



Beyond moral instruction: Tokkatsu and sports activities as an ecosystem of character education in Japanese schools

Más allá de la enseñanza moral: Tokkatsu y las actividades deportivas como un ecosistema de educación del carácter en las escuelas japonesas

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Abstract

Introduction: Character education has become an important issue in contemporary education. Japan is widely recognized for integrating character education into daily school life through Tokkatsu (*Tokubetsu Katsudō*) and sports activities.

Objective: This study aimed to analyze the integration of Tokkatsu and sports activities in shaping students' character in Japanese schools.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach based on observations at four schools in Okinawa, Japan. Data were collected through observation and documentation and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model.

Results: The findings revealed that character development is shaped through the integration of Tokkatsu and sports activities. Tokkatsu promoted cooperation, responsibility, independence, and social awareness, while sports activities strengthened discipline, teamwork, commitment, and leadership. Cooperation, responsibility, and independence emerged as the most dominant character traits.

Conclusions: Character education in Japanese schools is strengthened through the integration of social, academic, and sports activities. The findings demonstrate that Tokkatsu and sports activities function as complementary mechanisms in developing students' character through direct participation and experience.

Keywords

Tokkatsu; character education; sports activities; student character; Japanese education.

Resumen

Introducción: La educación del carácter se ha convertido en un tema importante en la educación contemporánea. Japón es ampliamente reconocido por integrar la educación del carácter en la vida escolar cotidiana a través de Tokkatsu (*Tokubetsu Katsudō*) y las actividades deportivas.

Objetivo: Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la integración de Tokkatsu y las actividades deportivas en la formación del carácter de los estudiantes en las escuelas japonesas.

Metodología: Este estudio empleó un enfoque descriptivo cualitativo basado en observaciones realizadas en cuatro escuelas de Okinawa, Japón. Los datos se recopilaban mediante observación y documentación, y se analizaron utilizando el modelo interactivo de Miles y Huberman.

Resultados: Los hallazgos revelaron que el desarrollo del carácter se configura mediante la integración de Tokkatsu y las actividades deportivas. Tokkatsu promovió la cooperación, la responsabilidad, la autonomía y la conciencia social, mientras que las actividades deportivas fortalecieron la disciplina, el trabajo en equipo, el compromiso y el liderazgo. La cooperación, la responsabilidad y la autonomía surgieron como los rasgos de carácter más dominantes.

Conclusiones: La educación del carácter en las escuelas japonesas se fortalece mediante la integración de actividades sociales, académicas y deportivas. Los hallazgos demuestran que Tokkatsu y las actividades deportivas funcionan como mecanismos complementarios para desarrollar el carácter de los estudiantes a través de la participación directa y la experiencia.

Palabras clave

Tokkatsu; educación del carácter; actividades deportivas; carácter estudiantil; educación japonesa.

Introduction

Character education has become one of the primary agendas of global education in the twenty-first century, as many countries face challenges related to increasing individualistic behavior, declining social awareness, and the weakening of responsibility and integrity among younger generations (Ramadan et al., 2025). In this context, education is no longer solely oriented toward academic achievement but also toward the development of students' social, emotional, and moral competencies (Febrianta et al., 2025). However, the implementation of character education in various countries continues to face significant challenges. Anisah et al. (2019) found that the implementation of character education in secondary schools had not yet been optimal because the integration of character values into the learning process, school culture, and habituation activities remained limited. These findings suggest that the success of character education cannot be determined solely by the formal curriculum; rather, it requires an educational environment that provides students with authentic opportunities to continuously practice character values.

One of the major weaknesses of character education implemented in various educational systems is the dominance of theoretical approaches that position students as passive recipients of values. Junaedi and Syukur (2017) argued that indoctrinative approaches to moral education tend to be less effective because values are understood merely as knowledge without being internalized through everyday actions. In their study of Japanese moral education, they demonstrated that effective moral learning should encourage students to discover and internalize values independently through authentic social experiences. Similarly, Mulyadi (2020) explained that character education in Japan is primarily carried out through daily activities rather than lectures or rote memorization. Children are trained to become disciplined, independent, responsible, and cooperative individuals through direct involvement in various school activities (Syaikhu et al., 2025). Therefore, experience-based character education is considered more effective than approaches that focus solely on the verbal transmission of moral concepts.

Japan is often regarded as one of the countries that has successfully developed character education in a systematic and sustainable manner. This success is closely associated with Japanese school culture, which positions character development as an integral part of the entire educational process. In addition to moral education classes (*doutoku*), Japan has developed a special program known as *Tokubetsu Katsudō* (*Tokkatsu*), which encompasses various school activities designed to foster students' social skills, responsibility, cooperation, and leadership (Kyomen, 2025). Junaedi and Syukur (2017) explained that *Tokkatsu* is integrated into student council activities, classroom activities, school events, shared lunch activities, and various group-based activities aimed at developing students' awareness as members of a community. Empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this approach was provided by Miharja et al. (2020), who conducted a study involving 31 fifth-grade students in a lesson-study-based school. The findings revealed that the implementation of *Tokkatsu* successfully initiated and strengthened students' collaborative behavior through habitual questioning, the development of social relationships, and structured group-learning activities. These findings indicate that character development in Japan places greater emphasis on social habituation than on the mere acquisition of moral concepts.

Character development in Japanese schools is further strengthened through the integration of *Tokkatsu* with school sports activities, both in the form of annual sports festivals (*undokai*) and sports clubs (*bukatsu*). Akiyama (2020) explained that school sports activities in Japan constitute an integral component of holistic education aimed at fostering cooperation, solidarity, responsibility, and active student participation within the school community. All students are involved in various individual and group activities that require coordination, communication, and collective commitment. Furthermore, Shimotake (2022) demonstrated that contemporary Japanese school sports culture emphasizes not only discipline but also the development of student autonomy through the cultivation of self-discipline, independent decision-making, and personal responsibility in sports activities. These values are consistent with the objectives of *Tokkatsu*, which focuses on developing collaborative skills and group consciousness. Consequently, the integration of *Tokkatsu* and sports activities creates an educational environment that enables students to learn and directly practice responsibility, cooperation,

independence, discipline, and leadership through authentic and sustained social experiences within school life.

Research on character education in schools and through sports activities has been widely conducted; however, it has generally developed along two relatively separate lines of inquiry. Using a qualitative approach, Hapsara et al. (2025) found that character education in Japanese schools is integrated into various school activities and contributes to the development of social responsibility and global citizenship values. Similar findings were reported by Miharja et al. (2020), who demonstrated that Tokkatsu promotes collaboration, active participation, and student character development through everyday school activities. Meanwhile, studies on sports activities have shown that physical education and extracurricular programs contribute to the development of discipline, responsibility, cooperation, sportsmanship, and leadership among students (Carsiwan et al., 2025; Firmansyah, 2016; Kuspratiwi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, most of these studies have treated Tokkatsu and sports activities as separate domains of inquiry, leaving the mechanisms through which they complement one another in shaping students' character within Japanese schools insufficiently explained from an empirical perspective. In addition, studies specifically examining the integration of Tokkatsu and sports activities through direct observation of school life in Japan remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution by investigating the synergy between Tokkatsu and sports activities as a unified ecosystem of character education integrated into everyday school life.

Based on this research gap, the present study aims to analyze the integration of Tokubetsu Katsudō (Tokkatsu) and sports activities in shaping students' character in Japanese schools. The study focuses on identifying the character values that emerge, the forms of integration implemented within school life, and their contributions to the development of cooperation, responsibility, independence, discipline, and leadership among students. This research is important because it offers a more holistic perspective on character education in Japan, which has largely been examined through either Tokkatsu or sports activities separately. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the literature on character education by explaining the relationship between school-based social activities and sports activities in the process of value internalization. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for educators, school administrators, and policymakers in developing integrated character education models, while also providing inspiration for the advancement of character education practices across diverse educational contexts.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a benchmarking study design to examine the implementation of Tokkatsu and sports activities in shaping students' character in Japanese schools (Homburg, 2001). The benchmarking design was used to identify, compare, and analyze educational practices considered effective in fostering student character through school-based and sports-related activities. The unit of analysis consisted of Tokkatsu practices and sports activities implemented within the school environment as part of the character education process.

Data were collected during participation in the *Education Administration for Reducing Disparities in Basic Education* program organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Okinawa, Japan, from May 28 to June 28, 2025. Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation, field notes, document analysis, and the review of training materials and official program reports. Observations were carried out at Sakata Elementary School, Chinen Junior High School, Konan Junior and Senior High School, and Kumejima Elementary School, which represented diverse educational contexts, including primary education, secondary education, high-performing schools, and schools located in remote areas of Okinawa Prefecture. The observations focused on the implementation of Tokkatsu, school sports activities, student participation, and the character values developed through these activities.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of four stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data condensation stage, information relevant to the implementation of Tokkatsu, sports activities, and student character development was selected, simplified, and categorized. The data were then



organized into major themes to facilitate the interpretation of relationships among the findings. In the final stage, conclusions were continuously drawn and verified based on the entirety of the collected data. The trustworthiness of the data was enhanced through methodological triangulation by comparing findings obtained from observations, field notes, activity documentation, training materials, and official program reports.

Results

Implementation of Tokkatsu and Sports Activities in Japanese Schools

Amid growing attention to character education across various countries, debates continue regarding the most effective way to develop students' character. Some argue that character should be taught through subjects or special programs designed systematically. Others maintain that character cannot be developed solely through the delivery of instructional content but must emerge from students' direct experiences in their daily lives. This debate suggests that character development is influenced not only by what is taught in schools but also by how educational environments provide opportunities for students to participate, interact, and gain meaningful social experiences (Ridwan et al., 2026). In this context, the implementation of Tokkatsu and sports activities in Japanese schools is particularly noteworthy because both constitute educational practices that are continuously embedded in everyday school life.

Based on field observations conducted during participation in the *Education Administration for Reducing Disparities in Basic Education* program organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Okinawa, Japan, from May 28 to June 28, 2025, it was found that the schools visited integrated a variety of academic and non-academic activities into daily school life. These activities were manifested through student activities, student-led activities, collaborative learning, community involvement, extracurricular programs, and physical activities that encouraged active student participation. Such practices were observed at Sakata Elementary School, Chinen Junior High School, Konan Junior and Senior High School, and Kumejima Elementary School.

Table 1. Implementation of Tokkatsu and Sports Activities in Japanese Schools

School	Date of Visit	Tokkatsu Practices	Student and Sports Activities
Sakata Elementary School	June 6, 2025	Moral, life, and citizenship education	Student activities within the school environment
Chinen Junior High School	June 9, 2025	Love, Effort, Ambition; student activities	Physical sports and extracurricular activities
Konan Junior and Senior High School	June 10, 2025	Creativity and leadership development	Baseball and basketball
Kumejima Elementary School	June 20, 2025	Student-led activities; collaborative learning	Group-based physical activities and physical health promotion

Observations at Sakata Elementary School on June 6, 2025, involved 27 students participating in various learning and school activities. The school focused not only on academic achievement but also on fostering life education, morality, and citizenship among students. Throughout the activities, students actively interacted with teachers, peers, and visiting guests. The observed activities included classroom learning, social interactions among students, and various school programs that encouraged active engagement in daily school life. A well-organized school environment and adequate facilities supported the implementation of these activities.

The visit to Chinen Junior High School on June 9, 2025, revealed the implementation of Tokkatsu integrated into various educational activities. Observations involved 29 students participating in classroom learning activities. The school cultivated an educational culture based on the motto *Love, Effort, and Ambition*, which was embedded throughout school activities. Student development was guided by the values of *initiative, autonomy, respect, and creativity*. In the learning process, students engaged in Inquiry-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, Team Teaching, and the use of ICT tablets as learning media. In addition to academic activities, students participated in student activities, extracurricular programs, and physical sports programs that formed part of the school's regular activities.



The implementation of Tokkatsu was also evident through various special activities that connected students with the wider community. In practice, the school involved parents, volunteers, and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in a range of educational activities. This involvement was particularly visible during a community exchange activity held in Kumejima on June 19, 2025. During this event, students, parents, and community members participated in various collaborative activities that reflected the close relationship between the school and the local community. The PTA served not only as a supporter of school activities but also as a partner in organizing programs involving students.

Additional findings emerged from the visit to Kumejima Elementary School on June 20, 2025. Observations were conducted on 26 students participating in various learning and school activities. The school adopted an educational approach that emphasized a balance between students' physical, moral, and intellectual development. One of the practices observed was student-led activities, which provided students with opportunities to take active roles in implementing school programs. Furthermore, learning was conducted through deep learning and collaborative learning approaches. Throughout the observation period, students participated in various group-based physical activities carried out in a collaborative and participatory atmosphere. These activities involved interaction among students, group cooperation, and active participation in programs conducted within the school environment.

Figure 1. Student Participation in Group-Based Physical Activities at Kumejima Elementary School, Okinawa, Japan.



In addition to the implementation of Tokkatsu, sports activities also received considerable attention in Japanese schools. Findings from Konan Junior and Senior High School on June 10, 2025, indicated that the school provided a variety of programs to support students' potential development, including in the field of sports. Observations involved approximately 28 students participating in various school activities. The school is well known for its flagship baseball and basketball programs, which form an important part of student life. These sports programs are supported by adequate facilities and are among the most popular activities among students. Meanwhile, at Chinen Junior High School, sports activities were conducted through physical sports programs implemented alongside academic and extracurricular activities. The presence of school sports programs, extracurricular activities, and regular physical activities demonstrates that sports activities constitute an integrated component of everyday school life.

Based on the observations, the implementation of Tokkatsu in Japanese schools was manifested through student activities, student-led activities, collaborative learning, PTA involvement, and various community-based programs. Meanwhile, sports activities were implemented through physical sports programs, sports-related extracurricular activities, group-based physical activities, and school sports programs such as baseball and basketball. These activities reflect the high level of student engagement in school life and provide a foundation for understanding the character values that develop through the educational experiences in which students participate.

Character Values Developed through Tokkatsu and Sports Activities

Tokkatsu (Tokubetsu Katsudō) is a special component of the Japanese education system designed to support students' holistic development through direct experiences in school life. According to Japan's

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2018), Tokkatsu aims to develop students' ability to build harmonious social relationships, participate in group life, assume responsibility, and actively contribute to both the school and the wider community. Unlike academic subjects that primarily focus on knowledge acquisition, Tokkatsu emphasizes character development through experience, participation, and social interaction. Consistent with Manabu Sato's (2018) concept of the Learning Community, education occurs not only through the transmission of knowledge but also through collaboration, dialogue, and shared experiences that enable students to learn how to live together within a community.

Based on observations conducted at Sakata Elementary School, Chinen Junior High School, Konan Junior and Senior High School, and Kumejima Elementary School, it was found that the implementation of Tokkatsu and sports activities contributed to the development of various character values among students. These values emerged through students' participation in learning activities, group activities, school programs, sports activities, and interactions with the community and surrounding environment. Although a wide range of character traits was observed, the findings indicate that the most prominent values were independence, responsibility, cooperation, social awareness, discipline, and leadership.

Table 2. Character Values Developed through Tokkatsu and Sports Activities

Character Value	Supporting Activities	Observational Findings
Independence	Student-Led Activities, Inquiry-Based Learning	Students were involved in decision-making and the implementation of school activities
Responsibility	Project-Based Learning, Student Activities	Students carried out tasks and fulfilled roles in various school activities
Cooperation	Collaborative Learning, group-based physical activities, baseball, basketball	Students worked together to achieve shared goals
Social Awareness	PTA, Community Exchange Activities	Students interacted with community members and participated in community-based activities
Discipline	Physical Sports, sports extracurricular activities	Students followed rules, schedules, and activities consistently
Leadership	Student-Led Activities, baseball, basketball, Love-Effort-Ambition	Students were provided opportunities to lead and organize activities

Independence and responsibility emerged as the most prominent character traits fostered through the implementation of Tokkatsu. Findings from Chinen Junior High School showed that the school explicitly promoted autonomy as part of its school culture. This value was reinforced through the implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning, both of which positioned students as the primary agents in the learning process. Through these approaches, students were encouraged to seek information, solve problems, express ideas, and make decisions independently. Similar findings were observed at Kumejima Elementary School through student-led activities that provided students with opportunities to take active roles in the implementation of various school programs. In these activities, students did not merely follow teachers' instructions but were also involved in planning, carrying out, and completing activities together with their peers. These conditions indicate that Tokkatsu provides students with opportunities to learn how to manage responsibilities while simultaneously developing independent decision-making skills.

In addition to independence and responsibility, cooperation and social awareness were among the most consistently observed character traits across all schools. Interestingly, these values emerged not only through academic activities but also through physical activities and the social life of the school. At Kumejima Elementary School, learning was conducted through a collaborative learning approach that encouraged students to work together in completing various tasks and school activities. The observed group-based physical activities also demonstrated communication, coordination, and cooperation among students in achieving common goals. Meanwhile, the involvement of parents, volunteers, and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in various school activities reflected an educational process built upon collaboration between the school and the community. Community exchange activities in Kumejima further illustrated how students interacted with a broader social environment. These findings suggest that Tokkatsu not only develops students' ability to cooperate within the school setting but also cultivates social awareness through active engagement in the community.

Discipline and leadership were developed through sports activities and student-centered programs observed during the study. The physical sports program at Chinen Junior High School, as well as the



flagship baseball and basketball programs at Konan Junior and Senior High School, provided students with opportunities to learn how to follow rules, fulfill team roles, and participate in activities requiring commitment and consistency. Students were expected to attend regularly, adhere to established procedures, and collaborate with teammates in achieving common objectives. Contrary to the assumption that sports merely serve to improve physical fitness, the observations revealed that sports activities also functioned as spaces where students learned leadership, communication, decision-making, and responsibility management within group settings. Furthermore, the school culture promoted through the motto *Love, Effort, and Ambition* at Chinen Junior High School reinforced the development of leadership, achievement motivation, and commitment to shared goals.

Based on the overall findings, it can be understood that Tokkatsu plays a dominant role in fostering students' independence, responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness. Meanwhile, sports activities contribute to strengthening discipline, cooperation, and leadership through various physical activities and team sports implemented within the school environment. Therefore, Tokkatsu and sports activities do not operate independently; rather, they complement one another in shaping students' character. These findings indicate that character development in Japanese schools occurs through the integration of diverse activities that provide students with direct experiences in everyday school life. The relationship between Tokkatsu and sports activities in shaping students' character is discussed further in the following subsection.

Discussion

Character education has often been understood as a process delivered through specific subjects, moral lectures, or the transmission of normative values in the classroom. This perspective has become common practice in many countries, including within various modern character education programs. However, observations conducted at Sakata Elementary School, Chinen Junior High School, Konan Junior and Senior High School, and Kumejima Elementary School revealed a different reality. Students' character is not primarily developed through formal moral instruction but through active engagement in a variety of school activities integrated into everyday school life. These findings reinforce the study by Bamkin (2020) in Japanese elementary schools, which demonstrated that moral education is not delivered separately through specific subjects but is embedded in school activities that enable students to practice moral values in real-life contexts. Therefore, character education in Japan is more appropriately understood as an educational ecosystem rather than merely an instructional program.

The observations indicate that Tokkatsu serves as the primary foundation for student character development. Practices such as student-led activities, Inquiry-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, collaborative learning, and various other school activities provide students with opportunities to make decisions, solve problems, and actively interact with their surrounding environment. Interestingly, the most dominant character traits identified in this study were not discipline, which is often associated with Japanese education, but rather cooperation, responsibility, and independence. These three characteristics consistently emerged across nearly all of the observed schools. These findings suggest that the success of character education in Japan is supported more by students' active participation in school life than by formal systems of control. In other words, discipline develops as a consequence of students' involvement in learning communities rather than as the primary objective of character education.

The prominence of independence and responsibility in this study was evident in various activities that provided students with opportunities to manage activities and make decisions independently. At Chinen Junior High School, the value of autonomy was cultivated through the implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning, while at Kumejima Elementary School students were involved in various student-led activities that encouraged active participation in school programs. This finding is also supported by Silva and Ungheri (2023), who demonstrated that participatory educational and recreational programs that involve learners in decision-making processes can create meaningful experiences and strengthen participants' engagement and sense of ownership toward the activities they undertake. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Lagones and Ishihara (2024), which employed a mixed-methods approach over a five-month period with public secondary school



students in Peru. Their research found that Tokkatsu activities such as cleaning, recycling, and volunteer work enhanced students' autonomy, empathy, leadership, responsibility, and cooperative behavior. The similarity of these findings suggests that the principal strength of Tokkatsu lies in its ability to transform values into concrete actions through the principle of learning by doing.

The most prominent character trait identified in this study was cooperation. Nearly all observed activities placed students in situations that required them to work together to achieve shared objectives. Collaborative learning practices, group activities, student programs, and various community-based initiatives demonstrate that cooperation is not merely an additional social skill but rather the core of the educational process itself. This argument is further supported by Rivera et al. (2025), who found that participation in recreational activities contributed positively to participants' emotional, social, and academic experiences by providing opportunities for social interaction and meaningful engagement. This finding is particularly significant because it indicates that character development in Japanese schools is oriented more toward cultivating the ability to live and work together than toward producing highly competitive individuals. In this context, cooperation functions as a foundational character trait that enables the development of other qualities such as responsibility, leadership, and social awareness.

The prominence of cooperation in this study is reinforced by the findings of Todaka and Doering (2023), who conducted an ethnographic study of a surfing bukatsu program at Aoshima Junior High School in Miyazaki Prefecture, Japan. Involving students, parents, and 22 stakeholders, the study found that sports activities fostered solidarity, group identity, and social responsibility toward the community. These findings are consistent with observations in Okinawa, which revealed that school activities not only shape individual character but also cultivate collective awareness as members of a broader community. Therefore, cooperation in Japanese education extends beyond the ability to work in groups and develops into a form of social awareness reflected in students' relationships with schools, communities, and their surrounding environment.

Community involvement in student character development was also evident through the presence of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and various community-based activities observed during the study. Unlike many educational systems that position schools as the primary agents of character education, the observed schools demonstrated strong collaboration among teachers, parents, and community members. These findings are supported by the study of Huda et al. (2022), which employed a mixed-methods approach and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in schools across Japan, Indonesia, and Türkiye. The study found that collaboration among teachers, parents, and school principals was the most influential factor in the success of character education. These findings help explain why responsibility and social awareness developed strongly within Japanese educational environments supported by sustained participation from multiple stakeholders.

In addition to Tokkatsu, sports activities made a significant contribution to student character development. Observations at Chinen Junior High School and Konan Junior and Senior High School revealed that baseball, basketball, and physical sports activities functioned not only as means of physical development but also as effective settings for character learning. Students were required to attend consistently, follow training regulations, fulfill team roles, and maintain commitment to collective goals. Nevertheless, this study found that sports were not the primary source of character formation; rather, they functioned as a reinforcement mechanism for character traits that had already been developed through Tokkatsu. This finding differs from the common assumption that sports serve as the principal instrument for cultivating discipline in Japanese education.

The role of sports as a reinforcement mechanism for character development is clearly illustrated in the study by Aoyagi et al. (2020), which involved 23 Japanese junior and senior high school students participating in extracurricular sports activities. The study found that the most dominant motivational factors were not the desire to win but rather a sense of responsibility toward the team, group loyalty, and commitment to avoiding disappointment among teammates. Similar findings were also reported by Sinulingga et al. (2024), who demonstrated through a systematic literature review that martial arts activities provide an effective medium for internalizing character values such as discipline, responsibility, and self-control through continuous habituation, cultural traditions, and structured training processes. These findings are highly relevant to the observations at Konan Junior and Senior High School, where baseball and basketball activities taught students to maintain commitment to their groups. Similar results were reported by Shimotake (2022), who found that the culture of *bukatsu* in



Japan promotes a balance between discipline and autonomy. Thus, sports within the Japanese educational context not only foster adherence to rules but also develop self-regulation and responsibility for one's decisions.

The findings of this study also receive strong support from several large-scale investigations. Through a systematic review of 88 articles selected from 4,359 publications, Opstoel et al. (2020) identified eleven dimensions of personal and social development through sports, including responsibility, leadership, cooperation, communication, and prosocial behavior. These findings are consistent with numerous literature reviews demonstrating that physical education and sports activities contribute significantly to student character development. Carsiwan et al. (2025), through a systematic literature review of 15 studies, found that physical education contributes to the development of responsibility, cooperation, independence, discipline, tolerance, honesty, and self-confidence among students. Similarly, Burhaein et al. (2025) emphasized that adapted physical education provides inclusive and participatory learning experiences that support both physical development and the strengthening of students' character through various teaching approaches and learning strategies. Furthermore, Muyassar et al. (2025) reported that physical education activities positively contribute to strengthening responsibility, discipline, respect, problem-solving skills, assertive behavior, and self-confidence. These findings indicate that sports activities function not only as a means of physical development but also as an effective medium for internalizing social and moral values that support character development.

Similarly, Muyassar et al. (2025) reported that physical education activities positively contribute to strengthening responsibility, discipline, respect, problem-solving skills, assertive behavior, and self-confidence. These findings indicate that sports activities function not only as a means of physical development but also as an effective medium for internalizing social and moral values that support character development. Nevertheless, the observations in this study demonstrate that these character traits do not develop through sports alone but rather through the integration of sports activities with Tokkatsu and a collaborative school culture. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of sports in character development depends heavily on the educational ecosystem that supports it.

Stronger evidence is provided by Burgueño and Medina-Casabón (2020) through a quasi-experimental study involving 148 high school students who participated in 16 basketball learning sessions. The results showed that students who participated in the Sport Education model demonstrated significant improvements in respect for rules, respect for opponents, and group commitment, with statistically significant results (Pillai's Trace = 0.38; $p < 0.001$), whereas the traditional learning group showed no meaningful changes. These findings indicate that character does not develop automatically through sports; rather, it requires activity designs that provide students with responsibilities, roles, and opportunities to make decisions. This principle closely resembles Tokkatsu, which positions students as the primary actors in every school activity.

Based on the overall analysis, this study found that the integration of Tokkatsu and sports activities shapes students' character through two complementary pathways. Tokkatsu serves as the foundation for developing cooperation, responsibility, independence, and social awareness through various participatory activities embedded in school life. Meanwhile, sports activities strengthen discipline, commitment, resilience, and leadership through direct experiences in both collaborative and competitive situations. These findings are consistent with Almeida et al. (2025), whose systematic review of 30 studies concluded that character development is more effective when sports are combined with structured non-sport activities. Therefore, the success of character education in Japanese schools does not lie in the existence of standalone character programs but rather in the integration of various school activities that consistently position students as active participants in school life. The findings further indicate that cooperation, responsibility, and independence are the most dominant character traits developed, whereas discipline and leadership function as reinforcing characteristics strengthened through sports activities.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that student character development in Japanese schools does not occur through standalone moral instruction but rather through the integration of Tokkatsu and sports



activities embedded in everyday school life. Observations conducted at Sakata Elementary School, Chinen Junior High School, Konan Junior and Senior High School, and Kumejima Elementary School revealed that the most prominent character traits developed were cooperation, responsibility, and independence. These traits emerged through various Tokkatsu practices, including student-led activities, collaborative learning, Inquiry-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, and students' involvement in a wide range of school and community activities. Meanwhile, sports activities such as baseball, basketball, and physical sports reinforced discipline, commitment, and leadership through direct experiences in both collaborative and competitive settings. These findings indicate that the success of character education in Japanese schools stems from students not only understanding character values conceptually but also repeatedly practicing them through activities integrated into the culture of the school.

Theoretically, this study contributes to strengthening the understanding that effective character education requires the integration of academic, social, and sports-related activities within a sustainable educational ecosystem. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for schools and educational policymakers in developing character education models that extend beyond classroom-based learning and emphasize authentic student experiences. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations, as it was conducted in only a small number of schools within Okinawa Prefecture and over a relatively short observation period, limiting its ability to capture the full diversity of Tokkatsu and sports activity implementation across Japan. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of schools from different regions of Japan, employ longer observation periods, and combine observational methods with in-depth interviews involving students, teachers, and school administrators to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the character development process through the integration of Tokkatsu and sports activities.

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