



The Role of Discipline in Character Education for Elementary School Students in The Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, the decline of moral values among students has become a serious concern, highlighting the urgent need for character education. This article explores the importance of discipline as a foundational value in shaping the character of elementary school students. This study analyzes relevant literature through a qualitative library research approach, including academic journals, books, and expert perspectives. The findings indicate that discipline is crucial in fostering consistent behavior and moral responsibility in students across spiritual, social, and academic aspects. The article emphasizes the need for sustained reinforcement of disciplinary values through collaboration between schools and families. Strengthening discipline supports academic achievement and contributes to students' long-term integrity and character development. This study contributes to the discourse on moral education by highlighting practical strategies for character formation in digitally influenced educational settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education focuses on academic achievement and plays a crucial role in shaping students' character. Amid the complexities of globalization and technological advancement, moral and social degradation has become a significant challenge for the younger generation. One of the most neglected character values is discipline, essential to building responsible and independent individuals. According to the Character Survey Report by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2021), only about 52% of students consistently exhibit disciplined behavior in school and social environments. This data underlines the urgency to reevaluate character education practices in formal education settings. As Tilaar (2002) critiques, the current education system still leans too heavily on cognitive aspects, often overlooking moral and behavioral dimensions.

Discipline goes beyond mere rule compliance; it reflects an individual's ability to manage time, responsibility, and integrity. Lickona (1992) states that character education involves moral knowing, feeling, and moral action—where discipline integrates all three in shaping a holistic personality. Teachers are knowledge transmitters and moral agents who shape students' values through words and actions. In this context, Berkowitz (2021) emphasizes the need for intentionality in character education—the deliberate, conscious design of activities and environments that nurture character values such as discipline.

As a new educational paradigm in Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum offers significant opportunities to strengthen character education. Through the Pancasila Student Profile, values such as independence, responsibility, and discipline are embedded in meaningful and contextual learning. However, these values have not been optimally transformed into daily routines at school and home. Many schools struggle to reinforce character systemically, and family collaboration remains suboptimal.

As the primary educational institution, the family should serve as the foundation for instilling discipline. However, a lack of parental awareness in shaping disciplined behavior weakens continuity when children enter the school environment. On the other hand, teachers often prioritize academic outcomes, causing character development to be treated as secondary. The need for synergy between school and family is becoming more crucial in early education, where behavioral patterns begin to form and values become embedded.

Although recent efforts, such as those by Nuary (2024) and Yulianti (2023), have attempted to link character education with elementary contexts, the discussion on discipline as a distinct and central value remains limited. Meanwhile, classic frameworks like Lickona (1991) and Bandura (1977) still dominate the discourse, but require contextualization in light of digital-age challenges such as screen dependency, reduced attention spans, and weakened authority figures (Oktaviani & Prasetyo, 2024; Alrabaa et al., 2022).

Therefore, this study contributes to the discourse on moral education by focusing specifically on the urgency of discipline during the foundational years of schooling. It seeks to fill the gap by synthesizing literature on discipline-based character formation in early education and proposing a contextual framework that addresses traditional models and emerging challenges in the digital era. This study adds novelty by presenting practical strategies for collaboration between schools and families in nurturing discipline systematically and sustainably within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach through library research, a method involving the analysis of relevant written sources to gain an in-depth understanding (Zed, 2004). It focuses on how discipline values can be effectively instilled through character education, particularly in elementary schools and within the family context. No empirical field data were collected; all information was derived from literature and academic documents.

The researchers reviewed 15 carefully selected sources: 7 national and international journal articles, five academic books on character education and discipline, and three official educational policy documents from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, UNESCO, and the OECD. These sources were chosen based on the following criteria:

- a. Credibility – such as peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, or official reports;
- b. Relevance – focusing directly on discipline, moral character, and elementary education;
- c. Timeliness – published between 2013 and 2024 to ensure validity and relevance to current educational challenges (Zed, 2004; Patton, 2002).

The selection of these 20 references was based on their unique contributions to understanding discipline in education. For instance, journal articles by Berkowitz (2020), Lickona (2019), and Narvaez (2021) provide contemporary perspectives on moral and character education, while Indonesian books and articles offer insights on contextual application in national curricula. Official policy documents, such as the UNESCO Framework for Education 2030 (2022) and the OECD Learning Compass (2020), were included to highlight international benchmarks and priorities in 21st-century character formation.

The data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three steps:

- a. Data Reduction – identifying, summarizing, and selecting relevant content from the sources;
- b. Data Display – organizing thematic data for comparison and pattern recognition;
- c. Conclusion Drawing – interpreting the synthesized information in light of the research objectives.

To ensure data validity, source triangulation was applied by comparing concepts and findings across journal articles, books, and policy documents (Patton, 2002). Each reference was evaluated based on the author's credibility, the publishing institution's reputation, and the work's methodological rigor.

Although this research provides a theoretical foundation, it is limited by its exclusive reliance on secondary sources and the absence of empirical field data. Thus, findings are conceptual rather than predictive or generalizable. Future research should consider empirical classroom-based studies to test the effectiveness of proposed discipline frameworks.

Table 1. Summary Table of Analyzed Sources

No	Title	Author(s)	Focus	Reference
1	Educating for Character	Lickona, T.	Character education principles	Lickona (1991)

No	Title	Author(s)	Focus	Reference
2	The Science of Character Education	Berkowitz, M.	Practical approaches to character formation	Berkowitz (2002)
3	Moral Education for a Changing Society	Narvaez, D.	Moral development in modern contexts	Narvaez (2021)
4	Pendidikan Karakter di Era Digital	Yamin, M.	Digital-age challenges to moral education	Yamin (2023)
5	Building Discipline through Curriculum	Arifin, Z.	Classroom strategies for discipline	Arifin (2020)
6	OECD Learning Compass	OECD	Global competencies and character traits	OECD (2020)
7	Education 2030 Framework	UNESCO	Policy vision for global education	UNESCO (2022)
8	Etika Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini	Susanto, A.	Moral values in early education	Susanto (2019)
9	Implementing Discipline in the Classroom	Suryanto, B.	Practical tools for teachers	Suryanto (2021)
10	Character and Citizenship Education	Tan, C. & Deneen, C.	Character in multicultural settings	Tan & Deneen (2024)
11	The Psychology of Discipline	Ryan, R. & Deci, E.	Motivation and behavior	Ryan & Deci (2021)
12	Character Matters	Elias, M.	SEL and discipline integration	Elias (2023)
13	Disiplin Positif untuk Guru	Kemendikbud	Positive discipline strategies	Kemendikbud (2021)
14	Digital Literacy and Moral Formation	Halim, A.	Digital threats to moral education	Halim (2022)
15	Digital Behavior and Performance	Alrabaa et al.	Screen impact on academic performance	Alrabaa et al. (2022)
16	Family-Based Character Formation	Mulyani & Kurniawan	Discipline and family involvement	Mulyani & Kurniawan (2021)
17	School–Parent Collaboration	Syamsuddin et al.	Discipline alignment	Syamsuddin et al. (2023)
18	Modeling in Education	Bandura, A.	Social learning theory	Bandura (1977)
19	Role of Educators in Discipline	Ismiyati & Widodo	Teacher influence on student behavior	Ismiyati & Widodo (2022)
20	Tech Challenges in Indonesian Schools	Oktaviani & Prasetyo	Gadget use and discipline issues	Oktaviani & Prasetyo (2024)

This methodology ensures a well-grounded and up-to-date theoretical discussion on the urgency and implementation of discipline-based character education in elementary schools, especially within the context of 21st-century digital challenges.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Discipline as a Foundation of Character Education

Discipline is a core pillar in student character formation, especially at the elementary level. It reflects self-regulation, adherence to rules, and personal responsibility. In the context of character education, discipline is taught formally and cultivated through a consistent school culture and daily behavior. Children are learning how to internalize values through repetition, modeling, and reinforcement at this developmental stage.

Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education includes discipline as one of five national character values, alongside religiosity, nationalism, independence, and cooperation. These values are intended to be integrated across learning

activities, school management, and community interaction. Therefore, discipline must be reflected in classroom behavior and how schools shape their routines, expectations, and rules across all levels.

Discipline implementation in elementary schools can involve structured routines, consistent rule enforcement, and clear consequences. According to Ismiyati and Widodo (2022), children raised in disciplined environments tend to be more responsible, focused, and cooperative. Teachers are key figures in this effort, acting as rule enforcers and role models. This is especially important because elementary-aged children are in the imitation and identification stage, absorbing behavioral patterns from adults around them.

In comparison with countries like Finland and Singapore—both known for their strong character education systems—discipline in Indonesia still tends to rely more on reactive rather than proactive approaches. While Finland promotes student autonomy within structured guidelines and Singapore enforces values education integrated with digital citizenship, Indonesian schools often struggle with consistent implementation due to resource disparities. Therefore, this paper seeks to emphasize a model of discipline that is not only culturally grounded but also responsive to global trends in character education.

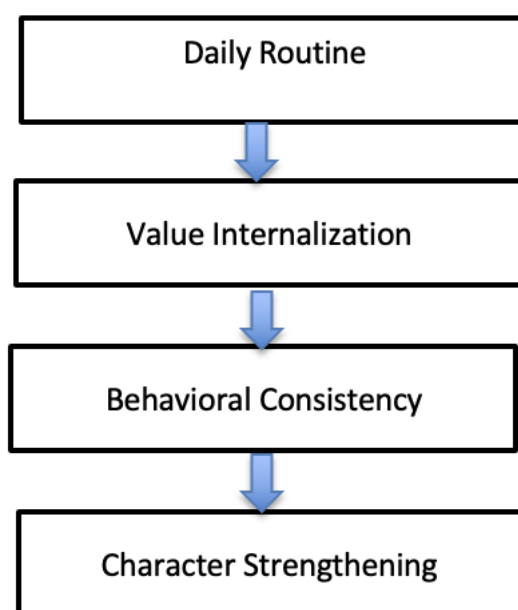


Figure 1. Flow of Character Development through Discipline

b. Challenges of Discipline in the Digital Era

Enforcing discipline faces increasingly complex challenges in the digital age. Elementary students today are immersed in technology—devices, internet access, and social media platforms—which can serve as both tools for learning and sources of distraction. Without proper guidance, technology use can undermine students' focus, attention span, and time management. This reality demands new strategies for nurturing discipline within digitally saturated environments.

Oktaviani and Prasetyo (2024) highlight that inadequate parental control at home and low digital literacy among teachers contribute significantly to declining student discipline. Many children go to bed late due to gadget use, resulting in fatigue, reduced motivation, and

disobedience in the classroom. The digital environment can weaken the authority of both parents and teachers if children are left unsupervised or without clear rules.

Research by Alrabaa et al. (2022) found a negative correlation between unregulated digital exposure and student academic performance and discipline. Children who excessively consume entertainment content are more prone to impulsive behavior, poor time management, and limited attention in academic tasks. This underscores the need to blend digital literacy with character education to help students navigate the digital world responsibly.

While several OECD countries like South Korea and Japan have integrated digital discipline through classroom device policies and structured screen-time education, Indonesian schools are only beginning to address this issue systematically. This paper contributes by proposing school-based programs that embed discipline and digital ethics simultaneously through engaging, humanistic methods.

Table 2. Strategies for Cultivating Discipline in Digital Contexts

Strategy	Description
Digital Literacy Curriculum	Teaching children to manage screen time
Classroom Tech Agreements	Co-created rules for device usage
Positive Reinforcement System	Rewarding focused, tech-responsible behavior
Teacher Training Programs	Enhancing digital competence among educators

c. School–Parent Collaboration in Cultivating Discipline

Discipline education cannot be the sole responsibility of schools. Parents play a critical role as the primary educators, especially in the early years of a child’s life. Households that apply consistent, loving, and firm discipline tend to raise children who are orderly, emotionally stable, and socially responsible (Mulyani & Kurniawan, 2021). This balance between affection and firmness is key to building habits children carry into school.

Regular communication is necessary to ensure effective alignment between school and home. Behavior report cards, daily journals, and parent-teacher meetings can serve as instruments to inform parents of their child’s progress and guide them in reinforcing similar values at home. Syamsuddin et al. (2023) found that collaborative strategies involving feedback loops between school and parents increase the consistency of discipline implementation and reduce behavioral problems.

Involving parents in school programs is also a valuable strategy. Parents can help develop school rules, contribute to designing reward systems for positive behavior, and participate in ceremonial or extracurricular activities. Their presence reinforces the seriousness of school expectations and sends a unified message to students about the importance of discipline in every setting.

Compared to practices in countries like Australia, where parent engagement is institutionalized via school councils, Indonesian schools often rely on ad-hoc involvement. This paper recommends formalizing school–parent collaboration models to address this gap and enhance consistency and accountability in disciplined education.

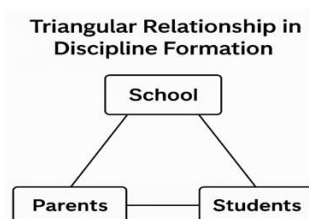


Figure 2. Triangular Relationship in Discipline Formation

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review and discussion, it is concluded that discipline plays an essential role in shaping the character of elementary school students. It is a behavioral norm and a moral foundation that fosters responsibility, independence, and consistency in fulfilling academic and everyday obligations. Discipline integration into character education has been widely recognized to contribute to students' academic achievements, emotional maturity, and long-term positive habits beyond the classroom.

Although many educational institutions acknowledge the importance of discipline, current practices are often fragmented or overly reliant on punitive rather than holistic developmental approaches. The discussion highlights the importance of systematic and consistent efforts to cultivate discipline, which include intentional instructional design, exemplary teacher conduct, and the creation of a school climate that supports order and student accountability. Furthermore, family involvement remains crucial, underscoring the need for synergy between school and home in embedding disciplined behavior.

Given the evolving educational landscape and increasing behavioral challenges in the digital era, the study emphasizes the need for curriculum reform at the elementary level. Habituation programs should be designed to thematically incorporate discipline into daily activities, classroom interactions, and extracurricular settings. Discipline must be contextualized within local values while responsive to global demands for character-based education. School culture, with its rituals, routines, and reward systems, should be deliberately structured to reinforce values like punctuality, respect for rules, and social responsibility.

This study implies the need for a comprehensive policy framework integrating discipline-based character education across formal and informal learning settings. It calls for more substantial alignment between educational policies, school practices, and community values to create a unified approach to character development. Future researchers are encouraged to validate these findings through empirical studies, explore policy implications, and conduct cross-national comparisons to enrich the understanding of effective disciplinary practices in diverse educational contexts.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

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