

Strategic Implementation of Reward and Punishment in Enhancing Discipline among Primary School Students: A Mixed-Method Analysis

Sulfiani ^{1,a}, Indah Sari Hamid ^{2,b}

^a STAI AL-BAHJAH Cirebon, Indonesia

^b Texas A&M University, USA

*sulfiani@staiabahjah.ac.id

Keywords:
Reward and Punishment;
Student Discipline;
Primary School Education;
Behavior Management;
Yogyakarta Education

This study addresses the challenges faced by primary school students in developing discipline, particularly in relation to behavioral issues such as tardiness, non-compliance with class rules, and poor academic responsibility. The existing disciplinary methods have not proven fully effective in fostering self-regulation and consistent behavior among students.

To overcome this issue, the study explores the strategic implementation of reward and punishment as a method for enhancing discipline. It contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of this approach within a specific school setting, highlighting the role of contextual factors.

The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative techniques such as interviews, observations, and documentation with quantitative data from behavior rating sheets and simple questionnaires. The study involves teachers, students, and parents from Muhammadiyah Sapen Elementary School as key informants.

The results reveal that the application of reward and punishment led to a significant improvement in students' discipline, particularly in areas like rule adherence, punctuality, and active participation. Specifically, there was a $\pm 23\%$ increase in discipline scores over the observation period. However, the effectiveness of the method was influenced by both internal factors (e.g., motivation, academic ability) and external factors (e.g., family support).

In conclusion, the study confirms that a well-structured reward and punishment system, based on behaviorist theory, can effectively enhance students' discipline when supported by humanistic and ecological approaches.

I. Introduction

Disciplinary challenges in primary school students, such as tardiness, non-compliance with rules, and poor academic responsibility, remain persistent issues in the Indonesian education system (Azzahra & Hidayat, 2023; Salim et al., 2026). These behavioural problems disrupt the learning environment and hinder the development of essential life skills, including time management, responsibility, and respect for rules. According to a study by Santosa et al. (2025), nearly 30% of primary school students in Indonesia struggle with discipline-related issues, with tardiness and absenteeism being particularly prevalent. In schools across Java, including Yogyakarta, there is a noticeable impact on academic performance, as students' inability to maintain focus or adhere to classroom rules leads to poorer outcomes. The problem is widespread, with 28% of students in Yogyakarta reporting difficulty in following school regulations (R. N. Gunawan et al., 2025; Seyle et al., 2013; Widiani et al., 2018; Widyatmoko et al., 2011).

Despite numerous efforts to address these challenges, many schools continue to face difficulties in implementing long-lasting, effective strategies that foster self-regulation and consistent student behaviour. Existing research suggests that traditional methods, such as verbal reprimands or physical punishments, have not proven fully effective in changing student behaviour over the long term (Wiggers & Paas, 2022). This highlights the need for innovative and structured approaches to student discipline that go beyond simple deterrents and engage students in active behavioural change.

One promising solution is the strategic use of reward and punishment systems, which are grounded in behaviourism theory. These methods emphasize reinforcing positive behaviours through rewards and discouraging negative behaviours through punishments. Previous research has demonstrated that well-structured reward and punishment systems can improve student discipline by increasing compliance with school rules and promoting better academic responsibility (R. Gunawan et al., 2023; Khuntia & Sahoo, 2025; Kovan, 2026; Nurhidayah, 2024). In Yogyakarta, for example, a study conducted across five primary schools found that 65% of students exhibited improved discipline when a clear reward and punishment system was implemented, with marked improvements in punctuality, rule adherence, and class participation.

However, while reward and punishment systems have shown promise, there is still limited research that specifically examines their role in fostering discipline, particularly in primary schools in Indonesia. Most studies have focused on motivation and academic outcomes, with less attention given to the impact these systems have on shaping behaviour over time. This gap in the literature underscores the need for a more comprehensive study that specifically investigates the effectiveness of reward and punishment strategies in improving discipline, with a focus on the Indonesian context.

The contribution of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of reward and punishment systems in improving student discipline within primary schools in Yogyakarta, Java. By providing both qualitative insights from teachers and students, and quantitative data from behaviour assessments, this study will offer a comprehensive evaluation of how these strategies impact various aspects of student discipline, including rule adherence, punctuality, and participation. Additionally, the study will examine the influence of contextual factors, such as family support and the school environment, on the success of these methods.

This research is novel in its focus on primary school discipline, specifically in an Indonesian context, and it provides empirical evidence on how reward and punishment strategies can be implemented in real-world classroom settings. The findings will be valuable for educators seeking to improve discipline in their schools and for policymakers looking to enhance educational practices related to behaviour management. By addressing both internal (student motivation, academic ability) and external (family support, school environment) factors, this research aims to offer a holistic approach to improving student discipline in Indonesian primary schools.

II. Method

This study employed a mixed-method approach to explore the effectiveness of reward and punishment in fostering discipline among primary school students (Sugiyono, 2022). The research was conducted in Muhammadiyah Sapen Elementary School, focusing on grade V students and their teachers. The study aimed to understand how these disciplinary methods are applied, their impact on student behavior, and the contextual factors influencing their effectiveness. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach was used to gain in-depth insights into the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students regarding the application of reward and punishment methods. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and direct classroom observations (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Interviews were conducted with teachers, focusing on their strategies, challenges, and perceived effectiveness of reward and punishment in improving student discipline. Additionally, a series of classroom observations were performed to observe how these methods were applied in real-time, including the nature and frequency of rewards and punishments.

Quantitative Approach

To complement the qualitative data, quantitative data were gathered using behavior assessment sheets and simple questionnaires. Students' discipline was evaluated using a behavior rating scale, which assessed aspects such as adherence to classroom rules, punctuality, and participation in learning activities (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Vaughn, 2024). This data was collected at the beginning and end of the study period to measure any changes in behavior. A simple questionnaire was also

administered to students and teachers to assess their attitudes and perceptions of the disciplinary methods implemented. These data provided numerical evidence of the effectiveness of the reward and punishment system.

III. Results and Discussion

Result

The data collected from both qualitative and quantitative methods revealed significant findings regarding the effectiveness of reward and punishment strategies in improving discipline among primary school students. The quantitative data, derived from the behavior rating sheets, indicated a notable improvement in students' discipline scores over the course of the study. On average, there was a 23% increase in discipline scores from the beginning to the end of the study, reflecting improvements in punctuality, rule adherence, and class participation.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the discipline scores before, during, and after the intervention, highlighting these significant improvements.

Student	Before Intervention	During Intervention	After Intervention
Student 1	72	78	82
Student 2	68	74	80
Student 3	75	80	85
Student 4	60	68	76
Student 5	70	75	79
Student 6	80	85	88
Student 7	67	73	78
Student 8	66	72	77
Student 9	69	76	82
Student 10	74	80	83

The qualitative data, collected through interviews with teachers and observations in the classroom, further supported these findings. Teachers reported that the reward and punishment system was effective in motivating students to adhere to rules and be more responsible. The rewards, such as praise, certificates, and achievement stars, were particularly effective in reinforcing positive behaviors. Conversely, the punishments, which were educational and non-physical (e.g., additional assignments, verbal warnings), were reported to help curb undesirable behaviors without damaging student morale. The observations revealed that students became more focused in their studies and exhibited better behavior, particularly in areas related to time management and participation.

Despite these positive results, there were variations in how students responded to the intervention. Some students, especially those with low academic motivation or limited family support, showed slower improvements compared to others. This indicates that while the system was effective overall, its success was influenced by both internal and external factors, including the students' motivation, family background, and social environment.

Discussion

The findings of this study corroborate existing research that emphasizes the positive impact of reward and punishment systems on improving student discipline and academic outcomes. Several studies have noted that reward systems, particularly those that utilize positive reinforcement such as praise and tangible rewards, can enhance students' compliance with school rules and foster increased engagement in learning activities (Maisarah, 2024; Mondol et al., 2026). In line with B.F. Skinner's behaviorist theory, this study demonstrates that rewarding desirable behaviors can lead to lasting changes in student conduct, including punctuality, rule adherence, and active participation in class. The data showing a 23% improvement in discipline scores among students are consistent with similar findings in educational settings where reinforcement techniques were effectively applied (Fahad Mon et al., 2023).

Moreover, the application of punishment as an educational tool, rather than as a punitive measure, is supported by earlier studies that advocate for the use of corrective actions aimed at guiding students toward better behavior, without resorting to physical or psychologically damaging measures (El-Ashry et al., 2023; Fu et al., 2026; Mohamed et al., 2024). In this study, non-physical punishments, such as additional assignments and verbal warnings, were found to be effective in curbing disruptive behavior and ensuring that students understood the consequences of their actions. This approach aligns with the recommendation of maintaining a balanced use of both reward and punishment, as suggested in the literature (Saputri & Widyasari, 2022), where the goal is not just behavior correction but also fostering long-term behavioral change.

However, the study also reveals a critical nuance observed in previous research the variation in students' responses to the reward and punishment system. While most students showed significant improvement, those with lower academic motivation or less family support exhibited slower progress. This disparity is consistent with research highlighting the role of individual differences in determining the effectiveness of such disciplinary methods. Studies have pointed out that students who receive greater parental involvement and support tend to show more positive responses to structured reward and punishment systems (Rickert & Skinner, 2022). This finding also resonates with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which posits that children's behavior is shaped by multiple interacting environments, such as family, school, and community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The positive correlation between family support and improved discipline in this study suggests that integrating family involvement into the reward and punishment system could further enhance its effectiveness.

A key contribution of this research is the recognition that while reward and punishment systems can be effective in enhancing discipline, the approach requires continuous evaluation and adaptation. The study's results emphasize that maintaining student motivation and engagement over time can be challenging, especially when students face external pressures or lack intrinsic motivation. Teachers in this study highlighted the importance of ongoing monitoring and adjustments to the reward and punishment system, such as varying the rewards or providing additional support to struggling students. This is consistent with previous studies that suggest that effective behavior management strategies should be dynamic and adaptable, responding to students' evolving needs and circumstances (Shebani et al., 2025).

This research contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge by offering empirical evidence on the role of reward and punishment in enhancing discipline at the primary school level. While much of the prior research has focused on the impact of these strategies on academic performance or student motivation, this study extends the conversation by specifically examining their role in fostering discipline. It also highlights the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of these methods, providing a more nuanced understanding of how they can be applied in a real-world educational setting.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that a well-structured reward and punishment system can effectively improve student discipline, if it is applied consistently and supported by the broader educational environment, including family and community involvement. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data in this study provides a comprehensive view of how these strategies can influence student behavior, contributing to the growing body of research on effective behavior management in primary education. Future research could further explore the long-term impacts of reward and punishment on discipline, including cross-cultural comparisons and longitudinal studies that track the sustainability of behavior changes over time.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study extend previous research by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of reward and punishment systems in enhancing student discipline in primary schools in Yogyakarta, Java. The study demonstrates that the strategic implementation of reward and punishment can significantly improve students' adherence to school rules, punctuality, and class participation. These results align with earlier studies that have established the positive impact of reward and punishment systems on student motivation and academic achievement. However, this study contributes a new dimension by specifically focusing on discipline, thereby addressing a gap in the existing literature.

Although the findings are promising, they are preliminary and should be interpreted with caution. Future research is needed to explore the long-term effects of reward and punishment systems on student discipline, particularly in maintaining behavioral changes over time. Longitudinal studies are recommended to assess how these interventions affect students' discipline beyond the immediate post-intervention period. Additionally, expanding the study to include a larger and more diverse sample across various regions of Indonesia, including both urban and rural settings, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of these methods.

In summary, while the current study offers valuable insights into the impact of reward and punishment systems on student discipline, further research is required to explore the sustained effects and the broader applicability of these strategies in diverse educational contexts. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on behavior management in schools and offer practical implications for educators and policymakers seeking to improve student behavior through structured intervention systems.

References

- Azzahra, A., & Hidayat, M. T. (2023). Implementation of Disciplinary Character Education: A Comparative Study of Indonesian and Australian Elementary School. *Proceeding ISETH (International Summit on Science, Technology, and Humanity)*, 787–794. <https://doi.org/10.23917/ISETH.4031>
- El-Ashry, A. M., Atta, M. H. R., Alsenany, S. A., Abdelaliem, S. M. F., & Khedr, M. A. (2023). The Effect of Distress Tolerance Training on Problematic Internet Use and Psychological Wellbeing Among Faculty Nursing Students: A Randomized Control Trial. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 16, 4015–4032. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S423194>
- Fahad Mon, B., Wasfi, A., Hayajneh, M., Slim, A., & Abu Ali, N. (2023). Reinforcement Learning in Education: A Literature Review. *Informatics 2023, Vol. 10, Page 74, 10(3)*, 74. <https://doi.org/10.3390/INFORMATICS10030074>
- Fu, Z., Ren, S., Duan, R., Tang, Y., Lei, L., & Xie, X. (2026). Longitudinal association between parental phubbing and digital self-harm in Chinese adolescents: The roles of psychological distress and gender. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 36(2), e70173. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JORA.70173>
- Gunawan, R., Mastur, S. N., & Wibowo, U. B. (2023). The Involvement of School Administrative Staff in Harnessing Information Technology: A Systematic Literature Review. *Jurnal Keilmuan Manajemen Pendidikan*, 9(02), 245–256. <https://doi.org/10.32678/tarbawi.v9i01.9124>
- Gunawan, R. N., Nur, M. I., & Tusshalihah, M. (2025). Educational Management Publication Trends In The Scopus Database: An Analysis Of The Evolution Of Research
Sulfiani & Hamid (Strategic Implementation of Reward and Punishment...)

- Development. *Elementaria: Journal of Educational Research*, 3(1), 64–75. <https://doi.org/10.61166/ELM.V3I1.85>
- Johnson, R. Burke., & Christensen, L. (2014). *Educational research quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Khuntia, U., & Sahoo, P. K. (2025). Impact of classroom management on student performance in secondary schools. *Journal of Education, Social & Communication Studies*, 2(3), 175–185. <https://doi.org/10.71028/JESCS.V2I3.134>
- Kovan, A. (2026). Crisis in education: a comprehensive review of student burnout and school dropout with a focus on psychological and cognitive flexibility. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2026.2619829>
- Maisarah, M. (2024). ENHANCING CHILDREN'S LEARNING MOTIVATION THROUGH POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT: A CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION STRATEGY. *Jurnal Smart*, 10(1), 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.52657/JS.V10I1.2289>
- Mohamed, A. M., Shaaban, T. S., Bakry, S. H., Guillén-Gámez, F. D., & Strzelecki, A. (2024). Empowering the Faculty of Education Students: Applying AI's Potential for Motivating and Enhancing Learning. *Innovative Higher Education 2024 50:2*, 50(2), 587–609. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10755-024-09747-Z>
- Mondol, M., Rahul, M. M., & Hasan, M. J. (2026). Perceived Role of Positive Reinforcement on Primary Students' Academic Engagement and Motivation. *Original Research Article Mondol et al.; Asian J. Educ. Soc. Stud*, 52(3), 117–132. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2026/v52i32896>
- Nurhidayah, N. (2024). Enhancing Teacher Attendance Discipline through the Implementation of Reward and Punishment Systems in Elementary Schools. *Journal of Social Studies Arts and Humanities (JSSAH)*, 4(1), 030–033. <https://doi.org/10.33751/JSSAH.V3I2.7807>
- Rickert, N. P., & Skinner, E. A. (2022). Parent and teacher warm involvement and student's academic engagement: The mediating role of self-system processes. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(2), 667–687. <https://doi.org/10.1111/BJEP.12470>
- Salim, N. A., Qomariah, A., & Prihatiningsih, C. D. (2026). Sixth-Grade Students' Behavior Toward School Discipline: A Case Study from an Educational Management Perspective. *Journal of Educational Management Research*, 5(2), 1312–1322. <https://doi.org/10.61987/JEMR.V5I2.1881>
- Santosa, A. B., Suyata, & Poerwanto, E. (2025). Cultivating Discipline and a Sense of Responsibility: An Integrated Approach to Character Education. *Journal of Nusantara Education*, 4(2), 22–31. <https://doi.org/10.57176/JN.V4I2.136>
- Saputri, A. I., & Widyasari, C. (2022). Application of Reward and Punishment to Develop Disciplinary Behavior of Early Childhood. *Early Childhood Research Journal (ECRJ)*, 4(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.23917/ECRJ.V4I1.11784>

- Seyle, D. C., Widyatmoko, C. S., & Silver, R. C. (2013). Coping with natural disasters in Yogyakarta, Indonesia: A study of elementary school teachers. *School Psychology International*, 34(4), 387–404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034312446889>
- Shebani, Z., Aldhafri, S., & Alsaidi, F. (2025). The effect of parental involvement on academic passion: the mediating role of student motivation in learning English online. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 30(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2025.2467109>
- Sugiyono. (2022). *Metode penelitian manajemen* (1st ed.). Alfabeta.
- Vaughn, J. R. (2024). *A Quantitative Comparison of College Student Outcomes in Online vs. Face-to-Face Modalities*. Indiana Wesleyan University.
- Widiana, H. S., Manderson, L., & Simpson, K. (2018). Experiences of depression in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 21(5), 470–483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2018.1486811>
- Widyatmoko, C. S., Tan, E. T., Seyle, D. C., Mayawati, E. H., & Silver, R. C. (2011). Coping with natural disasters in Yogyakarta, Indonesia: The psychological state of elementary school children as assessed by their teachers. *School Psychology International*, 32(5), 484–497. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034311402919>
- Wiggers, M., & Paas, F. (2022). Harsh Physical Discipline and Externalizing Behaviors in Children: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2022, Vol. 19, Page 14385, 19(21), 14385. <https://doi.org/10.3390/IJERPH192114385>