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## Hidden Curriculum: Conceptual Review and Practice of Its Implementation in the Context of Education

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Character  
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management

### Abstract

This article aims to examine the concept, categories, and implementation of hidden curriculum in school education. This research uses library research, examining reputable literature in the form of journals, books, and previous research on educational values, norms, attitudes, and practices that are not written but affect the development of students. The results of the study show that hidden curriculum plays an important role in shaping students' character, professionalism, and social-emotional competence, as well as mediating the effectiveness of the formal curriculum. Hidden curriculum is categorized into structural, educational, cultural, and social factors, with positive practices such as teacher exemplarity, collaboration, and integrity rewards, as well as negative practices such as discrimination, excessive hierarchy, and inconsistent behavior. The optimization strategy includes learning environment management, teacher training, and monitoring of school socio-cultural interactions. The findings confirm the need for conscious management of the hidden curriculum to support holistic educational goals.

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### Introduction

Education, in essence, does not only serve to teach knowledge, but it also serves to develop moral values and ethical standards such as honesty, kindness, responsibility, respect, and other good values (Weinberger & Patry, 2016). In educational practice, these various functions are not only achieved through the formal curriculum contained in the Syllabus, Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), and Teaching Modules. There is another dimension besides the written plan that affects the achievement of the function of Education, namely,

something that is not written but significantly realizes the function of Education. This unwritten plan is called by experts the hidden curriculum (Jančec et al., 2018).

In the context of 21st century education and the 4.0 era, where Education is required to be able to develop various social-emotional competencies and character development, the study of hidden curriculum is increasingly urgent to always be echoed (González-pérez & Ramírez-montoya, 2022). Various problems that continue to haunt Education such as low discipline, lack of empathy, bullying cases (Arifin & Afrudin, 2025) and other moral integrity issues are complex challenges that require a comprehensive approach that goes beyond the formal curriculum approach (Siagian, 2020). These various problems when viewed from curriculum theory are more related to the cultural and climatic conditions that form in schools which are a form of hidden curriculum (Quynh & Son, 2025). A positive form of hidden curriculum will be able to optimize the development of students' character, but on the other hand, a form of hidden curriculum that is not managed properly will teach negative values to students. Therefore, the study to understand the concept and management of hidden curriculum as part of the solution to solving education problems is a very strategic step.

In Indonesia, changes in curriculum policies from Competency-Based Curriculum, Education Unit Level Curriculum, 2013 Curriculum, to Independent Curriculum show the government's efforts to improve the quality of Education and overcome these problems. The 2013 curriculum, with its character education jargon, and the Merdeka curriculum, with the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile and the Graduate Profile, are real steps by the government to overcome this problem. But again, with reference to curriculum theory, the development of these values will not succeed with a formal curriculum alone. It requires the development of a good school climate and culture, the example of teachers and school leaders, and the formation of other good habits that are the main forms of the hidden curriculum (D'Cruz, 2023; Jančec et al., 2018). However, hidden curriculum often goes unnoticed because it is not explicitly stated in the lesson plan.

Various theoretical studies show that the Hidden curriculum has long received the attention of education experts as an important dimension in understanding the educational process as a whole. John Dewey emphasized that Education does not only take place through a formal curriculum, but also through learning experiences and teacher-student interpersonal relationships that transmit values implicitly (Knoll, 2025). The concept of hidden curriculum was then emphasized by Philip Jackson who identified the dimensions of crowd, praise, and power as social experiences that systematically shape students' behavior and attitudes in the classroom (Lischka-Schmidt, 2025). Furthermore, Michael Apple views the hidden curriculum as a mechanism for reproducing dominant ideologies and cultural values in Education, so it needs to be criticized through critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2004). In line with that, Henry Giroux emphasizes the political aspect of the hidden curriculum and calls for critical Education as an effort to dismantle power relations and encourage social justice (Giroux, 2004; Shelley & McCuaig, 2018).

Recent literature shows that *the hidden curriculum* not only has a negative impact, but in many contexts it actually contributes positively to the formation of character, professional identity, and the quality of student learning. A number of studies confirm that the *hidden curriculum* is able to strengthen professionalism, humanistic values, and internalize professional attitudes and behaviors through the example of educators and a conducive

institutional culture (Larrotta et al., 2025; Meyer et al., 2025; Ullah et al., 2025). In addition, *hidden curriculum* plays a role in increasing students' confidence, socialization, work ethics, and professional identity (Abbaspour et al., 2022). In higher Education, the practice of mentoring and peer learning helps students understand academic norms, strengthen confidence, and build an inclusive learning community (Downing & Billotte Verhoff, 2023). In higher Education, mentoring and peer learning practices help students understand academic norms, strengthen confidence, and build an inclusive learning community (Çubukçu, 2012; Neve & Collett, 2018).

Other findings also show that the success of achieving formal curriculum goals is greatly influenced by the implementation of *hidden curriculum*, even implicit learning is often more decisive in shaping students' affective attitudes and involvement than formal curriculum (Ahvan et al., 2021). The role of teachers and the educational environment is a central element in transmitting *hidden curriculum* through pedagogical interactions, institutional culture, and daily learning practices (Arora & Mukherjee, 2021; Dos Santos et al., 2020). Therefore, various studies recommend that educational institutions consciously and systematically manage *hidden curriculum* as an integral part of curriculum development strategies to ensure a holistic educational experience (Park et al., 2023; Sarikhani et al., 2020).

Based on these various literature findings and backgrounds, it can be identified how many problems related to the implementation of the hidden curriculum exist. First, the concept of hidden curriculum has not been understood by many education practitioners, even though it is an important part of ensuring the achievement of educational goals. Second, there are still limited studies that integrate the discussion of hidden curriculum theory with examples of concrete practices in the school environment. Third, the use of hidden curriculum as a strategic instrument to support the achievement of educational goals and strengthen the character of students has not been optimal.

These problems indicate a significant gap between the theoretical understanding of the hidden curriculum, which has been widely studied in the literature, and its application in daily educational practice. If the understanding of this concept is not deep enough, the hidden curriculum risks running undirected, and can even have an impact that is contrary to the values that should be instilled through the formal curriculum, so that the expected educational goals are difficult to achieve.

Based on the formulation of this problem, this study aims to: (1) comprehensively examine the concept and theory of hidden curriculum based on literature from education experts; (2) identify the forms of hidden curriculum that appear in educational practices in schools; and (3) translate the theoretical concepts of the hidden curriculum into examples of relevant and applicable practices in the context of schools. This study uses a library research approach by examining books and journal articles with reputable reputations as the main data source.

Through this study, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the role of hidden curriculum in Education can be obtained and provide theoretical and practical contributions for educators, school managers, and policymakers in optimizing the function of Education holistically.

## Method

This research applies a library research design with a qualitative-descriptive approach that aims to study, synthesize, and analyze concepts, theories, and empirical findings regarding the hidden curriculum developed by education experts. Through a literature study, this research allows for a comprehensive understanding of the development of hidden curriculum thinking while linking the theoretical framework with its practical implications in the context of school education. This approach provides a space for integration between conceptual studies and educational practice so that it becomes a solid basis for the interpretation and analysis process.

Research data sources are reputable scientific literature, including classic and contemporary textbooks, as well as national and international journal articles indexed in reputable databases, such as Scopus. The selection of literature is based on the level of relevance to the hidden curriculum topic, the credibility of the authors and publishers, and the theoretical and empirical contribution to the development of curriculum studies. The literature analyzed includes the thoughts of key figures, the results of empirical research at various levels of Education, and studies that discuss the practical implications of the hidden curriculum, resulting in a holistic and representative picture.

The research procedure is carried out systematically through several stages, namely determining the focus of the hidden curriculum study from a theoretical and practical perspective, tracing and collecting literature sources from reputable academic publications, selecting sources based on inclusion criteria, and grouping literature into main themes such as concepts, forms, impacts, and implementation of hidden curriculum in schools. Data analysis is carried out using content analysis techniques and thematic synthesis, through an in-depth study of the ideas, findings, and arguments of each source, then comparing and integrating them to find patterns and differences in views. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of an analytical narrative that relates the theoretical framework of the hidden curriculum with examples of practice in schools, thus producing a systematic, critical, and applicable understanding for the development of educational theory and practice.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the purpose of writing this article, the presentation of results and discussions will be presented in three categories, namely: Hidden Curriculum Concepts and Theories, Forms of Hidden Curriculum and examples of hidden curriculum practices in schools.

### Concept and Theory of the Hidden Curriculum

To comprehensively understand the concept of *hidden curriculum*, it is necessary to explore various definitions put forward by experts from various scientific contexts and perspectives. Each definition places a different emphasis on aspects of values, norms, learning experiences, and the implicit educational process. Therefore, the presentation of definitions from reputable literature is important as a conceptual basis. The following are some definitions of *hidden curriculum* according to experts, as summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Definition of Hidden Curriculum**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name and Year</b>	<b>Definition</b>
1	<a href="#">Ortega et al. (2014)</a>	Hidden curriculum is understood as the undocumented, informal, and often unplanned lessons, values, and viewpoints that students learn in a university setting.
2	<a href="#">Whitcomb (2014)</a>	The hidden curriculum is characterized by the indirect delivery of messages to and between students regarding the cultural and moral environment that surrounds them.
3	<a href="#">Peterson et al. (2018)</a>	The hidden curriculum is characterized by the indirect delivery of messages to and between students regarding the cultural and moral environment that surrounds them.
4	<a href="#">Jančec et al. (2018)</a>	The hidden curriculum is understood as a set of values, attitudes, norms, rules, and rituals that are learned in the school environment, with the main characteristic that the learning process takes place involuntarily and is not formally structured.
5	<a href="#">Bigdeli et al. (2019)</a>	Hidden curriculum is understood as the experience of students that takes place outside the formal framework of the curriculum, especially the various messages conveyed by the education system related to values, viewpoints, behaviors, and attitudes.
6	<a href="#">Brown et al. (2020)</a>	The hidden curriculum includes a variety of noncognitive factors beyond the knowledge material taught, which affect students in the context of education and field practice.
7	<a href="#">Sarikhani et al. (2020)</a>	Hidden curriculum is understood as a learning experience that takes place without planning in medical Education, which includes values, norms, beliefs, skills, and knowledge.
8	<a href="#">Almairi et al. (2021)</a>	The hidden curriculum is understood as an undocumented, informal, and unplanned learning process that students experience in medical school along with the implementation of formal Education.
9	<a href="#">Centeno &amp; de la Paz Grebe (2021)</a>	The hidden curriculum is understood as an involuntary learning process and takes place during each teaching activity.
10	<a href="#">Baykut et al. (2022)</a>	The hidden curriculum is understood as an ideology that is implicitly inherent in the educational content.
11	<a href="#">Villanueva &amp; Sunny (2022)</a>	The hidden curriculum includes fundamental values, norms, and behaviors that are transmitted implicitly through the context of the educational environment.
12	<a href="#">Jeznik &amp; Mrvar (2023)</a>	The hidden curriculum is understood as a diverse aspect of pedagogical practice that includes professional knowledge, power relations, and the social and cultural context that surrounds the work of educators.
13	<a href="#">Rossouw &amp; Frick (2023)</a>	The hidden curriculum is an inseparable element of the curriculum in Education and has a subjective and contextual character.
14	<a href="#">Park et al. (2023)</a>	The hidden curriculum includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, values, and beliefs that are learned and internalized by students, both consciously and unconsciously.
15	<a href="#">Nemiroff et al. (2024)</a>	A hidden curriculum is understood as a collection of values that are transmitted to learners informally through examples of practice.
16	<a href="#">Culcay Delgado &amp; García Coello (2025)</a>	Hidden curriculum is understood as a collection of systemic messages that are exclusive, not formally acknowledged, and often unintentional, but still legitimized and maintained by existing structures.
17	<a href="#">Arphattananon, T. (2025)</a>	The hidden curriculum refers to the implicit messages conveyed through the physical environment and spatial configuration of the school, which play a role in reproducing or challenging ideologies and power dynamics in Education. Differences in physical settings between types of schools shape students' learning experiences indirectly and affect them differently according to their respective socioeconomic backgrounds.

Based on the various definitions put forward, the hidden curriculum can be synthesized as an integral part of the educational process that includes the lessons, values, norms,

attitudes, behaviors, skills, physical environment, beliefs, and viewpoints that students learn and internalize in an undocumented, unofficial, and often unintentional manner, both inside and outside the formal structure of the curriculum. This curriculum works through the delivery of implicit messages related to the cultural environment, morals, ideology, power relations, and the social context in which Education takes place, including through pedagogical practices, educator examples, and institutional structures. These experiences can affect learners consciously or unconsciously, include noncognitive factors outside of formal teaching materials, and are subjective and contextual, but are systemically legitimized and maintained in the entire educational process and activity.

Based on this concept, because the *hidden curriculum* can affect students both consciously and unconsciously, its existence is like two blades: on the one hand, it is able to form and improve attitudes, but on the other hand, it has the potential to instill a less constructive attitude. Positive influences can be seen especially in forming a professional identity and a constructive attitude. A positive role model and a supportive institutional environment play an important role in guiding learners to face uncertainty and develop a strong professional identity (Abushouk et al., 2025; Bigdeli et al., 2019; Meyer et al., 2025).

On the other hand, hidden curriculum also has a negative impact that can hinder students' professional development and learning experience. Discriminatory attitudes, hierarchical dynamics, and inconsistencies between the hidden curriculum and the formal curriculum can cause confusion, reinforce undesirable behaviors, and limit students' active participation (Abushouk et al., 2025; Doja et al., 2018; Lehmann et al., 2018; Neve & Collett, 2018; Whitcomb, 2014).

Thus, hidden curriculum works as a multidimensional phenomenon that can strengthen or hinder students' professional development depending on the context and management of the educational environment.

### Forms of Hidden Curriculum

Based on these various definitions, the hidden curriculum can be synthesized into several categories. First, the hidden curriculum is formed due to structural factors. These structural factors include various organizational rules and educational institutional structures. Formal and informal rules that govern the relationship between educators, students, and education personnel indirectly teach certain values, such as obedience, discipline, and acceptance of hierarchy. Sarikhani et al. (2020) say that this institutional structure forms a frame of thinking for students about their roles, positions, and limitations in the education system, even before the learning material is explicitly conveyed. In addition to organizational rules, the physical setting and learning environment are also an important part of the hidden structural curriculum. The design of classrooms, the layout of facilities, and the separation of academic and administrative spaces convey implicit messages about the authority, priorities, and values that the institution upholds. This is in line with what Sarikhani et al. (2020) said that the physical environment is not neutral, but functions as a symbolic medium that shapes students' perceptions of power, access, and legitimacy in the education process.



Second, the hidden curriculum is formed due to educational factors, especially those related to learning and assessment approaches. Teaching methods, evaluation strategies, and emphasis on specific outcomes implicitly communicate what is considered important in Education. When assessment systems emphasize quantitative outcomes rather than reflective processes, learners can internalize pragmatic and competitive values that are not always in line with holistic educational goals (Bigdeli et al., 2019).

Teaching quality and feedback mechanisms are also part of the hidden educational curriculum. The way educators provide appreciation, criticism, and guidance shapes students' attitudes toward learning, authority, and self-evaluation. Constructive feedback can foster confidence and intrinsic motivation, while a repressive approach has the potential to instill a passive attitude or fear of failure. In this context, hidden curriculum plays a significant role in shaping long-term learning ethos (Bigdeli et al., 2019).

The hidden curriculum can also be classified into cultural factors, which reflect the dominant culture within the educational institution. A thriving academic culture—whether competitive, collaborative, or hierarchical—is implicitly internalized by learners through everyday practice. The values that live in this school or college culture often determine the attitudes and behaviors of students more than the values that are explicitly taught (Jančec et al., 2018).

Values, norms, and beliefs embedded in institutional culture shape the way students interpret success, failure, and social relations. The hidden cultural curriculum works through repetitive institutional routines, symbols, and traditions, resulting in an unconscious internalization of values. The literature suggests that this cultural dimension can reinforce or even weaken formal educational goals, depending on the consistency between the values taught and the values practiced (Hafferty & O' Donnell, 2015).

The next category is social factors, especially those related to role modeling and interpersonal relationships. The behavior of educators, education staff, and senior students became a model that was observed and imitated by students. Through this process, professional values, work ethics, and social attitudes are transmitted implicitly, making the hidden curriculum the main mechanism in the process of educational socialization (Michalec & Hafferty, 2014).

Interaction and communication patterns between institutional citizens are also an important part of the hidden social curriculum. The way educators communicate, resolve conflicts, and respond to differences conveys implicit messages about inclusivity, fairness, and participation. Dialogical interactions can foster the courage to speak up and belong, while hierarchical communication has the potential to reinforce social distance and role inequality (Bigdeli et al., 2019).

#### Examples of Hidden Curriculum Practices in School Contexts

Based on the definition and form of the hidden curriculum category that has been discussed earlier, the following will present examples of positive and negative practices from each category. Understanding these examples of practice is important to present so that they can be used to optimize learning, build character, and design management strategies that align

with formal education goals and strengthen school values. The following are the results of the study of examples of practices based on categories and optimization strategies.

**Table 2: Examples of Hidden Curriculum practices and their optimization strategies**

No	Category	Examples of Positive Practices	Examples of Negative Practices	Optimization Strategy
1	Structural Factors: Rules and Organization	School rules are applied consistently and fairly, thus fostering discipline and a sense of responsibility for students (L. H. Brown & Beckett, 2006)	Rules are applied in a discriminatory and inconsistent manner, fostering injustice and apathy (Abushouk et al., 2025)	Drafting participatory, transparent, and value-based rules for justice
2	Structural Factors: Physical Environment	Inclusive and comfortable classroom layout that encourages student interaction and collaboration (Sivanathan et al., 2024)	Fixed, rigid, and hierarchical spatial arrangements that limit student participation, thus preventing dynamic exchange of ideas and collaborative learning (H. Y. Lee et al., 2023)	Design a learning environment that is friendly, flexible, and supportive of collaboration
3	Educational Factors: Learning Methods	Active and reflective learning that instills students' critical thinking (Tlale-Mkhize & Liebenberg, 2024)	One-way learning that emphasizes memorization and obedience so that it does not develop critical thinking skills (Altinyelken, 2021)	Implementing student-centered, reflection-based learning
4	Educational Factors: Assessment System	Authentic assessments that value student processes, effort, and development can increase student satisfaction and increase positive student behavior (James & Casidy, 2018)	A purely numerical assessment that leads to increased pressure and competition (Jin, 2021)	Develop formative and holistic assessments
5	Cultural Factors: School Culture	A culture of mutual respect, honesty, and inclusion in daily interactions reduces negative exchanges such as criticism and feelings of being ignored, thus creating a more positive and trusting environment (Tov et al., 2016)	A school culture that is tolerant of verbal abuse or discrimination leads to significant mental health problems, including increased rates of depression, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (W. R. Brown, 2022)	Building a school culture based on character values and ethics
6	Cultural Factors: Values and Norms	The value of exemplary teachers encourages the development of	Inconsistencies in teacher behavior that weaken the internalization of values	Penguatan keteladanan dan refleksi nilai bagi pendidik



			desirable professional behaviors in students (Aslam et al., 2023).	can be detrimental to students' self-empowerment (Opdenakker, 2022).	
7	Social Factors: Role Modeling of Teachers	Teachers who exemplify integrity, empathy, and responsibility can foster similar values in students (Uyun et al., 2024)	Teachers show authoritarian or unethical behavior negatively impacting the classroom environment and teaching quality (Caballero, 2024)	Professionalism training and awareness of the role of teachers as models	
8	Social Factors: Interaction and Communication	Dialogical communication that encourages participation and courage to speak can encourage participation and motivate individuals to express their opinions (Segal et al., 2017)	Hierarchical communication that suppresses students' voices can lead to decreased student engagement (T. Lee et al., 2023)	Encourage open communication and egalitarian relations.	

Based on the positive and negative practices of hidden curriculum in the school, it can be concluded that the educational environment has a strategic role in implicitly shaping students' values, attitudes, and behaviors. Positive practices, such as teacher example, a culture of mutual respect, and consistent application of rules, reinforce the internalization of character and moral values. On the other hand, negative practices in the form of discrimination, rigid power relations, and inconsistencies between the rules and actions of educators have the potential to weaken educational goals. Therefore, consciously managing the hidden curriculum is the key so that implicit messages are in harmony with the formal curriculum. The novelty of this research lies in the systematic categorization of hidden curriculum along with examples of concrete, positive, and negative practices, as well as applicable optimization strategies, as a bridge between theory and educational practice.

Conclusion

This research emphasizes that the hidden curriculum is a crucial element in Education that plays a major role in shaping learning experiences, character, and the process of internalizing values in students. Literature review shows that the success of the implementation of the formal curriculum is not solely determined by the documents, structure, and curriculum planning, but is also strongly influenced by implicit elements present in school culture, patterns of social interaction, learning practices, and unwritten norms and habits. In this context, the hidden curriculum serves as a link between the normative goals of Education and the reality of learning that takes place in schools.

The results of the analysis also show that hidden curriculum can be classified into structural, educational, cultural, and social factors, each of which has the potential to produce positive or negative impacts on student development. Positive practices are reflected through

educator examples, collaborative cultures, and respect for integrity and responsibility, while negative practices emerge in the form of discrimination, rigid hierarchies, or inconsistencies in educator behavior. These findings confirm the need for awareness and planned management of the hidden curriculum.

Efforts to optimize the hidden curriculum can be carried out through the creation of a supportive learning environment, strengthening teachers' social and pedagogical competence, and continuous evaluation of school culture and interaction. Thus, this research makes a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of a curriculum that is more holistic and adaptive to the demands of 21st-century education.

### Authorship Contribution Statement

Ahsan Hasbullah: Develop research ideas and conceptual frameworks. Muhammad Nurhalim: Compile research methodologies, collect and analyze literature, organize discussions and conclusions, and make final edits to manuscripts.

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