



# Shaping Professional Character Through Boarding School Culture: A Qualitative Case Study of Vocational Students in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study examines how boarding school culture contributes to the formation of professional character among vocational students by fostering discipline, responsibility, work ethics, independence, and interpersonal skills that support workforce readiness. **Methods:** This qualitative case study was conducted at a vocational boarding school in Gunungpati District, Semarang City, Central Java, Indonesia. Data were collected from 16 informants, consisting of six vocational students, four vocational subject teachers, four dormitory supervisors, and two school leaders, through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking were employed to ensure credibility. **Findings:** Boarding school culture emerged as an important context for professional character formation through structured routines, value internalization, educator role modeling, and continuous social supervision. Practices such as collective worship, time management, shared responsibilities, and experiential learning fostered self-discipline, accountability, teamwork, independence, ethical behavior, and interpersonal skills. These characteristics were consistently reflected in students' learning attitudes and vocational practice activities. **Conclusion:** Boarding school culture provides a holistic educational environment that supports professional character development and strengthens vocational students' readiness for future employment. **Research Implications:** Boarding school-based vocational education can serve as a strategic model for integrating technical competence development with character education. **Originality:** This study highlights the integration of boarding school culture and vocational learning in shaping professional character, an area that remains underexplored in vocational education research.



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## INTRODUCTION

Vocational education is designed to prepare students to be ready to enter the world of work through the mastery of technical skills and specific competencies that are in line with industry needs. In the context of rapid technological developments and an increasingly competitive labor market, vocational education institutions are required to produce graduates who are not only technically competent, but also have a strong professional character (Safitri & Sutadji, 2025; Suparyati & Habsya, 2024). Professional character that includes discipline, responsibility, integrity, work ethic, independence, and the ability to work together have become key factors that affect the competitiveness and sustainability of graduates' careers (Siswaya, 2020).

Despite various curriculum reforms and the implementation of competency-based training, many vocational education graduates still face difficulties in meeting the expectations of the world of work, especially regarding professional attitudes and behaviors (Misko & Circelli, 2022; Qin, 2024; Hartanto et al., 2019). Various reports from the industrial world show that vocational graduates generally have adequate technical skills, but often lack professional attitudes such as punctuality, accountability, adaptability, and ethical behavior. This condition shows a gap between skill mastery and character building, which confirms that vocational education needs to adopt a more holistic approach (Parker & Roumell, 2020; Sakdapat, 2024). Previous studies have consistently reported that employers place increasing emphasis on employability attributes, including work ethics, responsibility, communication, teamwork, and adaptability, which are often considered as important as technical competence in determining graduate employability (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). These findings indicate that strengthening professional character remains a critical challenge in vocational education.

Character formation in the context of vocational education cannot rely solely on classroom learning or formal curriculum (Harris & Clayton, 2020; Kovalchuk et al., 2022). Professional character is formed through a process of internalizing values that takes place on an ongoing basis, supported by social interaction, behavioral habituation, and real experience in daily life (Toh et al., 2022). Therefore, an educational environment that is able to provide mentoring, supervision, and a sustainable learning experience has an important role in shaping the attitude and identity of students as prospective professionals (Maryna et al., 2024).

One of the educational models that offers a comprehensive environment for character formation is the boarding school system. Boarding schools integrate academic activities with cohabitation, so the learning process is not limited to formal school hours (Hosaini et al., 2024). The culture of boarding schools is generally characterized by a structured schedule of activities, collective responsibility, shared activities, and consistent supervision by educators and boarding coaches. This condition allows for the continuous strengthening of values and norms in the lives of students.

The culture that develops in the boarding school environment encourages the formation of discipline, self-control, independence, and social responsibility through repetitive daily practices (Dwiputra & Halimi, 2022). Activities such as strict time management, communal life, shared division of tasks, and compliance with institutional rules form habits that are in harmony with the demands of the professional world of work (Boguslavska et al., 2025). In addition, the presence of educators as role models in both academic and non-academic contexts allows students to observe and internalize professional values through hands-on experience (Mahmud et al., 2022; Santosa & Poerwanto, 2025).

A number of studies have shown that the boarding school environment has a positive contribution to the moral, social, and personality development of students. Boarding school culture has been proven to improve students' discipline, leadership, emotional maturity, and ethical awareness (Darwanto et al., 2024). Studies by Dwiputra & Halimi (2022) mainly focus on character education, discipline, leadership, moral development, and religious values within boarding school settings. Although these studies demonstrate the positive contribution of boarding school culture to student development, they provide limited discussion regarding professional character as a specific outcome related to vocational students' readiness for employment.

These limitations indicate an important research gap, considering that vocational education is inherently oriented towards job readiness and professional life. The cultural integration of boarding schools in vocational education offers strategic potential to bridge the gap between technical skills development and professional character building. However, empirical studies that specifically examine how the culture of boarding schools shape the professional character of vocational students are still rare, especially in the context of developing countries. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to understanding the mechanisms through which boarding school values, routines, social interactions, and role-modeling practices contribute to the formation of professional character within vocational education settings. Based on these gaps, an important question remains: how does boarding school culture contribute to the formation of professional character among vocational students? Addressing this question is important because vocational education requires not only technical competence but also professional attitudes and behaviors that support long-term employability and career success.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of boarding school culture in shaping the professional character of vocational education students. By exploring values, routines, social interactions, and daily practices in the boarding vocational school environment, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of professional character formation. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize general character development, moral education, or religious values, this study specifically focuses on professional character formation within a vocational boarding school context. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of a more holistic vocational education model, which integrates technical skills training with school culture-based character education.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design (Schoch, 2020). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deep and contextual understanding of the role of boarding school culture in shaping the professional character of vocational education students (Cleland et al., 2021). The case study is seen as relevant because the focus of the research is directed at the exploration of a complex phenomenon that is tied to a specific context, namely the vocational school environment that implements the boarding school system.

This research was carried out in a dormitory-based Vocational High School (SMK) located in the Gunungpati District, Semarang City, Central Java Province. This area is known as an educational area that is relatively conducive to the implementation of boarding schools because it has an environment that supports character development, is far from the center of the city's crowds, and allows the implementation of an intensive student parenting and supervision system. The school where the research is located implements the integration of vocational learning with professional character development through a structured and sustainable boarding life.

The subjects of the study include vocational school students who live in dormitories, teachers of vocational subjects, dormitory coaches, and school leaders. A total of 16 informants participated in this study, consisting of six students, four vocational subject teachers, four dormitory coaches, and two school leaders. The student informants were Grade XI and Grade XII students who had lived in the dormitory for at least one year, while teachers, dormitory coaches, and school leaders were selected based on their direct involvement in vocational learning, dormitory management, and character development programs. The selection of informants is carried out purposively by considering their direct involvement in the vocational learning process, dormitory management, and professional character development of students. Informants were selected from various roles and levels to gain diverse and in-depth perspectives on the implementation of boarding school culture in shaping students' professional character.

Research data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. Data collection was conducted over a three-month period from February to April 2025. A total of 16 semi-structured interview sessions were conducted with students, vocational teachers, dormitory supervisors, and school leaders, with each interview lasting approximately 45–90 minutes. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore the views, experiences, and meanings of informants related to the cultural practices of boarding schools and the formation of students' professional character (Eppich et al., 2019). Each informant participated in at least one interview session, and additional probing questions were employed when clarification was required. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, indicated by the absence of substantially new information or themes emerging from subsequent interviews. Participatory observation was carried out to directly observe daily routines, social interactions, and habituation practices that took place in the dormitory and school environment. Participant observations were conducted on 12 occasions covering academic activities, dormitory routines, collective worship, vocational practice sessions, and student social interactions. Observations focused on student participation in daily activities, interactions with educators and peers, compliance with dormitory regulations, and vocational learning practices. In addition, document analysis includes a review of school regulations, dormitory activity schedules, character development programs, and relevant policy documents (Chand, 2025).

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself as a key instrument, as is the characteristic of qualitative research. To support the data collection process, the researcher used interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document checklists compiled based on the conceptual framework of the professional character and culture of boarding schools. The instrument is used flexibly to allow data deepening according to dynamics in the field. Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained field notes and analytical memos to document observations, emerging interpretations, and reflections related to the phenomenon under study.

Data analysis was carried out thematically, following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Interview, observation, and documentation data were transcribed and coded to identify key themes related to the values, routines, social interactions, and cultural practices of boarding schools in shaping students' professional character. The analysis process is carried out iteratively and continuously until a comprehensive and consistent understanding of the phenomenon being studied is obtained (Mezmir, 2020). The coding process began with open coding to identify meaningful units of data, followed by categorization of related codes into broader themes. Through repeated comparison across interview, observation, and document data, themes related to discipline, responsibility, independence, work ethics, professional ethics, cooperation, and communication skills were developed and refined. The coding and thematic analysis process was conducted manually without the use of qualitative data analysis software. All interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were systematically reviewed, coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify themes related to professional character formation. No qualitative data analysis software was used. All coding and thematic organization were conducted manually by the researcher.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applied the triangulation technique of sources and methods. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from various informants, while method triangulation is carried out by combining interviews, observations, and document analysis. In addition, the researcher also conducts member checking by confirming the results of provisional findings to several informants to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data. An audit trail was also maintained through the documentation of interview transcripts, observation records, coding notes, and analytical decisions to enhance the transparency and trustworthiness of the research process.

This research is carried out by paying attention to the ethical principles of research. All informants were given an explanation of the purpose of the research and data collection procedures, and were asked to give informed consent. The identities of informants and research institutions are kept confidential, and all data obtained is used solely for academic purposes. Participation was voluntary, and informants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

## RESULTS

### Characteristics of Research Informants

This study involved a number of informants who were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the process of vocational learning and character development through boarding life. The informants consisted of students, vocational subject teachers, dormitory coaches, and school leaders. The students who became informants were students in grades XI and XII who had lived in the dormitory for at least one year, so that they had enough experience in participating in the boarding school culture. Teachers and dormitory coaches were selected based on their experience in assisting students in both academic and non-academic settings, while school leaders were selected to provide policy and managerial perspectives related to the integration of vocational education and character building. The diversity of informant roles allows for comprehensive and in-depth data on the phenomenon being studied.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Research Informants

| Informant Group             | Code           | Number    | Characteristics                                                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Vocational Students         | S-03 to S-08   | 6         | Grade XI and XII students residing in the dormitory for at least one year  |
| Vocational Subject Teachers | GJ-01 to GJ-04 | 4         | Teachers involved in vocational learning and student character development |
| Dormitory Supervisors       | PA-01 to PA-04 | 4         | Supervisors responsible for student guidance and dormitory management      |
| School Leaders              | KS-01 to KS-02 | 2         | School administrators responsible for policy and program implementation    |
| <b>Total</b>                | -              | <b>16</b> |                                                                            |

### Boarding School Culture as a Professional Character Building System

The results of the study show that the culture of boarding schools functions as a system that structurally shapes the professional character of students. This culture is not only reflected in the formal rules of the school, but also in the daily practices that students live repeatedly. The integration between academic activities, vocational practice, and boarding life creates a sustainable educational environment, where professional values are instilled consistently at all times. A teacher of vocational subjects affirms that the formation of professional character does not only occur in the classroom, but takes place in all student activities in school and dormitory environments,

*"Character learning does not stop in the classroom. In the dormitory, students learn discipline, responsibility, and work attitudes in real life every day. From waking up in the morning until night, everything is organized and it shapes their habits."* (GJ-01, February 12, 2025).

These findings suggest that professional character is not formed instantly, but rather through a social process that takes place continuously. The boarding school culture provides space for the internalization of the values of discipline, responsibility, and work ethic through habituation, so that these values are gradually inherent in students. A dormitory coach explained that consistency is the main key in the formation of the character,

*"If the rules are only occasionally enforced, character will not be formed. In this dormitory, consistency is important. Students finally get used to it and become aware of themselves without having to be constantly reminded."* (PA-02, February 15, 2025).

In addition, students also feel that boarding life helps them understand the meaning of professionalism in a more concrete way. A student of grade XII recounted his experience as follows:

*"At first it felt heavy, but it took a while to get used to it. Living in a dormitory made me more disciplined and responsible. Now if there is a practical task, I feel like I have to complete it seriously, like I've already worked."* (S-05, February 18, 2025).

These quotes show that the boarding school culture functions as a social system that allows for a continuous process of internalizing professional values. Through direct experience, habituation, and consistent supervision, the values of discipline, responsibility, and work ethic are not only understood normatively, but are manifested in the real behavior of students as prospective professionals.

#### **Discipline and Time Management in Boarding Life**

Discipline and time management skills emerge as the most dominant professional character formed through the boarding school culture. A strictly scheduled daily routine, ranging from morning activities, school learning, vocational practices, to dormitory activities in the evening, accustomed students to respect time and obey the applicable rules. This structured lifestyle encourages students to complete tasks according to the deadlines that have been set and fosters awareness of the importance of punctuality in each activity. A dormitory coach explained that the implementation of a consistent daily schedule is the main means in instilling discipline and time management in students,

*"In the dormitory, all activities have time, starting from waking up early to taking a night break. If students are late, there are consequences. From there they learn to manage their own time and be responsible."* (PA-01, February 14, 2025).

These findings are also reinforced by the statements of vocational subject teachers who observed changes in students' attitudes in vocational learning activities and practices:

*"Students who live in dormitories are usually more disciplined. They are rarely late for class or practice, and are more punctual in collecting assignments than students who do not live in dormitories."* (GJ-02, February 16, 2025).

From a student's perspective, boarding life helps them understand the meaning of discipline not only as a school rule, but as a personal need. A grade XI student expressed his experience as follows,

*"At first it was difficult because everything had to be on time. But it took a while to get used to it. Now if I have a practice assignment, I'm used to managing my time so I don't have to be late."* (S-03, February 17, 2025).

In the context of vocational education, these findings have strong relevance because discipline and time management are the main demands of the world of work. The dorm culture serves as a simulation of a professional work environment, where tardiness and negligence have obvious consequences. Thus, students not only understand the importance of discipline normatively, but also experience it directly through repetitive daily practice.

#### **Formation of Student Responsibility and Independence**

The results of the study show that boarding life significantly promotes the formation of responsibility and independence of students. Through the division of dorm duties, the management of personal needs, and involvement in collective activities, students learn to take responsibility for their roles and obligations. Dormitory coaches consciously provide space for students to solve problems independently before providing assistance, so that students are used to facing challenges gradually. A dormitory coach explained that the main strategy for fostering independence is to give confidence to students in managing their own responsibilities,

*"We do not directly help students. If it can still be solved by ourselves, we direct them first. From there they learn to be responsible and not dependent."* (PA-03, February 15, 2025).

This view is reinforced by vocational subject teachers who observe the impact of boarding life on students' attitudes in vocational learning activities and practices,

*"Students who live in dormitories are usually more independent. When practicing, they don't wait for constant instruction and are more courageous to take the initiative."* (GJ-03, February 17, 2025).

From the student's side, responsibility and independence are felt as a direct result of boarding life which demands consistent self-management. A student of grade XI revealed,

*"In the dormitory, everything must be taken care of by yourself, starting from waking up in the morning to tasks. It was difficult at first, but over time I got used to it and felt more responsible."* (S-04, February 18, 2025).

A similar experience was also conveyed by grade XII students who have lived in the dormitory for a longer time, *"If there is a problem, we are asked to try to solve it first. It makes me more confident and not easy to give up."* (S-06, February 19, 2025). In addition, the school leadership emphasized that the formation of responsibility and independence is part of the vision of dormitory-based vocational education implemented in the school,

*"We want graduates to be not only technically smart, but also independent and responsible. The dorm culture is the main means to form this attitude."* (KS-01, February 20, 2025).

This habituation that takes place in a continuous manner contributes to the formation of a professional character characterized by initiative, resilience, and decision-making ability. In the context of the world of work, this character is very much needed, especially in dealing with work situations that demand independence and individual responsibility. These findings confirm that the formation of professional character requires an educational environment that is able to give confidence to students, while implementing proportional supervision so that the character learning process runs optimally.

Despite the generally positive outcomes, several informants acknowledged that the adjustment process was not always smooth. Some students initially experienced difficulties adapting to the strict schedule and dormitory regulations. One student explained:

*"During the first few months, I often felt pressured because everything was scheduled. It took time before I could adapt and manage my activities properly."* (S-03, February 17, 2025).

These findings suggest that the development of discipline is a gradual process that requires adaptation and continuous support from educators and dormitory supervisors.

### **Internalizing Work Ethic and Professional Ethics through Example**

The work ethic and professional ethics of students are formed through the exemplary process shown by teachers and dormitory coaches. Intensive interaction between students and educators in boarding life allows for a continuous role modeling process. The attitude of hard work, commitment, consistency, and honesty displayed by educators is a real reference for students in building professional behavior.

A teacher of vocational subjects affirms that example has a stronger influence than the theoretical delivery of material,

*"If it is only conveyed through theory, students quickly forget. But when they see firsthand the teacher coming on time, working seriously, and being responsible, that's exactly what they imitate."* (GJ-04, February 18, 2025).

This view is reinforced by the dormitory coach who emphasizes the importance of consistency of educators' attitudes in daily life in the dormitory,

*"In the dormitory, students see us most of the day. If the coach is not consistent, students will also not respect the rules. Example is key."* (PA-04, February 19, 2025).

From the perspective of students, the example of educators is felt as a direct learning about work ethic and professional ethics. A grade XII student conveyed his experience as follows,

*"We can see how teachers and coaches work. They are disciplined and serious about their duties, so we feel embarrassed if we are casual or perfunctory."* (S-07, February 20, 2025).

Other students also revealed that the values of honesty and responsibility are easier to understand when exemplified in real life by educators,

*"If the coach is honest and firm, we will be honest. It feels different if you are just told without being exemplified."* (S-08, February 21, 2025).

The school leader emphasized that the example of educators is a strategic part of the policy of fostering professional character in dormitory-based vocational schools,

*"We emphasize to teachers and coaches that they are life examples for students. A dormitory culture will be effective if the educators show a strong work ethic and professional ethics."* (KS-02, February 22, 2025).

These results show that professional character development cannot be separated from the quality of educator figures. Professional ethical values conveyed through direct experience and daily interactions tend to be easier to internalize

than conveyed through theoretical learning alone. Thus, the culture of boarding schools strengthens the role of educators as the main agents of professional character formation through consistent and sustainable example.

#### **Development of Cooperation and Communication Skills**

Communal life in the dormitory makes a significant contribution to the development of students' cooperation and communication skills. Shared activities, whether in the context of academics, student organizations, or dorm activities, encourage students to interact intensively, resolve conflicts, and work in teams. Students learn to appreciate the differences in character, background, and abilities between individuals. A dormitory supervisor explained that collaborative activities are intentionally designed to encourage students to communicate and work together in solving daily problems:

*"Students cannot live individually in the dormitory. They have to communicate, coordinate tasks, and solve problems together. At first some students find it difficult, but gradually they learn how to work with others."* (PA-03, February 20, 2025).

This observation was supported by a vocational teacher who noted improvements in students' teamwork during vocational practice activities:

*"Students who actively participate in dormitory activities tend to communicate more effectively during group projects. They are usually more willing to listen, share responsibilities, and complete tasks together."* (GJ-03, February 21, 2025).

Students also acknowledged that communal living improved their communication abilities. One Grade XII student stated:

*"Living in the dormitory taught me how to communicate with different people. Sometimes there are disagreements, but we learn how to discuss and find solutions together."* (S-07, February 22, 2025).

From a vocational education perspective, cooperation and communication skills are an integral part of professional character that is often a challenge in classroom-based learning. These findings show that boarding school culture provides an authentic social context to develop soft skills that are needed in the world of work. Informants also reported occasional interpersonal conflicts arising from communal living. Differences in habits, responsibilities, and communication styles sometimes created tensions among students. However, these situations were generally addressed through discussion, mediation by dormitory supervisors, and collective reflection activities. One student explained that adapting to communal living was not always easy because students came from diverse backgrounds and possessed different personal habits (S-06, February 2025).

Similarly, a dormitory supervisor acknowledged that minor conflicts occasionally occurred, particularly during the early stages of students' adjustment to dormitory life (PA-02, February 2025). Despite these challenges, the findings indicate that the boarding school environment provides opportunities for students to develop conflict-management, communication, and collaborative problem-solving skills through everyday social interactions.

#### **Integration of Dormitory Culture and Vocational Learning**

The results of the study show that the formation of professional character is effective because of the strong integration between dormitory culture and vocational learning. The values instilled in dormitory life are strengthened through vocational learning practices, so that consistency is created between the attitudes, behaviors, and competencies developed. Teachers and dormitory coaches collaborate in instilling the meaning of professionalism that is relevant to the industrial world.

This integration strengthens students' identities as prospective professional workforces. The culture of boarding schools does not stand alone, but rather becomes part of a holistic vocational education ecosystem, which links character development with the simultaneous mastery of technical skills. A summary of the integration of dormitory culture and vocational learning and its implications for the formation of students' professional character is presented in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1.** Integration of Dormitory Culture and Vocational Learning in Professional Character Building

| <b>Aspects of Dormitory Culture</b> | <b>Vocational Learning Practice</b> | <b>Integration Process</b>  | <b>Formed Professional Character</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Communal life and collective tasks  | Group work and practice projects    | Cross-context collaboration | Cooperation and communication        |
| Discipline of boarding              | Timeliness of practice              | Consistency of rules        | Discipline and time                  |

| Aspects of Dormitory Culture        | Vocational Learning Practice            | Integration Process                 | Formed Professional Character      |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| time                                | and tasks                               |                                     | management                         |
| Example of a dormitory builder      | Role models of vocational teachers      | Continuous role modeling            | Work ethic and professional ethics |
| Responsibilities of boarding duties | Responsibilities of vocational practice | Habituation of responsibility       | Responsibility and independence    |
| Resolution of boarding conflicts    | Evaluation of teamwork                  | Social reflection and reinforcement | Interpersonal skills               |

## DISCUSSION

Theoretically, the findings of this study expand the study of character education by emphasizing that boarding school culture is a strategic context that plays a significant role in the formation of the professional character of vocational education students. This research reinforces the perspective that professional character is not only formed through cognitive value transfer, but through an internalization process that takes place in social interactions and continuous daily practices (Abakah, 2023). Thus, professional character is understood as the result of a structured social process, in which values such as discipline, responsibility, work ethic, and professional ethics are formed through habituation and example in a consistent educational environment (Hartanto et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this research makes a theoretical contribution by integrating the concept of boarding school culture into the vocational education framework which has so far emphasized more technical skill mastery. These findings show that professional character development and vocational competence are not two separate domains, but rather interrelated and mutually reinforcing. The dormitory-based education environment functions as a learning ecosystem that allows synchronization between technical learning and character development, thereby enriching the theoretical model of character-based vocational education (Larasati et al., 2021; Sumbodo, 2021).

In addition, the results of this study emphasize the relevance of social learning theory and contextual character education, which emphasizes the role of the environment, social interaction, and role models in behavior formation. The culture of boarding schools provides conditions that allow for continuous role modeling, social reinforcement, and self-reflection (Witmer, 2025). Thus, this research provides a strong empirical basis for the development of a character education theory that places institutional culture as a key factor in the formation of students' professional character. These findings are generally consistent with previous studies that highlighted the contribution of boarding school environments to discipline, leadership, moral development, and ethical awareness. However, unlike many previous studies that primarily focused on general character development, this study specifically highlights the formation of professional character within a vocational education context. This distinction suggests that boarding school culture may contribute not only to moral and social development but also to the development of competencies and attitudes closely associated with workplace readiness.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that boarding school culture is the sole determinant of professional character formation. Other factors, including students' prior experiences, family background, personal motivation, peer influence, and the broader school culture, may also contribute to the development of professional attitudes and behaviors. The positive outcomes identified in this study are therefore likely to result from the interaction of multiple educational and social factors rather than from boarding school culture alone.

Moreover, several informants acknowledged that adaptation to dormitory life was not always immediate. Differences in personal habits, levels of self-discipline, and social adjustment occasionally created challenges for students during the early stages of residence. Although these challenges generally diminished over time through guidance and supervision, they indicate that professional character formation is a gradual process rather than an automatic outcome of participation in a boarding school environment.

Practically, the findings of this study provide important implications for vocational education managers, educators, and policymakers in designing strategies to improve the quality of graduates. The results of the study show that the dormitory-based vocational education model has great potential to answer the challenges of graduates' job readiness, especially in the aspect of professional attitudes and behaviors that have been the main concern of the industrial world (Sujatmiko et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening the culture of boarding schools can be considered as part of the strategic policy of vocational education development.

For school managers, this study emphasizes the importance of consistent integration between dormitory management and vocational learning processes. The dormitory should not be positioned solely as a student living facility, but rather as a character education space that is systematically designed. School managers need to ensure that

the professional values instilled in the dormitory environment are aligned with the objectives of vocational learning, and supported by the active role of teachers and dormitory coaches as role models (Barker, 2020; Ma, 2024).

For educators and dormitory coaches, the results of this study emphasize the importance of example, consistency, and collaboration in fostering students' professional character. Teachers and coaches do not only play the role of teachers or supervisors, but also as professional figures who are observed and emulated by students in their daily lives (Wade, 2024). Therefore, strengthening the capacity of educators through character development training and professional ethics is a relevant need to support the success of the dormitory-based vocational education model.

For policymakers, this study provides an empirical basis to consider the development or replication of a dormitory-based vocational education model, especially in areas or groups of students who need more intensive character development. Policies that support the development of dormitory facilities, improving the quality of coaches, and integrating character programs in the vocational curriculum have the potential to increase the work readiness of graduates more comprehensively. Thus, vocational education not only produces a technically skilled workforce, but also has a professional character that suits the needs of the world of work and industry.

Several limitations should also be acknowledged. This study was conducted as a single-case study in one vocational boarding school, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. In addition, the study relied primarily on participants' perceptions and experiences, without incorporating perspectives from industry partners, employers, alumni, or graduate performance data. Future studies may benefit from comparative multi-site designs and the inclusion of additional stakeholder perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of professional character formation in vocational education.

Despite these limitations, the findings provide valuable insights into how boarding school culture contributes to the development of professional character among vocational students. The study highlights the importance of integrating structured routines, value internalization, role modeling, and social interaction within vocational education environments to support the development of graduates who are not only technically competent but also professionally prepared for future employment.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that boarding school culture contributes to the formation of professional character among vocational education students by fostering discipline, time management, responsibility, independence, work ethics, professional ethics, and cooperation skills through structured routines, consistent supervision, social interaction, and educator role modeling. The integration of dormitory life with vocational learning creates a supportive environment in which professional values are internalized through daily practice and reinforced across academic and practical activities. As a result, students develop attitudes and behaviors that are closely aligned with the expectations of professional and vocational settings.

The findings suggest that the integration of boarding school culture and vocational education provides a meaningful approach to supporting both technical competence development and professional character formation. Rather than functioning solely as a residential facility, the boarding school environment serves as a social and educational context in which professional values are continuously practiced, observed, and reinforced through everyday experiences. Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted within the context of the study. As a single-case qualitative study conducted in one vocational boarding school, the results are not intended to be generalized to all vocational education settings. In addition, the study focused on participants' perceptions and experiences and did not include direct assessment of graduate performance, employment outcomes, or employer perspectives.

Future research is therefore encouraged to examine similar models across diverse institutional contexts, compare boarding and non-boarding vocational schools, and explore the long-term relationship between professional character formation and graduates' workplace performance. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of educational culture in preparing vocational students for professional life.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

YS, CFBH conceptualized and designed the study. YS conducted the investigation, coordinated data collection, and prepared the initial manuscript draft. CFBH, RP, ABPH, and YM contributed to the research methodology, data interpretation, critical revision of the manuscript, and validation of the findings. RP supported the literature review and theoretical framework development. ABPH contributed to the analysis of character education perspectives and manuscript refinement. YM assisted with data interpretation and final manuscript review. All authors read, approved, and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that this research was prepared, researched, written, and edited without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques.

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