

Educational Practices and Character Development Among High School Students in Catholic Schools in Northern Samar

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between Catholic educational practices and the character development of high school students in Catholic schools in Northern Samar during School Year 2025–2026. Anchored on Integral Human Formation, Social Learning Theory, and Moral Development Theory, the study used a descriptive-correlational research design. Data were gathered from 336 high school students from seven Catholic secondary schools using a researcher-made questionnaire based on Catholic school standards and related literature, while interview responses from 17 selected students were used to support the quantitative findings. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, weighted mean, ranking, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, and thematic analysis. Findings showed that Catholic educational practices were implemented to a very high extent in terms of Catholic identity and mission, Christian Living Curriculum, prayer and sacramental life, student formation programs, and governance and quality assurance, while social involvement was implemented to a high extent. Students' character development was generally always observed in faith formation, moral integrity, respect for human dignity, social responsibility, self-discipline, environmental stewardship, and sense of purpose, while leadership and service-oriented citizenship was frequently observed. Selected profile variables were significantly related to some dimensions of character development, while sex showed no significant relationship. Catholic educational practices were also significantly related to several dimensions of students' character development. The study concludes that sustained Catholic educational practices contribute to the holistic formation of students and recommends strengthening faith-based programs, leadership opportunities, outreach activities, environmental stewardship initiatives, and school-community collaboration. The study supports SDG 4, SDG 11, SDG 13, SDG 16, and SDG 17 by promoting quality education, responsible citizenship, environmental responsibility, institutional formation, and collaborative partnerships. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational, institutional, social, spiritual, community, and environmental sustainability through values-based Catholic education.

Keywords: Catholic Educational Practices, Character Development, Christian Living Curriculum, Environmental Stewardship, Faith Formation, Governance, Quality Assurance, Social Responsibility

1. Introduction

This study examines the relationship between Catholic educational practices and the character development of high school students in Catholic schools in Northern Samar. It focuses on how faith-based school practices, including Catholic identity and mission, Christian Living Curriculum, prayer and sacramental life, student formation programs, social involvement, and governance and quality assurance, contribute to students' faith formation, moral integrity, respect for human dignity, social responsibility, self-discipline, leadership, environmental stewardship, and sense of purpose and vocation. The study is situated within the continuing concern that education should form not only academically competent learners but also morally grounded, socially responsible, and spiritually mature individuals.

Character development is a central aspect of education because it shapes learners' values, attitudes, behavior, decision-making, and relationships. In the Philippine K to 12 curriculum, values formation is reflected in *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* and in the integration of values education across learning areas. However, the effectiveness of this formation depends on the educational practices implemented in daily school life. UNICEF (2015) emphasized that "Character education is an inseparable part of education, but it has been neglected for quite some time." This suggests the need to give equal attention to academic learning and character development. Catholic education extends beyond academic excellence by promoting holistic formation grounded in Gospel values and Catholic teaching. In this context, Catholic schools are expected to form students intellectually, morally, spiritually, socially, and emotionally. However, it remains necessary to examine whether daily Catholic school practices genuinely foster character development or simply become routine religious observances without meaningful moral impact. The concern is strengthened by studies showing a crisis in moral values among teenagers, including issues related to honesty, justice, discipline, responsibility, wisdom, and fear of God,

where Catholic religious education teachers are considered important in supporting students' moral development. In the Philippines, concerns about student character formation are reflected in the high incidence of bullying in Philippine schools reported by the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2) on June 13, 2024. Republic Act No. 11476 also recognizes the role of the youth in nation-building and promotes their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. These concerns show that values and character formation remain critical issues in education. Within Catholic schools, exposure to Church teachings, school Masses, prayer practices, and Marian devotion may influence students' values formation, moral awareness, humility, care, and obedience.

The literature shows that students' character development is shaped by developmental, religious, curricular, institutional, and social factors. Moral character develops throughout adolescence, with older students often showing stronger moral reasoning, self-regulation, and internalization of Catholic values (World Health Organization, 2024; Smith, 2005; Bowman et al., 2022). Sex, grade level, length of enrollment, and religious affiliation may also influence formation, as studies suggest differences in religiosity, empathy, prosocial behavior, religious engagement, exposure to Catholic values, and participation in faith-based practices (Penny et al., 2014; Penny, 2015; Ebstyne King et al., 2004; Cotton et al., 2006). Catholic identity and mission are likewise central to Catholic educational practice, as they are expressed through prayer, liturgy, symbols, curriculum, school culture, mission, vision, values, and Gospel-centered daily practices. In this regard, Catholic education seeks to form learners who are morally upright, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible. The Christian Living Curriculum, prayer, liturgy, sacramental life, student formation programs, social involvement, and governance further strengthen Catholic character formation. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2011) emphasized that religious education should develop moral judgment, conscience formation, and responsible living, while David (2021), Daniel (2023), Cook et al. (2011), and Pope Francis (2015) affirmed that Gospel integration, worship, prayer, and sacramental participation support discipline, faith, and character. Student formation programs such as retreats, recollections, leadership training, service activities, youth ministry, and campus ministry deepen students' spiritual engagement and values formation (Ackerson, 2018; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018; National Catholic Education Commission, 2018). Social involvement also connects faith with community action, helping students develop empathy, identity, responsibility, and civic awareness through community service and service-learning (Basco, 2024; Youniss et al., 1999; Vicente et al., 2024; Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, 2024). Finally, effective governance and quality assurance ensure that Catholic identity, leadership, accountability, and continuous improvement are sustained in school practices, thereby supporting the holistic formation of students (Convey, 2012; Johnson et al., 2000).

The literature shows that Catholic schools contribute to students' character development by strengthening faith and spiritual formation, moral integrity, conscience formation, respect for human dignity, social responsibility, self-discipline, leadership, environmental stewardship, and sense of purpose. Religious-based and Catholic schools are described as formative environments where students develop ethical behavior, empathy, integrity, citizenship, social awareness, and spiritual maturity through faith-based education, reflection, values integration, and community engagement (Megawati and Sulisworo, 2025; Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, 2023; Santos, Reyes, and Dela Cruz, 2025; Pope Francis, 2019). Studies also emphasize that character formation involves human dignity, moral judgment, fairness, responsibility, and ethical action, which are developed through dialogue, service-learning, outreach, volunteering, environmental activities, and servant leadership practices (Kleindienst, 2024; Kleindienst, 2022; Lickona, 2004; Hahn, 2021; Tabanao et al., 2021; Basco, 2024). Catholic education likewise supports students' sense of purpose and vocation by fostering spiritual identity, belonging, resilience, service, and meaningful relationships within the school, family, and faith community (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017; Lapsley et al., 2022; Templeton and Eccles, 2006; Buenconsejo, 2018; Johnson, 2021). Overall, Catholic educational practices shape character by integrating faith, virtue, moral reasoning, service, and lived values into students' daily school experiences. Globally, studies emphasize the role of schools in developing students' character, values, and skills, particularly through religious education, school culture, service learning, spiritual formation, and environmental engagement. Nationally, the Philippine concern for values formation is reflected in issues such as bullying and in Republic Act No. 11476, which institutionalizes Good Manners and Right Conduct and Values Education in the K to 12 curriculum. Catholic education in the Philippines further supports holistic formation through faith, values, prayer, and character development. Locally, Catholic schools in Northern Samar have long integrated faith-based instruction, prayer, service activities, leadership, and values-based discipline; however, limited studies have examined how these practices contribute to high school students' character development in the province. Thus, this study addresses this local research gap.

This study is anchored on Integral Human Formation, which views education as a holistic process that develops the intellectual, moral, spiritual, social, and emotional dimensions of the learner. Rooted in Catholic educational philosophy, it holds that authentic education goes beyond academic excellence and forms persons capable of ethical judgment, social responsibility, and service to the common good. This framework explains why Catholic schools emphasize Catholic identity, Christian values, prayer, liturgy, community involvement, responsibility, leadership, and environmental care as part of student character formation. The study is also supported by the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura, which explains that students learn behaviors by observing and imitating role models. In Catholic schools, teachers, administrators,

and peers may model faith, discipline, respect, service, and responsibility. The Moral Development Theory of Lawrence Kohlberg also explains how students develop a sense of right and wrong in stages, moving from external rule-following toward internalized moral reasoning and personal principles. Together, these theories explain how Catholic educational practices influence student character through holistic formation, observation, interaction, reflection, and lived experience. The conceptual basis of the study links respondent profile and Catholic educational practices with character development. Respondent profile includes age, grade level, length of enrollment, religious affiliation, and sex, which are understood as demographic and educational background variables that may influence students' perceptions, maturity, exposure, and openness to formation. Catholic educational practices include Catholic identity and mission, Christian Living Curriculum, educational practices, governance and quality assurance, prayer, liturgy and sacramental life, social involvement, and student formation programs. Character development is reflected in moral, ethical, spiritual, and social qualities, including conscience formation, environmental stewardship, faith and spiritual formation, leadership and service-oriented citizenship, moral integrity, respect for human dignity, self-discipline and responsibility, sense of purpose and vocation, and social responsibility.

Although Catholic education is widely associated with holistic student formation, the relationship between specific Catholic educational practices and character development remains insufficiently examined in the context of Northern Samar. Existing studies discuss Catholic identity, Christian Living instruction, prayer and liturgy, student formation, service learning, governance, environmental stewardship, and faith-based character development, but few focus specifically on how these practices relate to the character development of high school students in all Catholic schools in Northern Samar. This gap is important because Catholic schools are expected to form students not only academically but also morally, spiritually, socially, and environmentally. The rationale of the study is therefore grounded in the need to determine the extent to which Catholic educational practices are implemented and how these practices relate to students' character development. The study also considers whether respondent profile variables such as age, sex, grade level, length of enrollment, and religious affiliation are significantly related to character development. By examining these relationships, the study provides empirical support for strengthening faith-based educational programs, student formation activities, leadership opportunities, social involvement, environmental stewardship, and school-community collaboration.

This study aligns most directly with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it focuses on holistic, values-based, and faith-informed education that supports learners' moral, spiritual, social, and personal development. It also relates to SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions because the study emphasizes moral integrity, respect for human dignity, conscience formation, self-discipline, responsible citizenship, and governance and quality assurance in Catholic schools. The study also supports SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities through its concern for social involvement, community service, leadership, and service-oriented citizenship. In addition, it is connected to SDG 13 – Climate Action because environmental stewardship is included as one dimension of character development, particularly through practices that promote care for creation, environmental responsibility, and student participation in ecological activities. Finally, it supports SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals because the study highlights the importance of collaboration among schools, the Church, families, communities, administrators, teachers, educational planners, and policy makers in strengthening student formation.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by showing how schools can sustain learning environments that form students academically, morally, spiritually, and socially. It supports institutional sustainability by emphasizing governance, quality assurance, leadership, policy implementation, and continuous improvement in Catholic schools. It also contributes to cultural and spiritual sustainability by preserving and strengthening Catholic educational identity, faith formation, prayer life, sacramental participation, and values-based discipline. The study contributes to socio-economic and community sustainability by promoting social responsibility, service, leadership, volunteerism, and responsible citizenship among students. These outcomes are important because students who develop empathy, discipline, moral awareness, and a sense of service may become more active contributors to their schools and communities. The study also supports environmental sustainability by including environmental stewardship as a character dimension, encouraging students to view care for creation as both a moral and social responsibility. Overall, the research is multidisciplinary because it connects education, theology, psychology, ethics, leadership, governance, community development, and environmental responsibility in understanding student character formation.

This study focuses on high school students in Catholic schools in Northern Samar during the academic year 2025–2026. It examines the respondents' profile in terms of age, sex, grade level, length of enrollment, and religious affiliation. It also determines the extent of Catholic educational practices in terms of Catholic identity and mission in school life, Christian Living Curriculum, prayer, liturgy, and sacramental life as routine, student formation programs, social involvement, and governance and quality assurance. The study further examines character development in terms of faith and spiritual formation, moral integrity and conscience formation, respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, leadership and service-oriented citizenship, environmental stewardship, and sense of purpose and vocation. Finally, it determines whether significant relationships exist between respondent profile and character

development, and between Catholic educational practices and character development. The study is guided by the hypotheses that there is no significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and the character development of high school students in Catholic schools in Northern Samar, and that there is no significant relationship between the extent of Catholic educational practices implemented in Catholic schools in Northern Samar and the character development of high school students.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive method was used to determine the respondents' profile, the extent of Catholic educational practices, and their influence on the character development of students. The correlational method was used to examine the relationship between respondent profile and character development, and between Catholic educational practices and character development. Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire, while interview responses were used to support the findings.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in seven Catholic secondary schools in Northern Samar. These schools were selected because they implement faith-based educational practices and promote students' moral, spiritual, academic, and social formation. The participating schools were located in Laoang, Mondragon, Catarman, San Jose, Lavezares, and Allen.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were high school students enrolled in Catholic secondary schools in Northern Samar during School Year 2025–2026. From the total population of 2,447 junior and senior high school students, 336 students participated in the quantitative phase. Seventeen students were also selected for interviews to provide additional insights.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error through Raosoft's online sample size calculator. The study used proportional sampling to ensure representation from the participating Catholic schools. For the qualitative part, purposive sampling was used in selecting interview respondents who could provide meaningful experiences related to Catholic educational practices and character development.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made questionnaire based on the Philippine Catholic Schools Standards framework of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (2016), relevant literature, and indicators from Lactam, J. Y. et al. (2025). The questionnaire gathered data on the respondents' profile, Catholic educational practices, and students' character development. It also included open-ended questions to support the quantitative findings. The instrument was validated by one master teacher with a master's degree in Social Studies and two Christian Living Curriculum experts. It was pilot-tested among 30 junior and senior high school students in a Catholic school in Alang-Alang, Leyte, and was found clear, relevant, and suitable for actual administration.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, the researcher secured approval from the adviser, research panel, and school principals of the participating Catholic schools. After permission was granted, the validated questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents with the help of school coordinators, class advisers, or guidance personnel. Completed questionnaires were checked, encoded, and prepared for analysis. For the interview phase, informed consent was secured before selected students were interviewed.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques in accordance with the objectives of the study. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the respondents' profile variables. Mean and weighted mean were used to determine the extent of Catholic educational practices and the level of students' character development, while ranking was used to identify the relative prominence of indicators. To determine the relationship between Catholic educational practices and character development, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. This statistical test measured the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. Thematic analysis was also employed for the qualitative responses to support and enrich the interpretation of the quantitative results.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical procedures to protect the respondents' rights and privacy. No identifying information was required in the questionnaire to safeguard confidentiality. All collected data were handled confidentially and stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. For the interview phase, respondents signed an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance that their identities and responses would remain confidential. Only those who agreed and signed the consent form participated in the interviews.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile of the Respondents

3.1.1 Demographic and Educational Characteristics

The respondents were 336 high school students from Catholic schools in Northern Samar. Most were 14–15 years old, representing 125 respondents or 37.20 percent. Female students formed the majority, with 207 respondents or 61.61 percent. In terms of grade level, Grade 11 had the highest number of respondents with 63 or 18.75 percent, although the respondents were generally distributed across Grades 7 to 12. Most students had been enrolled in their Catholic schools for 1–2 years, representing 172 respondents or 51.19 percent. The majority were Roman Catholic, with 312 respondents or 92.86 percent, while 24 or 7.14 percent belonged to other Christian denominations. These findings show that the study mainly involved middle adolescents, female students, senior high school learners, students with relatively short exposure to Catholic school education, and Roman Catholic students. The inclusion of respondents from different grade levels and years of enrollment provided a broader basis for examining how students with varied levels of maturity and school exposure experienced Catholic educational practices and character formation.

3.2 Extent of Catholic Educational Practices

3.2.1 Catholic Identity and Mission in School Life

Catholic identity and mission in school life obtained an overall mean of 4.53, interpreted as Very High Extent. The strongest indicators were the visible presence of Catholic symbols, the celebration of Catholic holidays and feast days, and the encouragement of faith-based values such as respect, honesty, and compassion. The interview responses supported this finding by showing that Catholic identity was visibly and regularly experienced in school life. Participants reported the presence of crucifixes, statues of saints, religious images, and classroom altars, which helped create an atmosphere conducive to prayer and faith. They also shared that feast days were celebrated through Holy Mass and school activities that encouraged students to imitate the virtues of the saints. Morning assemblies, worship, novena prayers, and rosary recitation were likewise mentioned as regular practices. These qualitative responses indicate that Catholic identity was not limited to symbolic display but was embedded in the daily rhythm, rituals, and values of the school community. These findings affirm the Philippine Catholic School Standards of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (2017), which emphasize that Catholic identity is reflected in mission, vision, values, policies, and daily practices. They also support the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2005), which views Catholic schools as institutions that integrate faith, culture, and life, and Shane (2020), who explained that Catholic identity is manifested through prayers, liturgy, symbols, and values formation.

3.2.2 Christian Living Curriculum

The Christian Living Curriculum obtained an overall mean of 4.30, interpreted as Very High Extent. The highest-rated practice was the use of Christian Living activities that encourage students to apply Catholic teachings to real-life situations. Religion or Christian Living classes, values formation activities, retreats, recollections, and reflective activities were also highly implemented. The interview responses help explain this result. Participants shared that Christian Living classes taught them the importance of faith and helped them understand Catholic values more clearly. They also reported that reflection activities after lessons encouraged them to examine what is right and wrong and to apply these lessons in their daily lives. Retreats and recollections were likewise identified as meaningful experiences that strengthened their faith and deepened their relationship with God. These responses suggest that the Christian Living Curriculum functioned not only as doctrinal instruction but also as a formative process that encouraged reflection, moral judgment, and personal application. The findings support the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2011), which emphasized that religious education should develop moral judgment, conscience formation, and responsible action. They are also consistent with the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines through the K to 12 Christian Living Education–Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao Curriculum Guide and David (2021), who emphasized that integrating Gospel values across learning experiences strengthens moral development.

3.2.3 Prayer, Liturgy, and Sacramental Life

Prayer, liturgy, and sacramental life obtained an overall mean of 4.38, interpreted as Very High Extent. Daily prayers and reflections received the highest rating, followed by school-wide Masses, sacramental preparation, and student participation in liturgical celebrations. The interview findings reinforced this quantitative result. Participants shared that daily prayers were conducted through morning assemblies that included worship, novena prayers, and rosary recitation before classes.

They also reported that Holy Mass was celebrated during special occasions and on first Fridays. Some participants mentioned the use of Mass cards and explained that students were encouraged to listen attentively to the homily because they would later share their reflections and learnings with classmates. Students were also given opportunities to serve as lectors, choir members, prayer leaders, or assistants in liturgical celebrations. Confession and Confirmation were also identified as sacramental experiences offered by the school. These responses show that prayer and sacramental life were not merely occasional activities but recurring practices that promoted active participation in the life of the Church. These results confirm David (2021), who emphasized that Masses, liturgies, and prayer life sustain Catholic identity, and Daniel (2023), who explained that liturgical and sacramental participation deepens faith formation, moral understanding, and social responsibility.

3.2.4 Student Formation Programs

Student formation programs obtained an overall mean of 4.23, interpreted as Very High Extent. The strongest indicators were programs that develop self-discipline, responsibility, moral decision-making, leadership, and moral character. The interview responses provided qualitative support for these ratings. Participants shared that student organizations, leadership activities, and ministry-related programs encouraged them to become responsible, service-oriented, and active members of the school community. They also described retreats, recollections, seminars, and formation activities as experiences that supported their spiritual, moral, and social development. Guidance and counseling services were also viewed as helpful because they provided support anchored in Christian values. Participants further noted that students who demonstrated good behavior, leadership, and positive values were recognized by the school. These responses suggest that student formation programs contributed to holistic development by combining leadership opportunities, spiritual reflection, ethical guidance, and positive reinforcement. The results confirm Ackerson (2018), who emphasized the contribution of Catholic formation programs to students' spiritual growth and engagement. They also support the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2018) and the National Catholic Education Commission (2018), which highlighted retreats, campus ministry, leadership opportunities, youth ministry, and service activities as important to faith and character formation.

3.2.5 Social Involvement

Social involvement obtained an overall mean of 4.20, interpreted as High Extent. The strongest practices were collaboration with parishes or community organizations, organized community service, outreach activities, advocacy projects, charity drives, and volunteer work. The interview findings clarified why this dimension was rated high but not very high. Participants shared that students were given opportunities to participate in charity programs, volunteer work, community outreach, and catechism sessions in other schools. These activities promoted compassion, service, and social responsibility. However, participants also explained that social involvement activities were more commonly participated in by higher-level students and school officers. This suggests that while social involvement was present and meaningful, access to such activities may not have been equally experienced by all students. Thus, the qualitative evidence helps explain the quantitative interpretation by showing both the strength and limitation of social involvement practices. These results suggest that Catholic schools promote social awareness, empathy, cooperation, and service, but participation may need to be broadened so that more students can benefit from direct service experiences. The findings support Youniss (1999), who emphasized that church-sponsored service strengthens identity, community engagement, and social responsibility. They also align with Simons and Cleary (2006), who found that service-learning improves personal, social, and civic development, and the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (2024), which highlights citizenship building and social participation.

3.2.6 Governance and Quality Assurance

Governance and quality assurance obtained an overall mean of 4.27, interpreted as Very High Extent. The strongest indicators were the alignment of the school's vision, mission, and goals with Catholic identity, teacher participation in seminars and formation programs, policy review, monitoring of faith-based programs, and feedback mechanisms. Interview responses confirmed that school governance supported Catholic educational practices. Participants shared that the school's vision, mission, and goals reflected Catholic identity and holistic development. They also reported that teachers and school personnel participated in seminars, workshops, and formation activities that strengthened their understanding of Catholic education. School leaders were described as regularly monitoring and evaluating faith-based programs to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. Participants further noted that students and stakeholders were given opportunities to express suggestions and concerns through available feedback platforms. These responses suggest that governance and quality assurance practices helped sustain Catholic identity not only through written policies but also through leadership, monitoring, teacher formation, and participatory improvement. The results confirm Convey (2012), who emphasized that strong Catholic leadership strengthens values formation. They also support the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (2020) and the Private Education Assistance Committee (2024), which emphasize leadership, accountability, and quality assurance in holistic education.

3.3 Character Development of High School Students

3.3.1 Faith, Moral Integrity, and Respect for Human Dignity

Faith and spiritual formation obtained an overall mean of 4.34, interpreted as Always Observed. Students actively participated in Masses, prayer, and spiritual activities, and reported that faith influenced their daily decisions. Moral integrity and conscience formation obtained an overall mean of 4.28, also Always Observed, showing that students corrected mistakes, stood for what was right, and practiced honesty. Respect for human dignity obtained an overall mean of 4.39, Always Observed, indicating that students treated others with respect, considered others' rights and feelings, avoided bullying, and listened to different opinions. The interview findings strengthened the interpretation of these quantitative results. Participants shared that they regularly attended Mass, prayed, and participated in religious activities provided by the school. Some explained that before studying in a Catholic school, attending Mass was not part of their regular routine; however, through school religious activities, it became a habit and a source of strength. They also reported that faith helped guide their decisions, actions, and interactions with others. In relation to moral integrity, participants explained that the values and teachings learned in school helped them make good decisions, treat others properly, and correct mistakes. For respect for human dignity, students reported that teachers consistently reminded them to treat others with kindness, fairness, and respect regardless of differences. These responses provide qualitative evidence that the observed character outcomes were connected to repeated experiences of prayer, Christian Living instruction, teacher guidance, and values-based school interactions. These findings show that Catholic education supports students' spiritual growth, moral awareness, honesty, accountability, empathy, and respect for others. The results support the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (2023), David (2021), and Lapsley (2022), who emphasized that faith-based educational experiences strengthen spiritual and moral formation. They also confirm Lickona (2012), Kohlberg (1981), and Kleindienst (2024), who emphasized moral reasoning, conscience formation, respect, kindness, and ethical behavior as essential aspects of character education.

3.3.2 Social Responsibility, Self-Discipline, Leadership, Environmental Stewardship, and Purpose

Social responsibility and service obtained an overall mean of 4.25, interpreted as Always Observed. Self-discipline and responsibility obtained an overall mean of 4.21, also Always Observed, with task completion, rule-following, and behavioral control as major indicators. Leadership and service-oriented citizenship obtained an overall mean of 4.20, interpreted as Frequently Observed, showing that students were willing to lead and help others, although initiative and role-modeling were less consistently observed. Environmental stewardship obtained an overall mean of 4.25, Always Observed, while sense of purpose and vocation obtained an overall mean of 4.34, Always Observed. The interview responses provided important explanations for these results. For social responsibility, participants shared that they were encouraged to care for others and extend help to those in need through outreach programs, community involvement, and school activities. For self-discipline, they reported that school rules, reminders, and leadership responsibilities helped them become more accountable and responsible. In terms of leadership, participants explained that the school provided opportunities to develop leadership through class officer roles, school organizations, and group activities. However, they also noted that leadership opportunities were usually experienced by students who were officers or actively involved in organizations. This explains why leadership and service-oriented citizenship was interpreted only as frequently observed rather than always observed. The interview findings also supported the results on environmental stewardship and sense of purpose. Participants shared that the school reminded them to dispose of waste properly, conserve water and electricity, maintain cleanliness, and join clean-up drives inside and outside the campus. For sense of purpose and vocation, students reported that faith-based activities helped them reflect on their goals, dreams, and future plans. Some participants explained that their plans were previously unclear, but through school guidance and faith formation, they developed a clearer sense of direction. These responses suggest that Catholic schools helped students connect discipline, service, environmental care, and future aspirations with faith-based formation. These findings indicate that students generally demonstrate service, responsibility, discipline, environmental awareness, and future orientation. However, leadership behaviors appear less consistently manifested because leadership opportunities are often limited to student officers or active organization members. The findings support Gleeson (2018), Bandura (1977), and Lickona (2012), who emphasized that discipline and responsible behavior are developed through guidance, modeling, and reinforcement. They also affirm Ackerson (2022), Youniss (1999), Pope Francis (2015), Hahn (2021), Tabanao (2021), Lapsley (2022), Templeton and Eccles (2006), and the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (2024), which connect service, environmental responsibility, leadership, identity formation, and vocation-centered education with holistic character development.

3.4 Relationship Between Profile Variables and Character Development

3.4.1 Significant and Non-Significant Relationships

The findings showed that selected profile variables were significantly related to specific dimensions of character development. Age had significant relationships with faith and spiritual formation, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, and leadership and service-oriented citizenship. Grade level was significantly related to faith and spiritual formation, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, and leadership and service-oriented citizenship. Length of enrollment was significantly related to respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, and sense of purpose and vocation. Religious affiliation was significantly related to social responsibility and service and leadership and service-oriented citizenship. Sex did not show a significant relationship with any dimension of character development. The interview responses helped explain these relationships.

Participants indicated that as students grow older and move to higher grade levels, they are given more opportunities to participate in Masses, retreats, recollections, outreach programs, student organizations, and leadership activities. These experiences appear to strengthen their spiritual engagement, social responsibility, discipline, and leadership. Similarly, students who had stayed longer in Catholic schools reported continuous exposure to Catholic teachings, school policies, outreach programs, and formation activities, which helped them develop respect, discipline, service orientation, and clearer life goals. In relation to religious affiliation, participants explained that faith encouraged them to help others, practice compassion, participate in community service, and lead with humility and responsibility. These findings suggest that maturity, educational exposure, years of stay in Catholic schools, and religious background may influence selected aspects of students' spiritual, social, disciplinary, and leadership development. However, the absence of significant relationships involving sex suggests that character formation is experienced similarly by male and female students in the participating Catholic schools. This implies that the schools' faith-based and values-oriented practices are generally available to students regardless of sex. The findings support Lapsley and colleagues (2014) and Smith (2005), who explained that moral and religious values develop as adolescents mature. They also confirm Gleeson (2018), Fatima (2014), Kim (2014), Stoppa (2010), Maculada (2025), and Obhoo (2024), who emphasized the importance of Catholic school exposure, maturity, religious involvement, and school experience in values and character formation.

3.5 Relationship Between Catholic Educational Practices and Character Development

3.5.1 Significant Relationships

Catholic identity and mission in school life showed significant relationships with faith and spiritual formation and sense of purpose and vocation. The Christian Living Curriculum was significantly related to faith and spiritual formation, moral integrity and conscience formation, and sense of purpose and vocation. Prayer, liturgy, and sacramental life were also significantly related to faith and spiritual formation, moral integrity and conscience formation, and sense of purpose and vocation. Student formation programs showed significant relationships with faith and spiritual formation, moral integrity and conscience formation, respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, leadership and service-oriented citizenship, and sense of purpose and vocation. Social involvement was significantly related to respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, leadership and service-oriented citizenship, and environmental stewardship. Governance and quality assurance were significantly related to moral integrity and conscience formation, respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, and leadership and service-oriented citizenship. The interview findings clarified how these practices contributed to character development. Catholic identity was experienced through visible symbols, feast day celebrations, morning assemblies, worship, novena prayers, and rosary recitation, which helped students encounter faith in the ordinary life of the school. Christian Living instruction helped students reflect on moral choices and apply Catholic values in daily situations. Prayer, liturgy, and sacramental practices strengthened students' relationship with God and guided their decisions and actions. Student formation programs such as retreats, recollections, leadership activities, ministry programs, and guidance services provided direct opportunities for spiritual growth, ethical reflection, responsibility, and leadership. Social involvement activities such as outreach, charity work, catechism, and volunteerism helped students practice compassion and service. Governance and quality assurance supported these outcomes by ensuring that school programs, policies, teacher formation, and feedback mechanisms remained aligned with Catholic identity and holistic education. These findings show that Catholic educational practices contribute to different dimensions of students' character development. Catholic identity, Christian Living instruction, prayer, liturgy, student formation, social involvement, and governance provide complementary pathways for forming students spiritually, morally, socially, and personally. The findings support the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines through the Philippine Catholic School Standards (2016), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2018), David (2021), Daniel (2023), Betsy Ackerson (2022), the National Catholic Education Commission (2018), Youniss (1999), Simons and Cleary (2006), Convey (2012), the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (2020), and the Private Education Assistance Committee (2024), which emphasize faith integration, values formation, service, leadership, accountability, and continuous improvement in Catholic education.

3.5.2 Non-Significant Relationships

Several Catholic educational practices did not show significant relationships with selected character dimensions. Catholic identity and mission were not significantly related to moral integrity and conscience formation, respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, leadership and service-oriented citizenship, and environmental stewardship. Christian Living Curriculum was not significantly related to respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, leadership and service-oriented citizenship, and environmental stewardship. Prayer, liturgy, and sacramental life were not significantly related to respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, leadership and service-oriented citizenship, and environmental stewardship. Student formation programs were not significantly related to environmental stewardship, while social involvement was not significantly related to faith and spiritual formation, moral integrity and conscience formation, self-discipline and responsibility, and sense of purpose and vocation. Governance and quality assurance were not significantly related to faith and spiritual formation, environmental stewardship, and sense of purpose and vocation. The interview responses help explain these non-significant findings. While Catholic identity, religious instruction, and prayer were

strongly experienced by students, the responses suggest that these practices primarily strengthened faith, reflection, and personal values. Broader outcomes such as leadership, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship appeared to require more direct experiential activities, such as outreach, organization involvement, service projects, and environmental programs. Participants also noted that some activities, particularly leadership and social involvement, were more commonly experienced by officers, organization members, or higher-level students. This uneven access may have limited the strength of relationships between some educational practices and certain character dimensions. Similarly, environmental stewardship may require more specific, sustained, and school-wide ecological programs, since general formation activities may not directly target environmental behavior. These results suggest that some character dimensions may require more direct, targeted, and sustained interventions. Faith-based identity, religious instruction, and prayer may strongly support spiritual and moral development, but broader social, civic, behavioral, and environmental outcomes may need additional experiential activities such as outreach, leadership roles, environmental programs, and community engagement. Overall, the findings show that Catholic educational practices significantly contribute to character development, but their influence varies depending on the specific practice and the character dimension being developed.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that Catholic educational practices significantly contribute to the holistic character development of high school students in Catholic schools in Northern Samar. The respondents were predominantly middle adolescents, female students, senior high school learners, Roman Catholics, and students with short to moderate years of enrollment in Catholic schools. The findings revealed that Catholic schools highly implement educational practices related to Catholic identity and mission, Christian Living instruction, prayer and sacramental life, student formation, social involvement, and governance and quality assurance. These practices provide students with regular opportunities for faith formation, moral reflection, values integration, service participation, and personal development. The study also found that students generally demonstrated strong character development in terms of faith and spiritual formation, moral integrity and conscience formation, respect for human dignity, social responsibility and service, self-discipline and responsibility, environmental stewardship, and sense of purpose and vocation. However, leadership and service-oriented citizenship were observed less consistently, suggesting the need for broader and more inclusive leadership opportunities for students.

Selected profile variables, particularly age, grade level, length of enrollment, and religious affiliation, were significantly related to specific dimensions of character development, while sex showed no significant relationship. This indicates that maturity, school exposure, and religious background may influence certain aspects of students' character formation, whereas character development appears to be experienced similarly by male and female students. Overall, the findings indicate that sustained Catholic educational practices help shape students' values, attitudes, behavior, and holistic formation. Catholic schools therefore remain important formative environments where faith, moral values, discipline, service, leadership, and social responsibility are cultivated.

Catholic schools may continue strengthening faith-based educational programs, particularly Christian Living instruction, prayer activities, liturgical celebrations, student formation programs, outreach initiatives, and governance practices that support holistic character development. These programs should be sustained and continuously improved to ensure that Catholic identity is meaningfully integrated into both classroom instruction and school life. Teachers, school personnel, guidance counselors, campus ministers, and formation coordinators may provide more structured leadership training, service-oriented activities, mentoring programs, recollections, values formation sessions, and opportunities for moral reflection and responsible decision-making. These activities may help students internalize Catholic values and apply them in personal, social, and school-related situations. Catholic schools may also broaden leadership and service opportunities so that these are not limited only to student officers, organization members, or selected participants. More inclusive programs may allow a greater number of students to develop initiative, responsibility, collaboration, and service-oriented citizenship. Environmental stewardship programs may be intensified through regular school-wide clean-up drives, ecological advocacy campaigns, waste management activities, conservation practices, and community-based environmental projects. These initiatives may strengthen students' sense of responsibility toward creation and promote concrete expressions of environmental care. Stronger collaboration among schools, parents, parishes, and community stakeholders may also be encouraged to support students' spiritual growth, moral formation, social responsibility, and values development. Since character formation is influenced by both school and external environments, coordinated efforts between home, school, Church, and community may further reinforce the values promoted in Catholic education.

Future researchers may conduct similar studies using qualitative, mixed-method, or longitudinal approaches in other Catholic schools or educational settings. Further studies may also examine the role of teachers, administrators, parents, campus ministers, and guidance personnel in students' character development. Additional research may focus on specific areas such as student formation, leadership development, prayer and sacramental activities, environmental stewardship, and the long-term influence of Catholic educational practices on students' moral and spiritual formation.

The study was limited to high school students from seven Catholic secondary schools in Northern Samar during School Year 2025–2026; therefore, the findings should be interpreted within this specific context. The study did not include the

perspectives of teachers, administrators, parents, and other school stakeholders, whose insights could have provided a broader understanding of Catholic educational practices and character formation. The data relied largely on students' self-reported responses and interview narratives, which may have been affected by social desirability bias, especially on matters involving values, morality, faith, and behavior. In addition, the study captured students' experiences at one point in time and did not fully account for possible changes in character development over a longer period. External influences such as family background, peer relationships, parish involvement, media exposure, and community environment were also not fully controlled, although these factors may significantly affect students' character formation. Thus, while the findings provide meaningful insights into the relationship between Catholic educational practices and character development, they should be understood within the scope, context, and methodological limitations of the study.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards and proper research protocols. Approval and permission were secured from the concerned academic authorities and participating Catholic schools before data collection. Participation of the high school student-respondents was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to their involvement in the survey and interview. Confidentiality and anonymity were observed by not requiring identifying information and by ensuring that all collected data were used solely for research purposes. The researcher acknowledges the cooperation of the school administrators, coordinators, and student-respondents who contributed to the completion of the study. The author declares no conflict of interest, assumes responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the research, and retains copyright ownership of the work unless otherwise transferred or assigned.

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