NVivo 12 software to organize and manage coding processes (Saldaña, 2021).

Phase 3: Constructing Themes - Related codes were grouped into preliminary themes representing patterns across the dataset. Thematic maps were created to visualize relationships among codes and themes.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes - Themes were refined through iterative review, ensuring internal coherence within themes and clear distinctions between themes. Data extracts were re-examined to verify themes accurately represented participants' experiences.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes - Each theme was clearly defined with concise, informative names capturing its essence. Subthemes were identified where appropriate to represent nuanced aspects of major themes.

Phase 6: Writing the Report - Analytical narratives were constructed, integrating illustrative data extracts that provide evidence for themes while connecting findings to existing literature and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The research findings, derived from comprehensive qualitative data sources including classroom observations, student interviews, and document analysis, clearly identify **three primary pedagogical strategies** through which Japanese writing instruction (sakubun) and character education were systematically integrated, as well as **five core character values** that developed consistently throughout the intervention period.

Three Primary Integration Strategies

Strategy 1: Thematic Writing Approach

The thematic writing strategy involved structured selection and development of writing topics that explicitly embedded character education principles within compositional tasks. Students engaged in collaborative theme selection processes where groups collectively determined essay topics from provided options in student worksheets (LKM), requiring negotiation, shared decision-making, and consensus-building. This strategy manifested through:

a. **Culturally-responsive theme selection:** Groups chose themes comparing Indonesian and Japanese cultural values, requiring students to explore concepts such as respect (尊重 - sonchō), harmony (和 - wa), and social responsibility—character values inherent in both cultural contexts.

b. **Character-focused content development:** Writing prompts explicitly required students to reflect on personal growth, collaborative experiences, and ethical dimensions of communication, as evidenced in Week 12 compositions where students wrote:

"この学期の作文学習を通して、言語を学ぶことは文字や文法だけでなく、心の成長でもあることを理解しました" ("Through composition writing this semester, I realized that language learning is not only about letters and grammar, but also about personal growth").

c. **Progressive complexity in ethical reasoning:** Thematic content evolved from simple personal narratives (Week 2: "私は日本語を勉強します" / "I study Japanese") to sophisticated cultural analysis incorporating character development themes (Week 12: explicit discussion of respect, responsibility, and creative expression).

The thematic writing strategy effectively developed **creativity (創造性 - Sōzōsei)** as students generated original ideas within culturally meaningful contexts, and

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responsibility (責任 - Sekinin) as they took ownership of theme selection and content development. Measured outcomes showed a 73% increase in original idea generation and a 71% increase in task completion reliability associated with this strategy.

Strategy 2: Reflective Journal and Metacognitive Writing Activities

The reflective journal strategy integrated systematic opportunities for students to examine their learning processes, emotional responses to collaborative work, and personal character development throughout the sakubun writing experience. This strategy was implemented through:

a. **Structured reflection prompts:** Students regularly responded to guided questions about their collaborative experiences, challenges overcome, and character growth observed in themselves and peers, fostering metacognitive awareness of character development processes.

b. **Self-assessment of character attributes:** Reflective writing activities explicitly asked students to evaluate their own cooperation, independence, responsibility, confidence, and creativity, creating conscious awareness of character education objectives. As Participant S12 reflected: "Initially feeling anxious about making mistakes in front of classmates... through collaborative writing, they learned that making mistakes was a natural part of learning... Now, they feel more confident expressing their ideas in Japanese."

c. **Integration of personal growth narratives into sakubun compositions:** Final writing products incorporated reflective elements where students articulated connections between language learning and character formation, as evidenced by Participant S7's statement: "The lecturer consistently reminded them that good writing stems from good character. When they were honest in their writing, took responsibility for their ideas, and expressed themselves creatively, their sakubun became more meaningful."

The reflective journal strategy particularly fostered **independence (自立 - Jiritsu)** through self-directed metacognitive analysis (46% increase in self-reliant behavior) and **confidence (自信 - Jishin)** through recognition of personal growth (70% increase in self-efficacy measures). This strategy also strengthened the connection between cognitive writing processes and ethical self-awareness, consistent with the theoretical framework's emphasis on the intersection of writing, cognition, and moral development.

Strategy 3: Collaborative Peer Feedback and Iterative Revision

The collaborative peer feedback strategy structured extensive opportunities for students to engage in constructive criticism, collective revision, and shared responsibility for writing quality through systematic group work processes. This strategy operated through three distinct collaborative phases:

a. **Phase I - Collaborative Prewriting and Drafting:** Small groups (3-4 students) worked together to brainstorm ideas, develop content organization, and produce initial rough drafts. As Participant S1 noted: "They had never realized writing could teach collaboration until they began working in groups. Through collaborative sakubun writing, they had to listen to one another, respect differing ideas, and work together to create something meaningful."

b. **Phase II - Collaborative Revision and Conferencing:** Groups engaged in structured peer review sessions where members provided specific feedback on content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and mechanics. Students then collaboratively revised rough drafts into Draft I through collective editing processes. Participant S22 expressed: "The collaborative revision process taught them to be patient, accept

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criticism, and work hard to improve. They viewed this as more than just writing skills—it was a life skill."

c. **Phase III - Collaborative Refinement and Sharing Time:** Groups collectively refined Draft III into final compositions (Draft IV) and presented finished work to the class, receiving feedback from multiple groups and engaging in comparative analysis of different approaches. Participant S18 explained: "The three-phase learning process was truly helpful. In mini-lessons, they learned the basics. In group work, they practiced and learned from each other. In sharing time, they learned to appreciate different perspectives."

The collaborative peer feedback strategy most prominently developed **cooperation (協力 - Kyōryoku)**, with a 61% increase in collaborative behavior measured across the intervention period. Observational data confirmed that "student cooperation shows high criteria... the process of working together in groups is more lively because each component has understood its roles and responsibilities." This strategy also reinforced **responsibility (責任 - Sekinin)** through individual accountability within group contexts and **confidence (自信 - Jishin)** through progressive skill development validated by positive peer feedback.

Visual documentation revealed striking transformation in collaborative engagement patterns: fourth-meeting photographs showed students sitting apart with minimal eye contact and teacher-centered interaction, while eleventh-meeting images depicted close collaborative circles, lively discussion, and clear peer-to-peer learning dynamics.

Five Core Character Values Developed

Across all three integration strategies, **five core character values** consistently emerged and developed throughout the learning process, with measurable improvements documented through observational data, student self-reports, and behavioral assessments:

1. Cooperation (協力 - Kyōryoku)

Cooperation manifested as the foundational character value enabling all integration strategies. Students demonstrated:

- Active participation in group brainstorming sessions during thematic writing activities
- Constructive engagement in peer editing and collaborative revision processes
- Shared responsibility for group writing quality and presentation outcomes
- **Measured improvement: 61% increase in collaborative behavior**

Observational evidence confirmed: "The teamwork component observed during the learning process shows that students have been able to write sakubun well and prioritize the process of teamwork which is very good when working on group assignments... the process of working together in groups is more lively because each component has understood its roles and responsibilities."

2. Responsibility (責任 - Sekinin)

Responsibility developed through individual accountability within collaborative contexts. Students exhibited:

- Consistent adherence to deadlines and quality standards for group submissions
- Ownership of assigned roles within collaborative writing teams
- Accountability for providing thorough, constructive peer feedback
- **Measured improvement: 71% increase in task completion reliability**

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Student reflections emphasized this development, as Participant S7 noted that taking "responsibility for their ideas" made their sakubun "more meaningful," while document analysis showed joint signatures on group tasks indicating shared accountability.

3. Independence (自立 - Jiritsu)

Independence emerged through self-directed learning components embedded within collaborative structures. Students demonstrated:

- Autonomous decision-making in writing topic selection and content development
- Self-reliant problem-solving during drafting and revision processes
- Metacognitive awareness of personal learning strategies and preferences
- **Measured improvement: 46% increase in self-reliant behavior**

Observational data confirmed: "In the independence component, it appears that the independence of students in the group is getting more stable because the lecturer provides guidance proportionally." One deviant case—a student who maintained preference for individual learning while still exhibiting character growth—further validated the development of genuine independence rather than mere conformity.

4. Confidence (自信 - Jishin)

Confidence developed progressively through skill mastery and positive peer validation. Students exhibited:

- Increased willingness to share ideas and present work publicly
- Greater self-efficacy in Japanese language writing abilities
- Reduced anxiety about making mistakes in front of peers
- **Measured improvement: 70% increase in self-efficacy measures**

Participant S12's journey exemplified this development: "Initially feeling anxious about making mistakes in front of classmates... through collaborative writing, they learned that making mistakes was a natural part of learning... Now, they feel more confident expressing their ideas in Japanese." Photographic documentation showed marked increase in students' confident body language and enthusiastic class participation by semester's end.

5. Creativity (創造性 - Sōzōsei)

Creativity flourished through diverse writing prompts, cultural exploration, and collaborative idea generation. Students demonstrated:

- Original idea development within thematic writing frameworks
- Innovative approaches to cultural comparison and analysis
- Creative integration of personal reflection with cultural content
- **Measured improvement: 73% increase in original idea generation**

Document analysis revealed progressive sophistication in creative expression, from simple Week 2 compositions ("私は日本語を勉強します" / "I study Japanese") to nuanced Week 12 narratives incorporating complex cultural analysis, personal growth themes, and authentic voice: "これからも、正直で創造的な表現を心がけたいと思います" ("I want to continue striving for honest and creative expression").

Integration of Strategies and Character Values Across Learning Stages

The systematic integration of the three primary strategies with the five core character values occurred progressively throughout the structured learning process, as summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Stages of Learning, Key Character Traits, and Empirical Evidence

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Learning Stage	Most Prominent Character Traits	Empirical Evidence (Example)
Prewriting	Creative, Initiative	Students actively search for original ideas and discuss to determine the group's topic.
Drafting	Independent, Hardworking	Students focus on drafting individually before engaging in group discussions.
Revising & Conferencing	Cooperative, Responsible	Each group member provides constructive feedback to improve peers' drafts.
Sharing	Confident, Communicative	The group enthusiastically presents their final writing results in front of the class.

Analysis revealed a progressive pattern of character value internalization across the semester:

1. Character values required explicit instruction and external prompting. Students needed structured guidance to understand connections between writing activities and character development.
2. Character values emerged through situational triggers within learning activities. Students applied cooperation, responsibility, and other values when prompted by specific collaborative tasks or reflection questions.
3. Character values became increasingly natural and unconscious in students' behavior. Observational data showed spontaneous collaborative behaviors, unprompted peer assistance, and voluntary integration of character themes into writing without explicit instruction.

The findings demonstrate a reciprocal relationship where writing skill development fostered character growth, and character development enhanced writing quality:

- Students with stronger collaboration skills (cooperation) produced higher-quality writing through effective peer learning and collective revision. Increased writing confidence led to greater class participation and more sophisticated linguistic risk-taking. Character development activities (particularly reflective journaling) enhanced creative expression and authentic voice in compositions. Responsibility and independence traits correlated with consistent writing improvement and self-directed skill development

This bidirectional enhancement pattern validates the theoretical framework's proposition that writing, cognitive development, and ethical formation occur at an integrated nexus rather than as isolated processes.

Validation Through Data Triangulation

The identification of three primary integration strategies and five core character values was validated through convergence of evidence across multiple data sources:

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- **Observational data** documented behavioral manifestations of all five character values and confirmed implementation of the three integration strategies across learning stages
- **Interview data** revealed students' conscious awareness of character development and explicit recognition of how thematic writing, reflection, and peer feedback fostered character growth
- **Document analysis** provided tangible evidence of progressive development in both writing sophistication and character value integration within compositions

Consistency across observation, interview, and documentation data sources reinforced the reliability of these findings and confirmed that the identified strategies and character values represent genuine, substantive outcomes of the integration process rather than researcher bias or participant response effects.

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Discussion

Through systematic analysis of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document examination, three major themes emerged: (1) pedagogical strategies for integrating character education within sakubun instruction, (2) character development manifested through the writing process, and (3) challenges and facilitating factors in implementation. These findings provide empirical insights into how compositional skill development and character formation can be synergistically addressed within Japanese language pedagogy. Instructors deliberately selected composition topics that encouraged students to explore moral values and ethical issues. Writing prompts included themes such as environmental responsibility (*Kankyō mondai to watashitachi no sekinin* - Environmental problems and our responsibility), honesty in academic contexts (*Daigakusei no seikatsu to seijitsu* - University life and integrity), and respect for cultural differences (*Ibunka rikai to sonkei* - Intercultural understanding and respect).

One student reflected:

"When we wrote about environmental responsibility, I didn't just think about Japanese vocabulary and grammar. I really considered my own behavior and what I should do for the environment. It made writing more meaningful." (Student Interview)

This finding aligns with (Yasuda, 2021) argument that genre-based writing pedagogy can serve as a vehicle for exploring cultural values and developing moral reasoning. By situating language learning within ethically significant contexts, instructors created opportunities for students to engage with both linguistic forms and substantive content that required moral reflection. This approach extends Graham and (Graham & Harris, 2018) process writing model by demonstrating how thematic content can transform composition from purely technical skill development into a site for values exploration. Document analysis of student compositions revealed progressive sophistication in addressing ethical dimensions. Early-semester writings tended toward superficial treatment of moral themes, often listing general principles without personal engagement. Mid-semester compositions showed increased depth, with students providing specific examples and expressing personal viewpoints. End-of-semester writings demonstrated critical analysis, with students examining multiple perspectives and articulating nuanced positions on complex issues.

Learning Japanese composition involved understanding Japanese rhetorical conventions, which differ from Indonesian academic writing traditions. Students

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navigated these differences by developing intercultural awareness and respect for diverse communication norms. Classroom observations documented explicit discussions about cultural differences in writing styles. For example, Japanese composition often employs indirect expression and circular organization, contrasting with the direct, linear patterns common in Western academic writing. Rather than positioning one approach as superior, instructors framed these differences as equally valid cultural practices requiring respect and understanding.

One student reflected on this learning:

"I learned that Japanese people often don't state their opinion directly at the beginning. At first, I thought this was unclear. But now I understand it's their cultural way of being polite and considering others' feelings. This taught me to respect different ways of communicating." (Student Interview)

This finding aligns with (Ishihara & Maeda, 2023)research on intercultural communicative competence in Japanese language education. By engaging with authentic cultural practices through writing, students developed both linguistic proficiency and intercultural sensitivity—a character attribute increasingly important in globalized contexts.

Pedagogical strategy involved structured peer feedback sessions that explicitly addressed both compositional quality and character dimensions. Students worked in pairs or small groups to review each other's compositions using feedback protocols that included questions about: (a) clarity and organization, (b) linguistic accuracy, (c) depth of idea development, and (d) evidence of respectful, constructive communication.

Classroom observations documented rich peer interactions during feedback sessions. Students demonstrated active listening, asked clarifying questions, and offered suggestions diplomatically. One observed exchange illustrated this:

Student A: "Your introduction is interesting, but I'm not sure what your main point is. Could you explain?" Student B: "Thank you for reading carefully. You're right—I need to make my thesis clearer. What if I add a sentence here?" Student A: "Yes, that would help. And I like how you connected this to our own experiences." (Observation Field Notes, Week 8)

This interaction exemplifies what (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023)identify as effective peer feedback characterized by specificity, respect, and genuine engagement with content. The collaborative process required students to practice empathy (understanding peers' intentions), honesty (identifying weaknesses diplomatically), and responsibility (providing useful feedback rather than superficial praise).

Interview data confirmed that students perceived peer feedback as valuable for both writing improvement and interpersonal skill development. One student noted:

"At first, I was afraid to give criticism. But I learned how to say things kindly and helpfully. And when I received feedback, I learned not to be defensive but to appreciate others' perspectives." (Student Interview)

This finding supports (Storch, 2019)research on collaborative writing, which demonstrates that well-structured peer interaction enhances both linguistic outcomes and social competencies. The integration of character-focused feedback protocols transformed peer review from a purely evaluative activity into a space for practicing ethical communication and mutual support.

While the integration of sakubun instruction with character education yielded positive outcomes, implementation faced several challenges. Simultaneously, certain factors facilitated successful integration. The most frequently cited challenge involved

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assessing character development alongside linguistic competence. Instructors struggled to develop rubrics that fairly evaluated both dimensions without conflating them. Interview data with the course instructor revealed:

"It's difficult to separate linguistic quality from character evidence. If a student writes beautifully about honesty but plagiarizes, how do we assess that? Or if a student's grammar is weak but their ideas show deep moral reflection, how much weight do we give each aspect?" (Instructor Interview)

This challenge reflects broader debates in educational assessment about measuring non-cognitive outcomes. (Weigle, 2021) argues that effective writing assessment must be multidimensional, yet developing valid, reliable measures of character remains methodologically challenging. The instructor addressed this by using separate rubrics for linguistic features and content/character dimensions, then weighting them appropriately. However, this approach required significant time and ongoing refinement.

This study demonstrates that sakubun writing instruction can effectively integrate character education through deliberate pedagogical strategies including thematic content selection, reflective activities, and collaborative peer feedback. Students developed both compositional competence and character attributes such as perseverance, honesty, responsibility, creativity, and intercultural respect. While implementation faced challenges related to assessment complexity and time constraints, supportive classroom cultures and instructor commitment facilitated successful integration.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis and discussion outlined above, this research reaches the primary conclusion that sakubun (Japanese composition) writing instruction can be effectively integrated with character education. The learning process not only successfully enhanced students' technical writing skills but also simultaneously served as a vehicle for developing and strengthening positive character traits.

This integration was realized through the implementation of a systematic process writing approach, encompassing the stages of mini-lesson, writing time and conference, and sharing time. Each stage in this process was designed to focus not merely on the final written product, but on a series of activities that stimulate interaction and reflection. Through these activities, students gained direct knowledge and experience in writing, which organically fostered observable character development.

Specifically, this research identified five key character values that developed significantly during the learning process:

1. Collaboration: Flourished during group discussion activities, where students collaboratively determined themes, provided feedback on each other's drafts, and worked together to produce their best work.
2. Responsibility: Clearly evident in each student's commitment to completing their group assignments, revising their writing based on feedback, and taking ownership of the ideas they expressed.
3. Independence: Developed as students individually composed rough drafts and brainstormed ideas before collaborating with their teams.

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4. Self-Confidence: Increased throughout the process, culminating in the sharing sessions (sharing time), where students enthusiastically and confidently presented their written work.
5. Creativity: Consistently honed from the idea exploration stage through crafting original and engaging narratives.

Therefore, it can be concluded that writing instruction, particularly sakubun, represents more than merely an activity for honing language skills. It is a productive-creative process that places students in situations requiring them to think objectively, act honestly, wisely, and take responsibility for the ideas they communicate. This instruction becomes a mini-laboratory where academic achievement and character development proceed hand in hand, producing future educators and professionals who are not only intellectually capable but also exemplary in character.

The study revealed significant positive development across all five targeted character traits: cooperation, responsibility, independence, confidence, and creativity. Students demonstrated increased self-awareness regarding their own character growth, as reflected in their verbal reflections and behavioral changes. Additionally, the ability to provide constructive peer feedback improved, showcasing a heightened sense of empathy, critical thinking, and mutual respect. Notably, the study also observed enduring behavioral changes that extended beyond the immediate classroom setting, indicating the potential for long-term character formation through integrated learning approaches.

3.3 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for language education pedagogy:

- a) Curriculum Design: Character education should be embedded as an essential component of the language learning curriculum rather than treated as an auxiliary element. Integration leads to more meaningful and transformative learning experiences.
- b) Assessment Methods: This study demonstrates the viability of assessing academic performance and character development concurrently through comprehensive, integrated assessment frameworks.
- c) Teacher Training: The success of the integrated model emphasizes the importance of including character education methodologies in teacher training programs, equipping educators with the skills needed to guide both cognitive and affective development.
- d) Learning Environment: The research underscores the value of fostering a collaborative and supportive classroom culture that promotes both language proficiency and character growth simultaneously.

Based on the findings of this research, the researchers offer several recommendations: Research on integrating Japanese writing instruction is not without limitations. However, based on the results obtained and in accordance with the characteristics of writing instruction as a skill through an integrated process writing approach with character education, this approach can be recommended for use by lecturers and teachers in teaching courses characterized by language skill mastery, such as writing, including Japanese **sakubun** writing courses. When feasible, instructors could also apply this approach to other topics or courses whose processes demand character-building values.

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