



Strength Virtue Humanity and Social Awareness Among Junior High School Students: A Literature Review

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to identify, analyze, and synthesize previous research related to the relationship between *strengths, virtues, and humanity* and *social awareness*, with the aim of examining the relationship between strengths, virtues, and humanity—particularly social intelligence—and the development of *social awareness* in junior high school students, as well as identifying implications for the curriculum and teaching practices. Unlike previous studies that have generally addressed character strengths or empathy, this review specifically synthesizes the virtue of humanity—which encompasses kindness, love, and social intelligence—in relation to social awareness among middle school students. The research method employed a literature review using the PRISMA model to collect and select articles sourced from Google Scholar, resulting in 15 relevant studies published between 2016 and 2026. The data analysis technique used, based on Miles & Huberman, includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions through the critical extraction and comparison of research findings. A synthesis of 15 studies indicates that character strengths related to humanity—particularly empathy and social intelligence—are linked to social awareness and appear to help translate moral values into prosocial actions; however, direct research findings from samples of middle school students remain limited. Schools also need to create spaces that can integrate individual virtues with collective awareness through a humanistic approach and a character-based curriculum. The strength of character in the virtue of humanity has the potential. Thus, it is recommended that schools develop a character-based curriculum, group activities, and community social activities to support the creation of a safe, comfortable, inclusive environment grounded in psychological well-being.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Developing *social awareness* in junior high school students is a crucial foundation for character development and social maturity (Fitri et al., 2024). *Social awareness* can be defined as an individual's ability to understand others' perspectives, intentions, tolerance, and positive social behavior (Hilmi et al., 2024; Ying & Kutty, 2023). In the junior high school environment, students have already undergone a transition from previously relying on their family environment to becoming connected to a broader social environment—such as their peers, teachers, and the community—which are factors that contribute to the formation of students' self-identity (Chun, 2013; Syahrial et al., 2024). During this period, a high level of social awareness is crucial for students to manage conflicts, respect others' opinions and differing perspectives, and actively participate in social and community life (Astuti et al., 2024; Ngõ & Nguyet, 2020).

However, observations in schools indicate that not all junior high school students possess mature social awareness (Nawalinsi et al., 2024). Several studies and reports on best practices in schools indicate that bullying continues to occur, concern for peers remains low, conflicts between friends and between groups still arise easily, and there is an attitude of indifference toward problems arising in their surroundings (Efianingrum et al., 2025; Rejekiingsih & Taher, 2025). Data from the study indicate that students' social awareness varies in terms of empathy, sensitivity to social issues, and participation in community social activities across different student groups (Allemand et al., 2015,). Some groups demonstrate relatively high levels of social awareness, while others exhibit relatively low levels (Lan, 2022). This situation is concerning because low social awareness can lead to difficulties in social adjustment, the emergence of social conflicts, and hinder the development of a mature personality (Riba et al., 2024; Zynuddin et al., 2023).

In this case, the issues that arise in the field include: (1) Students' limited understanding of the feelings and needs of others from diverse life backgrounds (Ying & Kutty, 2023); (2) A lack of organized opportunities to develop empathy and social awareness during the learning process (Setyarini et al., 2023); and (3) the need for an adequate character-building curriculum that aligns with values supporting the development of social awareness (Fitri et al., 2024). This issue is particularly important given that junior high school students are at a critical stage of development—a period of identity formation, learning to manage emotions, and the ongoing development of social skills—which necessitates an appropriate approach during this time, with the hope of having a significant impact in the future (González, 2024).

The theoretical framework of positive psychology provides an appropriate theoretical perspective for describing how to develop social awareness by strengthening students' personality profiles (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). According to Peterson and Seligman, character strengths and virtues include six core virtues, one of which is humanity, which encompasses feelings such as love, kindness, and social intelligence (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). These abilities are directly related to an individual's capacity to understand and respond to others' emotions, as well as to build supportive and empathetic relationships with others (Datu et al., 2021). Positive psychology emphasizes that recognizing and developing one's personal strengths impacts the quality of an individual's social relationships and their ability to contribute positively in a more inclusive environment (O'Connell et al., 2016).

Social intelligence helps adolescents recognize social situations and manage their emotions when interacting with others, while empathy fosters a sense of concern for others' feelings; both are essential components of social awareness—the ability to understand others' perspectives and respond to social situations. (Hetemi dkk., 2023; Lopes dkk., 2005). In this section, humanity is presented as a virtue, with social intelligence and empathy as the forces that shape it, and social awareness as the result or outcome.

Among the various human strengths, social intelligence was chosen as the focus of this study due to its close relationship with students' ability to understand social situations and conditions, interpret others' emotions, and adapt their responses to the interactions they encounter in daily life (Riba et al., 2024). Social intelligence encompasses the ability to read facial expressions, tone of voice, and context in social communication, as well as the ability to regulate or manage emotions effectively in interpersonal relationships or conflicts (Lopes et al., 2005; Ngo & Nguyet, 2020). These skills are crucial for junior school students, especially those who frequently face complex social dynamics in various settings, such as peer pressure, intergroup conflicts, and emotional changes influenced by puberty (Popescu & Moscovici, 2024). Students with high levels of social intelligence tend to demonstrate greater empathy in resolving conflicts peacefully and are able to actively participate in social and community activities (De Wied et al., 2006; Li, 2024).

The rationale for selecting social intelligence as a catalyst for unlocking an individual's best character potential lies in its ability to foster values that contribute to the development of individuals who are sensitive to their social environment (Sabaruddin et al., 2025). First, social intelligence is practical in nature and can be developed through specific teaching methods such as group discussions, role-playing, project-based learning, and community service activities within the school environment (Zarifsanaiey et al., 2022). Second, several studies indicate that this strength is closely related to empathy, tolerance, and the ability to adapt in group settings (Hetemi et al., 2023). Third, by focusing on students' strengths, the positive psychology approach can boost students' self-confidence and motivation to learn, thereby making learning activities more meaningful, in-depth, and enjoyable (Weber & Harzer, 2022).

Previous studies have examined character strengths in adolescents (Park & Peterson, 2006; Shoshani & Slone, 2013) and the role of empathy in peer relationships ((De Wied dkk., 2006), while other VIA studies have primarily involved adults or college students (Bachik dkk., 2020). However, these studies rarely examine strengths related to humanity – particularly social intelligence, specifically as it relates to social awareness – and evidence on this topic is scattered across various educational levels and contexts. To the best of the author's knowledge, no review has clearly synthesized these relationships specifically among middle school students; therefore, this study fills that gap.

The objectives of this literature review are to: (1) examine the relationship between human strengths – particularly social intelligence – and the development of social awareness among junior school students; (2) to identify the theoretical and empirical mechanisms through which social intelligence fosters empathy, tolerance, and social participation; and (3) to evaluate the implications for school educational concepts in designing academic and character development programs that incorporate social strengths. It is hoped that this review will provide a strong conceptual framework for developing curricula and instructional practices that foster social awareness through a focus on character building.

The contributions of this literature review are as follows: (1) to separately map the roles of humanity, social intelligence, and empathy in social awareness; (2) to compare findings across disciplines and educational contexts at the secondary school level; and (3) to explain the implications for guidance and counseling services at the junior high school level.



Method (منهج)

This systematic literature review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page dkk., 2021). The literature review was conducted to answer the researchers' questions regarding the relationship between the strength of the virtue of humanity – particularly social intelligence and empathy – and social awareness among junior high school students, as well as the impact of this relationship on schools.

This study is a literature review, which involves synthesizing or extracting information from existing literature collected according to the research theme to identify research topics

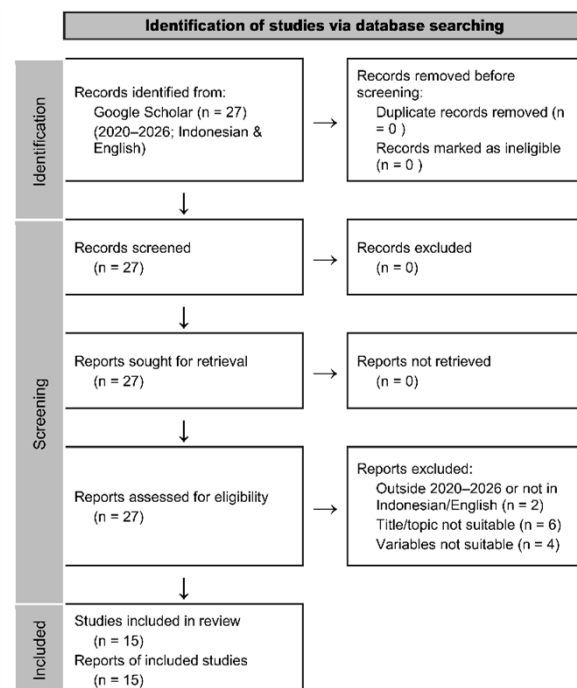
using various theories (Muslihati et al., 2023) . This study aims to identify, analyze, and synthesize previous research on the relationship between the strength of the virtue of humanity and social awareness among junior high school students. This approach was adopted as an expression of concern for creating a safe, comfortable, and joyful school environment through a deep understanding of the conditions of diversity in schools.

The sources of articles and literature for this study were obtained through Google Scholar from August 5 to August 12, 2026, using the keywords “social awareness,” “humanity virtue,” “empathy,” “social intelligence,” “character strengths,” and “junior high school,” with the Indonesian equivalents “kesadaran sosial” and “empati di sekolah.” The search for articles was limited to publications from 2016 to 2026.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature review are as follows. Inclusion criteria include (1) alignment with the article’s main variables; (2) focus on the relationships between variables; (3) context of the subject and learning environment; (4) completeness of structure and data; (5) written in English or Indonesian; and (6) articles published between 2020 and 2026. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria are: (1) mismatch with the article’s subject matter; (2) lack of relevance to the research variables; (3) limited content and methodology.

The data from this study were analyzed thematically using a Miles dkk model-based approach (Miles et al., 2014), which includes: 1) data reduction, which is the process of extracting the research objectives, context, methods, and results from the articles; (2) the process of presenting data in the form of tables and narratives; and (3) drawing conclusions by comparing findings across studies to identify similarities, differences, and research gaps.

The literature search yielded 27 references. After screening the titles and abstracts, 12 references were excluded because their research topics did not align with the focus of this study – which centers on the fields of engineering and technology, human resource management, or ecological and environmental crises –without measuring psychological dynamics; research variables that were inappropriate –such as those discussing general social awareness influenced by mass media, or language teaching techniques not linked to an individual’s internal virtues; and those with limited content and methodology. Subsequently, 15 articles were confirmed to meet the inclusion criteria, as they specifically focused on examining the relationship between the virtue of humanity and social awareness.



Adapted from: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. Licensed under CC BY 4.0.


FIGURE 1 PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for the Literature Review

From the literature collected through the Google Scholar search, a total of 27 articles were gathered. The collected articles were then analyzed for relevance to this study. The analysis of these 27 articles yielded 15 that aligned with the research concept. These 15 articles are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Results of the Literature Review on Strength, Virtue, Humanity, and Social Awareness Among Junior High School Students

N o.	Author and Year of Publication	Article Title	Key Findings
1	(Weruin, 2024)	Fostering students' social awareness and empathy toward social issues outside the classroom	Empathy is a key variable for transforming cognitive moral knowledge into tangible action in society
2	(Fitri dkk., 2024)	Building social awareness through the pillars of education: the role of schools in society	Social awareness cannot exist without virtue within the individual
3	(Wahyudi dkk., 2025)	<i>Carl Rogers' Humanistic Approach to Character Education in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools</i>	An empathetic relationship between teachers and students can accelerate the deeper internalization of social values
4	(Purba, 2026)	Schools as Spaces for Character Building and Social Awareness	Schools have a moral responsibility to integrate the dimension of individual virtue with collective awareness
5	(Fadillah dkk., 2025)	The Reality of Humanitarian Social Values: Tolerance, Empathy, and Peace in Elementary School	Experiences are facilitated so that humanitarian virtues can be transformed into tangible competencies.
6	(A dkk., 2025)	The Importance of Education in Enhancing Social Awareness	Social education plays a vital role in instilling virtues that lead to humanitarian values
7	(Erniasari dkk., 2024)	An Overview of Instilling a Sense of Social Concern in Addressing Bullying Among Students	Empathy is the core of social concern and positive interactions among peers
8	(Salgia Fitri & Sartono Sartono, 2025)	The Role of Character Education in Building Tolerance and Social Awareness Among Elementary School Students Toward Their Peers	Social awareness is the ability to be sensitive to and understand the behavior and circumstances of others around them

9	(Muhammad Fadil dkk., 2025)	The Application of Project-Based Learning Strategies in Islamic Education to Enhance Students' Social Awareness	Empathy is key to motivating oneself to not focus too much on oneself, but also to care about others.
10	(Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad, 2026)Yoesoep Edhie	Social Leadership Theory	Without relational competencies, social awareness within an organization will weaken
11	(Barus & Laspita, 2026)	Humanistic education as a strategy for character development among students at SMK Bersama Berastagi	Treating students as subjects with feelings can strengthen their awareness of social reality
12	(Hilmi dkk., 2024)	The Role of Religious Education in Fostering Social Awareness Among Students	Religious education significantly contributes to increasing social awareness and sensitivity
13	(Sabaruddin, 2020)	Schools with a Humanistic Educational Concept	Humanistic schools foster dynamic and healthy personal development in relation to the social environment of the community
14	(Syafi'i & El-Yunusi, 2024)	The Humanities as a Catalyst for Innovation in Contemporary Education and Society	Strengthening the humanities fosters individuals who are intellectually astute and socially sensitive
15	(Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University dkk., 2024)	The importance of values education and its impact on character development	Providing values education offers strong evidence of increased awareness and sensitivity toward society and the search for meaning in life

Empathy and relational intelligence are catalysts for prosocial action

From the analyzed literature, a deep understanding emerges that the strengths of virtue, humanity, and social awareness reinforce one another holistically. Internal virtues such as empathy and relational intelligence not only serve as a foundation but also act as catalysts that encourage individuals to behave ethically and be sensitive to the actual conditions around them. Well-developed social awareness is viewed as an external manifestation of the virtue of humanity that has been deeply internalized by the individual.

Social intelligence plays a crucial role in this practice because it enables students to learn to interpret the context of communication—from reading tone of voice to understanding emotional expressions—and to manage interpersonal conflicts constructively. A student with well-developed social intelligence will demonstrate the ability to move beyond egocentric focus and will actively exhibit prosocial behavior and inclusivity within their community.

A review of the literature reveals that the majority of studies agree that educational institutions bear a moral responsibility to integrate individual virtues with collective consciousness. Empathy is recognized as the foundation of a caring character in the context of social life. Furthermore, it was found that students' social awareness varies across groups, ranging from high to low levels.

Discussion (مناقشة)

The Role of a Humanistic School Ecosystem and Values-Based Education

Education plays a key role in developing morality to align students' character with the collective consciousness of society. A humanistic education will position students as individuals with genuine feelings and emotional experiences that deserve attention, thereby facilitating the internalization of values of care for others (Himayaturohmah & Safei, 2026; Sarip et al., 2023; Supriyanto et al., 2019). A loving relationship between teachers and students creates a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Meanwhile, differences in the findings illustrate variations in research contexts and methods. Some studies focus on inclusive school environments, Islamic boarding schools, and vocational schools.

Various contexts of the learning environment—including public schools, inclusive schools, Islamic boarding schools, and vocational schools—demonstrate that an integrated approach to character education, religious education, and project-based learning is effective in fostering tolerance and sensitivity toward social conditions and the environment (Sofyan & Saputra, 2022; Supriyanto & Saputra, 2023).

Variability in Social Awareness, Bullying Intervention, and Student Dynamics in Junior High School

The level of social awareness among junior high school students varies considerably across student groups. Some students demonstrate high social sensitivity, while others exhibit relatively low levels. Low levels of social awareness are correlated with the emergence of problems such as difficulty adjusting, a lack of concern for peers, increasing intergroup conflict, and the occurrence of bullying in the school environment (Erdawati & Zulkifli, 2021; Lailatussaidah et al., 2021; Natania et al., 2026; Syirva et al., 2026).

Junior high school students are adolescents undergoing the transition from puberty, characterized by emotional ups and downs, peer pressure, and a period of self-identity exploration within peer groups (Allen et al., 2024; Branje et al., 2021; Mustari & Sari, 2024; Pakpahan et al., 2023). Strengthening social intelligence and empathy is crucial for helping to resolve conflicts peacefully and for enhancing students' resilience and psychological well-being (Kokmandzhiev & Dagbaeva, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

Practical Implications for Guidance and Counseling

This study suggests that, in order to develop a character-based curriculum and contextual learning methods in schools to foster social awareness, schools and/or guidance and counseling teachers are advised to: (1) integrate group activities into guidance and counseling services, such as role-playing and/or project-based learning activities; (2) organize social activities in the school's surrounding community to provide students with firsthand experience interacting with diverse life situations; and (3) guidance and counseling teachers should design interventions to develop social intelligence and establish service standards for addressing aggressive behavior and bullying in schools.

This study has limitations regarding the research subjects, as previous studies have focused primarily on adults or college students, and data on junior high school students remain limited. There is still an overlap between the concepts of social-emotional intelligence and empathy, without distinguishing the specific contributions of each virtue strength.

Based on this study, the following research recommendations are provided: further in-depth research is needed regarding the variables of this study among junior high school students as research subjects. This is particularly true regarding how social intelligence fosters tolerance and social participation. The practical development of a character-based curriculum also needs to be further explored.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

From the literature review above, it can be concluded that character strengths – particularly within the virtue of humanity, which includes social intelligence and empathy – have a significant relationship with and mutually contribute to social awareness. Social intelligence serves as a key catalyst capable of transforming an understanding of moral values into concrete actions; this enables individuals to understand others' perspectives, manage conflicts peacefully, and build supportive interpersonal relationships.

This research implies that the dynamics of character strength development are not merely about moral education but serve as a crucial tool for enhancing mental well-being. Individuals with high social intelligence tend to adapt more easily to their environment and the dynamics that arise in complex social settings, and they demonstrate greater resilience in facing pressures from social life. A humanistic learning environment can tangibly foster healthier, more comprehensive personal development across physical, emotional, and psychological dimensions.

As a recommendation for future research, it is suggested that educational institutions try to integrate a character-strengths-based curriculum through practical methods such as project-based learning or group discussions to strengthen sensitivity to changes in the social environment. Future research should specifically examine each element of “Values in Action” separately to obtain more meaningful data regarding the differing impacts of social intelligence, kindness, and love on mental health.

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