



# THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE SPIRITUAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN

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## ABSTRACT

Spiritual character development constitutes a central dimension of holistic child development, influencing moral reasoning, identity formation, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior. In contemporary societies characterized by rapid technological change, cultural pluralism, and declining communal value systems, concerns have emerged regarding the weakening of moral and spiritual foundations among children and adolescents. This meta-analysis examines the role of parents in the spiritual character development of their children through a synthesis of empirical, theoretical, and evaluative studies drawn from psychology, education, sociology, and family studies. Using a qualitative meta-synthesis design, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, and international policy reports were systematically reviewed to identify dominant themes, convergences, contradictions, and contextual influences. Findings demonstrate that parents play a foundational and irreplaceable role in shaping children's spiritual character through modeling, intentional value transmission, parenting style, emotional attachment, discipline practices, and family routines. While schools, religious institutions, and peers contribute to spiritual socialization, their effectiveness is significantly mediated by parental involvement and the home environment. However, parental influence is constrained by socioeconomic pressures, inconsistent parenting practices, digital media exposure, and weakened family structures. The study concludes that intentional, consistent, and relational parenting remains the most sustainable pathway for spiritual character formation. It recommends family-centered interventions, strengthened parental capacity-building, and coordinated collaboration between parents, educational institutions, and community organizations.

**KEY WORD;** Parental influences, spiritual Character Development, Parenting Styles, Value Transmission, Family Practices

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Concept of Spiritual Character Development

Spiritual character development refers to the process through which individuals internalize values, beliefs, virtues, and moral orientations that guide behavior, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships (King & Boyatzis, 2015). Unlike purely cognitive or behavioral development, spiritual character integrates ethical reasoning, purpose, meaning, and self-transcendence, it shapes how children interpret life experiences, respond to moral dilemmas, and relate to others within society (Wong, 2016).

From a biblical perspective, spiritual character development is presented as intentional and generational. Scripture emphasizes moral formation beginning in childhood:

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, New International Version).

Scholars argue that character development is cumulative and begins in early childhood, with early moral experiences exerting long-lasting influence on adult behavior (Benson et al., 2012). As such, spiritual character development is not an isolated event but a lifelong process initiated and nurtured within primary social environments.

Kusuma and Kasingku (2024) investigated the relationship between parental roles and the development of children's spirituality among Grade XI students at UNKLAB Adventist High School. The analysis revealed a statistically significant and

strong positive correlation between these variables ( $r = 0.548$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that more active parental engagement is strongly associated with higher levels of adolescent spirituality. The findings underscore the critical importance of parents maintaining and enhancing their intentional role in fostering their children's spiritual and character education.

Niyonizye et al., (2024) aimed to explore the role of parents' religious commitment in shaping their children's character in Burundi's Gitega District. Findings revealed that while parents recognized their critical role in fostering character through interdependence, empathy, socialization, and acting as role models, their practical engagement was often inconsistent and lacked positive participation. Key influencing factors included addressing children's needs, providing motivation, education, and emotional support. The study concluded that effective, religiously-informed parenting is essential for healthy psychological development and preventing antisocial tendencies, whereas inadequate parental involvement detrimentally affects character formation.

Raesi et al., (2025) investigated the relationship between parents' spiritual health and their desire to have children. The findings identified that spiritual health in parents is shaped by three core factors: beliefs and values, religious practices and family traditions, and social support. Conversely, the desire for childbearing is influenced by another triad of factors: biological and evolutionary drivers, sociocultural influences, and psychological and emotional states. The study concludes that



spiritual health and its constituent dimensions significantly impact parental decisions regarding having children and recommends that policymakers integrate spiritual health dimensions into family well-being programs to encourage informed childbearing decisions.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NIV): "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

### 1.2 Parents as Primary Socialization Agents

Parents represent the most immediate and enduring influence on children's development. According to social learning theory, children acquire values, attitudes, and behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from significant adults, especially parents (Bandura, 1977). Within the family context, children encounter daily opportunities for moral instruction, emotional guidance, and value clarification.

The family is the first and most influential environment where children learn foundational values, with parents serving as their initial educators. Parents play a crucial role in instilling religious knowledge, moral conduct, and appropriate behavior toward both family members and the wider community, particularly in contexts where they have received Islamic-based education (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2021; Sukardi & Rahmawati, 2022). Children inherit traits from their parents, but parental guidance strongly shapes the direction of their moral and religious development (Santrock, 2021). Research indicates that active parental involvement and family cohesion significantly influence children's moral reasoning and ethical behavior, with positive role modeling linked to higher levels of moral development in childhood and adolescence (Lickona, 2018; Putra & Suyadi, 2020). Moreover, consistent guidance in religious practices and daily moral routines helps children resist negative external influences, internalize ethical and spiritual values, and develop a strong moral character over time (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2021; Sukardi & Rahmawati, 2022). These findings underscore the importance of parents not only transmitting inherited traits but also actively shaping moral development through ongoing interaction, education, and example.

Family education refers to the learning that a person acquires consciously or unconsciously through daily experiences within the family, from birth throughout life. Parents serve as the primary guides and companions, providing care, protection, direction, and education at each stage of a child's development (Santrock, 2021; Putra & Suyadi, 2020). They are responsible for shaping children's moral values, social behavior, and religious understanding, ensuring that children develop the necessary skills and attitudes to navigate life successfully (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2021; Sukardi & Rahmawati, 2022). Research demonstrates that active parental involvement, consistent guidance, and role modeling significantly influence children's ethical reasoning, behavior, and character formation, with positive family interactions linked to higher levels of moral and spiritual

development (Lickona, 2018). Through daily engagement and continuous supervision, parents not only transmit inherited traits but also actively cultivate moral, social, and religious competencies, helping children internalize values that sustain ethical conduct across the lifespan (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2021; Sukardi & Rahmawati, 2022).

Research consistently demonstrates that parental influence on spiritual and moral development surpasses that of schools, peers, and religious institutions, particularly during early and middle childhood (Smith & Denton, 2005; Bengtson et al., 2018). Parental beliefs, practices, and relational styles create the primary framework through which children interpret spiritual and ethical concepts.

Sari (2023) focuses on the foundational role of parents as the primary educators in building children's mental, spiritual, moral, and intellectual character through deliberate approaches and methods, the key finding is that the family environment constitutes the first and most critical educational setting, where children initially acquire and habituate religious, moral, and intellectual teachings. The study concludes that parental success in fostering virtuous character is contingent upon them responsibly fulfilling their role and providing a consistent positive example for children to imitate, asserting that failure in moral development is preventable when parents actively execute their educational function.

### 1.3 Contemporary Challenges to Parental Influence

Despite the centrality of parents, modern social conditions have altered traditional parenting roles. Increased economic pressures, long working hours, single-parent households, digital media saturation, and cultural individualism have reduced the time and consistency with which parents engage in intentional moral and spiritual nurturing (Chetty & Naidoo, 2019). Consequently, responsibility for character development is often shifted to schools or religious institutions, sometimes with limited success.

In the digital era, parents must continuously develop their own skills and knowledge to guide children effectively in navigating information technology and fostering their potential. Children today adapt rapidly to technological developments, which presents new challenges for parents in nurturing moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth (Karmila et al., 2021). Character education cannot rely solely on theoretical instruction but must be modeled through parental behavior and daily examples (Syahputra, 2020). The family remains the primary educational environment, where parents play a pivotal role in supporting children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual maturity, ensuring they develop mental, moral, intellectual, and professional competencies (Ahmad Supardi, 2017). Effective parenting requires adaptation to contemporary conditions so that children become independent, resilient, and socially contributive individuals. Religious and moral habits are primarily acquired in the family, as children internalize the practices and teachings they observe in their parents, emphasizing the need for fathers and



mothers to fulfill their complementary roles in providing sustenance, care, education, and guidance (Ramayulis, 2002; Fauzan, 2022). Neglecting the spiritual and moral development of children in favor of purely material provision can have long-term consequences on their character formation, highlighting the integral role of parents as first educators.

Solomon-Moore (2018) explore parents' perceptions of their 8–9-year-old children's screen-viewing (SV) time and the importance of achieving a 'digital balance. 'The findings revealed that parents view SV as a societal norm and struggle to limit it, driven by a desire to equip their children for a technological world. While most acknowledge negative effects, they also see advantages and do not treat all SV equally distinguishing between educational and non-educational content and viewing tablet use as more isolating than television. Most parents considered achieving a digital balance important primarily to increase quality family time, yet reported wide variation in their children's actual SV habits. The conclusions highlight the complex challenge for researchers and policymakers in supporting families to navigate and plan balanced SV use.

Syomwene (2022) investigated parental involvement strategies and challenges in developing pupils' literacy skills under Kenya's Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in Early Years Education. Findings revealed that teachers involved parents through reading/writing activities, homework, material acquisition, and storytelling. Key challenges included lack of parental cooperation and time, insufficient learning materials (especially in public schools), and limited teacher/parent understanding of CBC principles, with public schools facing greater engagement

difficulties. The study recommends government-led teacher training, parental awareness seminars, adequate resource provision for public schools, and parent sensitization to dedicate time for their children's education to inform effective CBC implementation.

Ahmed (2025) analyze how different parenting styles authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful influence children's emotional, cognitive, and social development, including outcomes like self-esteem, academic achievement, and emotional regulation. It highlighted specific findings on how parenting styles shape child development. Authoritative parenting characterized by warmth and reasonable demands is consistently linked to positive outcomes, including higher self-esteem, stronger academic achievement, and better emotional regulation. In contrast, authoritarian (strict, low warmth) and permissive (indulgent, low control) styles are associated with mixed or negative results, such as lower self-esteem and poorer social skills, while neglectful parenting correlates with the most adverse developmental risks. A key finding is that these effects are not universal but are significantly mediated by cultural context, socioeconomic status, and gender. The review identifies a major research gap: a lack of long-term, cross-cultural studies on diverse populations. It concludes by advocating for targeted interventions and policies informed by these nuanced findings to support adaptive child development.

This meta-analysis therefore seeks to synthesize existing literature to clarify the specific mechanisms through which parents influence spiritual character development and to identify gaps that require targeted intervention.

Table 1.1: Studies Reviewed in the Meta-Analysis

RegNo.	Author / Year	Type	Focus
1	Bandura (1977)	Theoretical	Social learning and modeling
2	Smith & Denton (2005)	Empirical	Parental influence on youth spirituality
3	Benson et al. (2012)	Longitudinal	Family assets and character development
4	King & Boyatzis (2015)	Conceptual	Spiritual development theory
5	Bengtson et al. (2018)	Longitudinal	Intergenerational value transmission
6	Mahoney (2010)	Review study	Parenting, religion, and child outcomes
7	Lickona (2013)	Scholarly book	Character education
8	Roehlkepartain et al. (2006)	Survey	Youth spirituality and families
9	Boyatzis et al. (2006)	Mixed methods	Family practices and spirituality
10	Volling et al. (2019)	Empirical	Parenting and moral regulation
11	Kim et al. (2020)	Empirical	Parenting styles and moral reasoning
12	Okafor (2017)	African case study	Parental moral instruction
13	Oduyoye (2014)	Qualitative	Family and value transmission
14	Chetty & Naidoo (2019)	Qualitative	Parenting in pluralistic societies
15	UNESCO (2021)	Policy report	Family role in values education



## 1.1 Review of Available Studies

### 1.1.1 Parental Modeling and Value Transmission

Bandura (1977) establishes that children learn values primarily through observing parental behavior. Parents who consistently demonstrate honesty, empathy, responsibility, and self-discipline create a lived moral curriculum that children internalize. Smith and Denton (2005) confirm that adolescents' moral and spiritual orientations closely resemble those of their parents, particularly when parental behavior aligns with expressed values.

Bengtson et al. (2018), using multigenerational data, found that value continuity across generations is strongest when parents combine clear moral expectations with emotional warmth. In contrast, inconsistency between parental beliefs and behaviors weakens internalization.

Şahin et al., (2025) assess intergenerational value transmission within the family. Analyzing data from 1,443 Italian adolescents, the bifactor exploratory structural equation modelling (ESEM) demonstrated excellent fit for the Transmission of Values Scale, confirming its factorial validity and reliability. Key findings reveal that the global Transmission of Values Scale factor is strongly and positively associated with key adolescent outcomes, including secure parental attachment, family life satisfaction, and family leisure activities. Furthermore, specific value dimensions within the scale explained unique variability in these outcomes, supporting the scale's utility in measuring how the effective transmission of family values during adolescence is linked to positive developmental and relational well-being.

Pinquart and Silbereisen (2004) analyzed the bidirectional transmission of values between adolescents (11-17 years) and their parents over one year. Key findings demonstrate that adolescents successfully transmit their values to parents, but this influence is selective. Transmission from adolescents to parents was observed specifically for values salient in adolescence such as views on new technology's usefulness, beliefs about traditional life, and the importance of religion but not for topics relevant later in adulthood. Furthermore, this upward transmission primarily occurred in families with above-average levels of authoritative parenting, characterized by parental receptiveness and support. A notable exception was religious values, which were transmitted from adolescents to parents even in families with below-average authoritative parenting. The study confirms that value socialization is a reciprocal process, with adolescents actively shaping parental values under specific conditions.

Kusuma and Kasingku (2024) investigated the relationship between parental roles and the development of children's spirituality among Grade XI students at UNKLAB Adventist High School. The quantitative, descriptive-correlational study, sampling 105 respondents via convenience sampling, found that both parental role involvement (mean 4.02) and children's spirituality (mean 4.03) were rated highly. The analysis revealed a statistically significant and strong positive correlation between these variables ( $r = 0.548$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that more active

parental engagement is strongly associated with higher levels of adolescent spirituality. The findings underscore the critical importance of parents maintaining and enhancing their intentional role in fostering their children's spiritual and character education.

Niyonizye et al., (2024) aimed to explore the role of parents' religious commitment in shaping their children's character in Burundi's Gitega District, utilizing a qualitative exploratory methodology with interviews of fifteen couples. Findings revealed that while parents recognized their critical role in fostering character through interdependence, empathy, socialization, and acting as role models, their practical engagement was often inconsistent and lacked positive participation. Key influencing factors included addressing children's needs, providing motivation, education, and emotional support. The study concluded that effective, religiously-informed parenting is essential for healthy psychological development and preventing antisocial tendencies, whereas inadequate parental involvement detrimentally affects character formation.

Raesi et al., (2025) aimed to investigate the relationship between parents' spiritual health and their desire to have children. The findings from 14 reviewed articles identified that spiritual health in parents is shaped by three core factors: beliefs and values, religious practices and family traditions, and social support. Conversely, the desire for childbearing is influenced by another triad of factors: biological and evolutionary drivers, sociocultural influences, and psychological and emotional states. The study concludes that spiritual health and its constituent dimensions significantly impact parental decisions regarding having children and recommends that policymakers integrate spiritual health dimensions into family well-being programs to encourage informed childbearing decisions.

Meneses et al., (2022) investigated the relationship between children's perceived parenting styles and their personal values. The key findings from 119 children revealed that a guardian's own value priorities do not correlate with the specific parenting style the child perceives. However, a positive parenting style was significantly linked to a greater alignment (congruence) between the values of guardians and their children. The analysis confirmed that both the parenting style and the values perceived by the child are significant explanatory factors for the values the child ultimately endorses, underscoring their critical joint role in the intergenerational transmission of values.

Roest et al., (2009) employed structural equation modeling to examine bidirectional value transmission within 402 families over five years, focusing on "work-as-duty" and "hedonism." Key findings revealed that value socialization is not a unidirectional parent-to-child process. Instead, there were significant bidirectional transmissions: between fathers and children for work-as-duty, from children to mothers for work-as-duty, and from children to fathers and bidirectionally between parents for hedonism. Furthermore, family adaptability and cohesion influenced these pathways. Father-to-child transmission of work-



as-duty was consistent across family systems, while child-to-parent transmission of this value occurred only in more structured families. A connected family climate generally facilitated transmissions, though evidence from multiple-group analyses was not strong. The study conclusively demonstrates that late adolescents and emerging adults actively socialize their parents, and parents socialize each other, within the family system.

### 1.1.2 Parenting Styles and Spiritual Character Formation

Parenting style significantly shapes how children internalize moral values. Kim et al. (2020) demonstrate that authoritative parenting characterized by warmth, structure, and consistent discipline is associated with higher levels of moral reasoning and self-regulation. Conversely, authoritarian and permissive styles are linked to superficial compliance or moral ambiguity. Volling et al. (2019) argue that emotionally responsive parenting enables children to develop empathy and conscience, key components of spiritual character.

Javdan and Nickkardar (2011) examined the relationship between parenting styles and the spiritual intelligence of 160 high school students. The key finding is that parenting styles are a significant predictor of adolescent spiritual intelligence. Specifically, an authoritative parenting style showed a strong positive relationship with higher spiritual intelligence. In contrast, authoritarian and neglecting parenting styles were significantly and negatively related to spiritual intelligence. The permissive parenting style demonstrated no significant relationship with this outcome.

Cayaban et al., (2025) investigated Grade 10 students' perceptions of how parenting styles influence their holistic character development. Key findings from a survey of 118 students revealed that the majority perceived authoritative parenting as the most common style in their households. Critically, students perceived parenting styles to have a positive impact on their holistic development across all measured domains: psychological, social, intellectual, physical, and spiritual. Furthermore, the study found no significant differences in these perceived effects based on students' demographic profiles. The results underscore the essential role of inclusive and responsive parenting styles, particularly authoritative practices, in fostering comprehensive character development in adolescents.

Mburu et al., (2025) investigated the relationship between perceived parenting styles and spirituality among 248 consecrated women in Kenya. Key findings revealed that the dominant retrospectively perceived parenting style was authoritarian (78.2%), followed by authoritative (55.5%) and permissive (43.7%). A majority of participants reported a low level of spirituality (62.6%). Analysis showed a significant negative correlation between spirituality and both permissive ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and authoritative ( $r = -.21$ ,  $p = .001$ ) parenting styles, while authoritarian parenting showed no significant correlation. Demographic characteristics (age, education) were not significantly associated with spirituality. The study concludes that specific parenting styles are linked to later spiritual outcomes and

recommends workshops to educate parents on the long-term influence of their parenting approach.

Mai et al., (2025) investigated the relationship between parenting styles and spiritual well-being among 290 Catholic emerging adults in Kenya. The key findings revealed that the authoritarian parenting style was the dominant style reported ( $M=35.48$ , 70.96%). While the majority of participants exhibited a moderate level of spiritual well-being (98.5%), inferential statistical analysis showed no significant relationship between parenting styles and spiritual well-being, as indicated by a very weak, non-significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.014$ ,  $p = 0.813$ ). Consequently, the study's recommendations focused on individual spiritual practices, advising emerging adults to proactively engage in church-led spiritual growth activities to enhance their well-being, rather than on modifying parenting approaches.

Mushlih (2025) examined the influence of parenting styles on students' religious character, surveying 200 junior high school students in Indonesia. The key findings revealed that parenting style has a significant direct effect on both worship discipline and religious character. The model demonstrated strong predictive validity, underscoring the essential role of consistent, family-based religious routines. The study concludes that religious character in youth is most effectively strengthened through structured parental involvement and the habitual practice of spiritual disciplines at home.

Susanti and Tarigan (2021) investigated the impact of parenting styles on the character and spirituality of Batak adolescents during the pandemic using an ex post facto design. The key finding is that the parenting styles families adopted significantly shaped adolescent character and spirituality, with the model explaining an exceptionally high proportion of the variance ( $R^2 = 97.1\%$ ). This indicates a very strong interaction between parenting style variables and the resulting adolescent character and spirituality outcomes, evidencing the family's crucial role as the primary agent of socialization for spiritual and character development during a challenging period.

Parenting style is critical in shaping moral internalization. Authoritative parenting supports moral reasoning and spiritual intelligence, whereas authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful parenting may have adverse or inconsistent effects (Kim et al., 2020; Javdan & Nickkardar, 2011; Cayaban et al., 2025; Mburu et al., 2025). Research also highlights cultural context as a mediator of these effects (Ahmed, 2025).

### 1.1.3 Family Practices and Daily Interactions

Boyatzis et al. (2006) emphasize that informal family practices such as shared conversations, reflective discussions, and routine interactions play a greater role in spiritual formation than formal instruction alone. Benson et al. (2012) similarly highlight that family rituals, routines, and shared responsibilities cultivate moral identity and purpose.



In African contexts, Okafor (2017) and Oduyoye (2014) document how storytelling, communal discipline, and respect for elders reinforce moral norms within family systems.

Hosokawa et al., (2023) examined the relationship between family routines, family relationships, and the behavior of 8–9-year-old children. Key findings from a path analysis of 717 parent responses demonstrated that consistent family routines significantly predict children's behavior, but this effect is fully mediated by family relationships. Specifically, family routines were positively associated with family cohesiveness and expressiveness and negatively associated with family conflict. These relationship qualities, in turn, directly influenced child outcomes: greater cohesiveness and expressiveness were linked to fewer externalizing problem behaviors, while expressiveness was also associated with fewer internalizing problems and more prosocial behaviors. Conversely, higher family conflict was linked to more internalizing and externalizing problems and fewer prosocial behaviors. The study concludes that family routines protect children's mental health and foster social competence primarily by stabilizing and improving the emotional quality of family relationships.

Hosokawa et al., (2023) investigated the associations between family routines, family relationships, and the behavior of 8–9-year-old children in Japan. The path analysis of 717 parental responses revealed that family routines are significantly linked to children's behavior, but this relationship is fully mediated by the quality of family relationships. Specifically, consistent routines were positively associated with family cohesiveness and expressiveness and negatively associated with family conflict. In turn, greater cohesiveness predicted fewer externalizing problems, higher expressiveness predicted fewer internalizing and externalizing problems and more prosocial behaviors, while higher conflict predicted more internalizing and externalizing problems and fewer prosocial behaviors. These findings indicate that family routines protect children's mental health and enhance social competence primarily by stabilizing and improving the emotional climate of family relationships.

Lloyd et al., (2023) in a systematic review investigated whether family-focused interventions improve communication in the context of adolescent anxiety and depression. Analyzing seven randomized controlled trials, it found significant heterogeneity in how communication was measured and mixed evidence on whether interventions improved it. While limited evidence suggested family-focused interventions might improve communication more than non-family-focused approaches, the results were inconclusive due to major methodological limitations in the primary studies. The review concludes that further rigorous research is required to determine the efficacy and mechanisms of family-focused interventions for improving communication and mental health outcomes in adolescents and young adults (aged 14–24).

Research also shows that parenting styles influence the effectiveness of value transmission. Authoritative parenting, marked by warmth and reasonable demands, fosters positive outcomes such as self-esteem, moral reasoning, and spiritual intelligence, whereas authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful styles can limit or distort these outcomes (Ahmed, 2025; Javdan & Nickkardar, 2011; Mushlih, 2025; Susanti & Tarigan, 2021). Furthermore, contemporary educational reforms, such as Kenya's Competency Based Curriculum (CBC), reveal challenges in parental involvement due to limited time, resources, and understanding of teaching methodologies (Syomwene, 2022).

Daily family routines, reflective discussions, and shared responsibilities foster spiritual identity and prosocial behavior (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Benson et al., 2012). African studies underscore the role of storytelling, communal discipline, and respect for elders (Okafor, 2017; Oduyoye, 2014). Consistent family routines enhance cohesion, expressiveness, and reduce conflict, positively influencing child outcomes (Hosokawa et al., 2023).

## 1.2 Agreements and Contradictions from Reviewed Studies

### 1.2.1 Agreements

The reviewed literature strongly agrees that parents are the primary agents of spiritual character development. Across cultural and methodological contexts, studies affirm that parental modeling, relational quality, and intentional engagement significantly influence children's moral and spiritual outcomes (Benson et al., 2012; Bengtson et al., 2018). There is also consensus that parental influence is strongest during early childhood and continues to shape adolescent development, even when peer influence increases.

Children internalize ethical values and spiritual norms primarily through observing and imitating parents' behavior (Bandura, 1977; Smith & Denton, 2005). Studies indicate that moral consistency and authenticity in parental behavior strengthen children's internalization of values (Bengtson et al., 2018; Şahin et al., 2025). Emotional warmth, secure attachment, and responsive parenting significantly influence moral reasoning, prosocial behavior, and spiritual engagement (Volling et al., 2019; Kusuma & Kasingku, 2024). Children in supportive family environments display higher empathy, resilience, and internalized religious practices. Parental impact begins in early childhood and persists through adolescence, even as peer influence increases (Benson et al., 2012; Lickona, 2013). Early moral experiences have cumulative, long-term effects on character development. Authoritative parenting, which combines warmth, guidance, and reasonable expectations, is repeatedly shown to positively influence moral reasoning, spiritual intelligence, and holistic development (Javdan & Nickkardar, 2011; Cayaban et al., 2025). Across societies, the family remains the first and most influential environment for teaching ethics, spirituality, and social responsibility (Sari, 2023; Ahmad Supardi, 2017). Formal institutions such as schools and religious organizations supplement but cannot replace parental influence. Although



parents predominantly transmit values, adolescents can also shape parental perspectives under certain conditions, highlighting a dynamic, reciprocal influence within the family system (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004; Roest et al., 2009).

### 1.2.2 Contradictions / Divergences

Divergences arise regarding the most effective mechanisms of influence. Lickona (2013) emphasizes structured moral instruction, while Boyatzis et al. (2006) prioritize relational and experiential learning. Cultural context also mediates effectiveness, with parental authority stronger in collectivist societies than in highly individualistic ones (Chetty & Naidoo, 2019). While the importance of parental influence is widely recognized, there are notable divergences in the literature regarding the mechanisms, magnitude, and contextual factors of that influence: Lickona (2013) emphasizes structured moral instruction and deliberate character education, suggesting that intentional teaching is central to moral development. Boyatzis et al. (2006) prioritize experiential and relational learning, arguing that everyday interactions, family routines, and conversations are more influential than formal instruction. While authoritative parenting is consistently linked to positive outcomes in many studies (Kim et al., 2020; Javdan & Nickkerdar, 2011), other studies (Mburu et al., 2025; Mai et al., 2025) report mixed or context-dependent effects, with some authoritarian or permissive practices showing neutral or culturally mediated outcomes. In collectivist societies, strict parental authority may reinforce moral conformity, while in individualistic societies, the same practices may hinder autonomy and self-reflection (Chetty & Naidoo, 2019). Studies differ in measuring spirituality and character, leading to inconsistencies. For instance, Mburu et al. (2025) found negative correlations between authoritative parenting and later spiritual outcomes among consecrated women, while Kusuma and Kasingku (2024) found strong positive effects in adolescents. Measurement tools, age groups, and religious contexts contribute to these divergences. Contemporary challenges such as digital media, socio-economic pressures, and parental work demands reduce opportunities for direct value transmission (Chetty & Naidoo, 2019; Solomon-Moore, 2018). This introduces contradictions in effectiveness; parental influence may be strong in theory but limited in practice due to competing societal forces. Some longitudinal studies (Bengtson et al., 2018; Benson et al., 2012) suggest that parental influence is cumulative and long-lasting, while short-term or cross-sectional studies indicate that peer, school, and media influences can temporarily override guidance during adolescence.

### 1.3 Justifications

Despite extensive acknowledgment of parental importance, many educational and social policies marginalize parents in character education initiatives. Existing studies often focus on outcomes rather than practical strategies for strengthening parental capacity. Additionally, rapid social change has introduced competing influences that weaken parental authority. There is therefore a need for an integrated synthesis that clarifies parental

mechanisms, contextual challenges, and opportunities for intervention.

This meta-analysis addresses these gaps by consolidating interdisciplinary evidence and highlighting pathways for strengthening parental engagement in spiritual character development.

## 1.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 1.4.1 Conclusions

- i. Parents are the most influential agents in children's spiritual character development.
- ii. Parental modeling and relational quality are more impactful than formal instruction alone.
- iii. Parenting style significantly affects the internalization of moral values.
- iv. External institutions complement but cannot replace parental influence.
- v. Modern social pressures constrain effective parental engagement.

### 1.4.2 Recommendations

- i. **Strengthen Parental Capacity:** Programs should emphasize moral and spiritual nurturing skills.
- ii. **Family-Centered Policies:** Policies should recognize families as primary character-forming institutions.
- iii. **Collaborative Approaches:** Schools and community institutions should partner with parents rather than replace them.
- iv. **Supportive Environments:** Governments should promote family-friendly policies enabling parent-child engagement.
- v. **Further Research:** Conduct longitudinal studies in diverse cultural contexts to examine evolving parental roles.

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