

## Managing the Learning Process to Cultivate Disciplinary Behavior in Early Childhood Education

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**Abstract.** Cultivating disciplined behavior is a cornerstone of early childhood education, yet educators often lack the managerial competence to implement integrated learning that effectively fosters this trait. This study was prompted by the need for a systematic learning management approach to address inconsistencies in fostering student discipline. The purpose of this research is to analyze how learning management, guided by Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, can enhance the disciplinary behavior and socio-emotional development of young children. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive, multiple-case study design conducted at two inclusive early childhood centers in East Jakarta: PAUD Pelita Hati and TK Sa'adatuddarain. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and parents, direct observation of classroom activities, and analysis of documentation such as daily lesson plans. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The findings demonstrate that a systematic management cycle effectively cultivated discipline. Planning involved creating structured daily plans (RPPH) that embedded character-based objectives. Implementation utilized varied, engaging methods, with a consistent focus on modeling, positive reinforcement, and habituation of rules. Evaluation was conducted through continuous formative and summative assessments. The follow-up phase used these evaluation data to refine strategies and provide differentiated support, creating a continuous improvement loop. This study concludes that the systematic management of the learning process, grounded in the PDCA cycle, is a highly effective framework for enhancing disciplinary behavior in young children. The consistent application of planning, implementation, evaluation, and adjustment fosters an environment where children internalize rules, manage emotions, and develop a strong sense of responsibility. This research provides a replicable model for early childhood educators to transform discipline from a reactive measure into a proactively managed component of holistic child development.

**Keywords:** learning management, discipline, early childhood education.

### 1 Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) represents the most strategic and formative stage in human development, laying the foundation for lifelong learning, character, and personality [1]. Within this critical period, the cultivation of discipline emerges as a cornerstone for healthy socio-emotional growth. Discipline, in the context of early

childhood, is not merely about compliance or obedience to rules; it is a complex developmental process through which children learn self-regulation, responsibility, and respect for others [2]. It involves the internalization of social norms and the development of an inner locus of control, which are essential for positive peer interactions and future academic success [3]. As Hurlock posits, discipline is fundamentally a process of habituation and character formation, not a punitive measure [4], [5]. However, a significant gap often exists between this developmental understanding of discipline and its practical implementation in many educational settings.

The reality on the ground frequently reveals a misunderstanding of discipline, where it is conflated with punishment and control. Educators and parents may resort to reactive, often repressive, approaches rather than proactive, positive habituation [6]. This can stifle a child's intrinsic motivation and fail to cultivate the underlying socio-emotional skills that true discipline requires. The urgency of this issue is underscored by broader societal trends in Indonesia, where a perceived decline in public discipline highlights the critical need to instill these values from the earliest age [7]. If the foundational habits of discipline are not properly formed in early childhood, the challenge of shaping responsible and self-regulated individuals becomes exponentially more difficult in later years.

This research was prompted by initial observations at two inclusive early childhood centers in Jakarta, PAUD Pelita Hati Kramatjati and TK Sa'adatuddarain. These observations revealed a common challenge: a disconnect between the intended curriculum and the actual development of disciplinary behavior. Many children struggled with following basic rules, such as storing belongings properly, waiting their turn, or engaging in respectful communication. This indicated that the existing learning processes were not fully effective in supporting socio-emotional development, a situation exacerbated by the inclusive setting, which required differentiated strategies for children with diverse needs. The presence of children with special needs alongside their peers demands a highly effective and adaptable learning management system to ensure that discipline is fostered through positive, inclusive methods such as modeling, habituation, and positive reinforcement [8]. This aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes that children learn behavior by observing and imitating adults [9].

While numerous studies have confirmed that systematic learning management is crucial for shaping child behavior and that early discipline positively impacts emotional control and social skills [10], [11], there is a scarcity of research that specifically examines the management process of cultivating discipline within an inclusive ECE context in Indonesia. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on how the entire learning process is managed to enhance the discipline of children aged 5-6. The central theoretical framework guiding this research is W. Edwards Deming's management philosophy, specifically the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle [12]. The PDCA cycle, also known as the Deming wheel, is a model for continuous improvement. It provides a systematic, iterative approach to problem-solving and process management that is highly applicable to the dynamic environment of a classroom. This study conceptualizes the cultivation of discipline not as a static topic to be taught, but as a continuous process to be managed.

In this framework, the teacher is not just an instructor but a classroom manager, responsible for orchestrating interactions, resources, and strategies to create a conducive and engaging learning environment [7]. Their role is to translate the abstract value of discipline into concrete, daily practices. Discipline for young children, who are in what Piaget termed the preoperational stage, involves understanding and adhering to simple, concrete rules [13]. According to Kohlberg's theory of moral development, children at this age operate at a preconventional level, where compliance is motivated by consequences—either rewards or the avoidance of punishment. An effective management system, therefore, must be designed to align with these developmental realities, using positive reinforcement and clear, consistent routines to guide behavior.

This research analyzes the application of this management approach at PAUD Pelita Hati and TK Sa'adatuddarain. It seeks to answer the following question: How is the learning process managed, following the PDCA cycle, to enhance the disciplinary behavior of children aged 5-6 in an inclusive ECE setting? By providing a detailed, narrative account of the planning, implementation, evaluation, and adjustment of strategies, this study aims to offer a practical, theoretically grounded model for ECE practitioners. The findings are expected to provide new insights into managing discipline proactively, contributing to the development of healthier, more optimal socio-emotional foundations for all children.

## 2 Method

This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive, multiple-case study design. This methodology was chosen for its strength in providing a deep, rich, and holistic exploration of a complex phenomenon—learning management—within its authentic, real-world context [14]. The study was conducted at two inclusive early childhood centers in East Jakarta, PAUD Pelita Hati Kramatjati and TK Sa'adatuddarain. The subjects included teachers, parents, and children aged 5-6.

Data were collected over a six-month period using a triangulated methodology to ensure the comprehensiveness and credibility of the findings. The primary data collection techniques were: (1) direct observation of classroom activities, daily routines, and teacher-child interactions to capture authentic disciplinary behaviors and management strategies in action; (2) in-depth interviews with teachers to understand their planning processes, pedagogical rationales, and challenges, and with parents to gather insights into the transfer of disciplinary behavior to the home environment; and (3) a review of institutional documents, including daily learning implementation plans (RPPH), curriculum records, and samples of children's work.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman [15], which involves three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The credibility of the data was established through source triangulation (comparing data from teachers, parents, and observations), technique triangulation (comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents), and member checking with key informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations.

### 3 Result

#### 3.1 Designing a Structured and Character-Infused Learning Environment

The foundational stage of the management cycle at both institutions was a meticulous and purposeful planning process. This was not merely about scheduling academic content but about architecting a daily experience where discipline was an integrated and expected component. The primary tool for this was the Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH), which served as the blueprint for all activities. The planning process began with the collaborative establishment of clear daily schedules and classroom rules. The schedules were designed to be predictable and rhythmic, providing children with a sense of security and order. They carefully balanced structured learning, creative play, rest, and routine activities like mealtimes and cleanup, ensuring each segment had an appropriate duration for the developmental needs of 5-6-year-olds. This structured routine itself was a passive form of discipline management, as it minimized unstructured time that could lead to chaotic behavior.

Crucially, the classroom rules were not imposed autocratically. Instead, they were co-created with the children at the beginning of the school year using simple, positive language and visual aids. Rules like "Use walking feet inside," "Listen when a friend is talking," and "Put toys back in their home" were established as shared agreements. This participatory approach was a key strategy to foster intrinsic motivation and a sense of ownership over the classroom community. As one teacher at PAUD Pelita Hati explained, "If the children help make the rules, they are more likely to remember and follow them. It becomes 'our' rule, not just 'the teacher's' rule."

The core of the planning phase was the integration of discipline-related objectives directly into the RPPH. The plans went beyond cognitive goals to explicitly include objectives for motor development, language skills, and character-based social-emotional learning. For example, a single activity like a group art project would have multiple planned objectives: a cognitive goal (learning about colors), a motor goal (practicing cutting with scissors), and a discipline-focused socio-emotional goal (learning to share materials and wait for one's turn). This integration ensured that discipline was not taught as a separate, abstract subject but was woven into the fabric of every learning experience. The planning also involved careful consideration of methods and materials. Teachers deliberately planned activities that required cooperation, patience, and following multi-step directions. This approach is consistent with management theories that emphasize the importance of thorough needs analysis and strategic resource allocation in the planning phase to ensure that objectives are achievable [16]. Furthermore, in line with the inclusive nature of the schools, the planning included differentiation, with teachers considering how to adapt activities and provide extra support for children with special needs to ensure they too could succeed in meeting the disciplinary expectations. This comprehensive, integrated, and child-centered planning created a solid foundation for a learning environment where discipline was not just demanded but actively and consistently taught.

### 3.2 Actuating Discipline Through Modeling, Habituation, and Reinforcement

The implementation, or "Do," phase was where the meticulously crafted plans were brought to life through consistent, daily practice. At both PAUD Pelita Hati and TK Sa'adatuddarain, the execution of the learning plan was characterized by a multi-pronged strategy focused on three core behavioral techniques: teacher modeling, systematic habituation, and positive reinforcement.

Teacher modeling was the most pervasive and powerful strategy. Educators at both centers operated on the principle that discipline is "caught, not taught." They consciously acted as living examples of the behaviors they wished to cultivate. This was evident in every interaction. Teachers consistently used polite language, demonstrated patience, followed classroom rules themselves, and managed their own emotions calmly. For instance, during observations, teachers were seen waiting their turn to speak in a group discussion with children, explicitly modeling the behavior they expected. As one teacher stated, "Children are mirrors. I cannot expect them to be tidy if my own desk is a mess. I must be the first to follow the rules." This aligns perfectly with Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that observational learning is a primary mechanism through which children acquire new behaviors [9]. The consistency of this modeling provided a constant, implicit curriculum on disciplined conduct.

Systematic habituation was the second pillar of implementation. The schools transformed daily routines into powerful learning opportunities for discipline. The act of lining up, for instance, was managed not as a chaotic scramble but as a practiced skill. Teachers used songs, visual cues, and consistent verbal prompts to guide children to form an orderly line before going outside or washing hands. Similarly, tidying up after an activity was not an afterthought but a structured part of the lesson. A "cleanup song" would signal the transition, and teachers would guide children in sorting toys and materials back into their designated places. This consistent repetition of routines helped to automate pro-social behaviors, gradually shifting the locus of control from the teacher to the child [4]. This process of habituating desired actions is fundamental to building character and discipline from an early age [17].

The third key strategy was the deliberate use of positive reinforcement. Grounded in behavioral theory, this involved providing immediate and specific positive feedback when children exhibited disciplined behavior [18]. This was primarily delivered through social reinforcement, such as verbal praise. Instead of a generic "Good job," teachers would offer specific praise like, "I really liked how you waited so patiently for your turn on the slide, Ali." This specificity helped children understand exactly which behavior was being acknowledged. At PAUD Pelita Hati, they also used a simple token economy system where children could earn a star sticker for specific acts of discipline, such as helping a friend or cleaning up without being asked. These stickers were not extravagant rewards but served as tangible symbols of recognition that motivated the children. This consistent use of positive reinforcement created a classroom climate where children were motivated to behave well not out of fear of punishment, but for the positive social recognition and sense of accomplishment it brought. Through the combined and consistent implementation of these three strategies, the abstract plans for discipline were translated into a vibrant, lived reality in the classroom.

### 3.3 Monitoring and Reflecting on Disciplinary Growth

The "Check" phase of the management cycle was a continuous process of evaluation, designed to monitor the development of children's disciplinary behavior and assess the effectiveness of the learning management strategies. This evaluation was not a one-time event but an ongoing, reflective practice involving both formal and informal methods. The process at both PAUD Pelita Hati and TK Sa'adatuddarain was primarily qualitative and observational, focusing on authentic assessment of behavior in natural settings.

The core of the evaluation was systematic daily observation. Teachers were trained observers, constantly monitoring children's behavior throughout the day. They used simple but effective documentation tools, such as anecdotal records and developmental checklists, to capture significant instances of disciplinary behavior. For example, a teacher might note, "Today, Aisha shared the red crayon with Budi without being prompted, a significant improvement from last week." These records were not used for grading but served as a running log of each child's socio-emotional progress. This approach aligns with assessment principles in ECE, which emphasize authentic, observation-based methods to understand the whole child.

In addition to daily observations, a more formal reflection on discipline was built into the weekly routine. At the end of each week, teachers would review their anecdotal records and reflect on the progress of both individual children and the class as a whole. They would ask key questions: "Which classroom rules are the children following consistently? Which ones are still challenging? Are there specific times of day when disciplinary issues are more likely to occur? Is our positive reinforcement system still motivating?" This reflective practice was crucial for identifying patterns and making data-informed adjustments to their teaching strategies.

A vital component of the evaluation process was communication with parents. Both schools maintained regular contact with parents through communication books and informal chats at drop-off and pick-up times. Teachers would share positive observations about a child's disciplinary progress and also collaboratively problem-solve with parents if a child was facing particular challenges. This created a consistent home-school partnership, ensuring that the messages and expectations regarding discipline were aligned in both environments. This collaborative evaluation is critical, as a child's development is influenced by a general system of interconnected environments [19]. The insights gained from parents provided a more holistic picture of the child's development, helping teachers to understand behaviors that might be influenced by factors outside of school. The evaluation data, gathered through these multiple channels, did not just serve to judge success; it was the critical information loop that fueled the final stage of the management cycle: action and adjustment.

### 3.4 Follow-up and Adjustment (Act): Driving Continuous Improvement

The "Act" phase was the dynamic heart of the PDCA cycle, where the insights gained from the evaluation were translated into concrete actions for continuous improvement. This stage ensured that the learning management system was not static but

was a responsive and evolving process. The follow-up at both PAUD Pelita Hati and TK Sa'adatuddarain was managed through a clear, multi-step process that involved refining plans, innovating programs, and providing differentiated support.

The first step was the revision of the Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH). Based on the weekly reflections, teachers would make immediate adjustments to their plans for the upcoming week. For example, if the evaluation showed that many children were struggling with the rule of "listening when a friend is talking," the teacher would intentionally plan more structured circle time activities for the next week that explicitly taught and practiced active listening skills. For children who had mastered certain disciplinary skills, teachers would adjust the plan to provide them with new challenges, such as giving them a leadership role as a "line leader" or a "cleanup captain." This constant revision of the RPPH ensured that the learning plan was always tailored to the current needs and developmental levels of the children.

Second, the evaluation results informed the development of innovative new programs or strategies. When a persistent, class-wide challenge was identified, the teaching team would brainstorm and implement new solutions. For instance, at TK Sa'adatuddarain, teachers noticed that the transition from free play to circle time was consistently chaotic. Based on this evaluation, they developed and implemented a new "transition routine" involving a specific song and visual cues. They evaluated its effectiveness over the next few weeks and found a significant improvement in the smoothness of the transition. This exemplifies the "Act" phase in action: a problem is identified ("Check"), and a new strategy is implemented and tested ("Act"), leading to an improved process.

Third, the follow-up process involved providing differentiated support and guidance. The evaluation data allowed teachers to identify children who were consistently struggling with discipline. The follow-up for these children was more intensive and individualized. The teacher might hold a one-on-one conversation with the child, create a simple individual behavior chart, or work closely with the parents to develop a consistent strategy. For children with special needs, the "Act" phase involved collaborating with specialists or adjusting environmental supports to help them succeed. This targeted follow-up ensured that every child received the support they needed to develop their disciplinary skills.

Finally, the continuous monitoring by the school principal ensured that these follow-up actions were implemented consistently and effectively. The principal would review the teachers' revised plans, observe the new strategies in action, and provide feedback and support. This leadership oversight was crucial for maintaining the integrity and momentum of the continuous improvement cycle. By systematically acting on the evaluation data, the schools ensured that their approach to discipline was not a rigid set of rules but a dynamic, reflective, and ever-improving management system designed to optimally support the socio-emotional growth of every child.

## 4 Discussion

The findings from this study offer a compelling, practice-based model for character education, yielding significant implications for both educational theory and school management. The successful integration of a child-friendly school ethos with systematic behavioral counseling techniques at SDN Tegalsari and SDN Salammulya provides a powerful counter-narrative to the often-bifurcated approaches to moral development. This study's primary contribution is its detailed illustration of how these two paradigms can be synergized through deliberate management, creating a holistic system that addresses both the environment and the individual.

First, the research highlights the critical importance of a dual-layered implementation strategy. The findings reveal that character is cultivated most effectively through a combination of school-wide cultural immersion and targeted behavioral intervention. The management of the school environment based on CFE principles—emphasizing safety, respect, and participation—acted as the foundational layer. This aligns with socio-cultural learning theories, which argue that learning is deeply embedded in the social and cultural context [20]. The CFE approach created the nurturing "soil" in which character could grow. However, the study powerfully demonstrates that this necessary condition is often not sufficient. The addition of the second layer—explicit behavioral interventions like reinforcement systems and individualized counseling—provided the specific "scaffolding" needed to build concrete pro-social behaviors. This supports the core tenets of social learning theory and applied behavior analysis, which emphasize that complex behaviors are learned through direct instruction, modeling, and reinforcement [11], [12]. The synergy is clear: the child-friendly environment made students receptive to behavioral instruction, while the behavioral strategies provided the tools to translate the school's values into observable actions. This managed, dual-layered approach offers a more comprehensive model than approaches that focus solely on either school climate or individual intervention [21].

Second, the study re-conceptualizes the role of behaviorism in character education. Behavioral approaches are sometimes criticized in educational circles as being overly mechanistic or undermining intrinsic motivation [30]. However, the management of behavioral techniques in these case studies demonstrates a more sophisticated and humanistic application. Reinforcement was used not as a bribe for compliance, but as a systematic way of providing positive feedback and making pro-social behavior visible and valued. Consequences were restorative and educational, not punitive. Counseling was solution-focused and skill-building, not deficit-oriented. This "positive behavior support" framework [22] shows that behavioral tools, when wielded within a management philosophy that is fundamentally respectful and developmental (as dictated by CFE principles), can be powerful, ethical, and effective instruments for teaching the habits of good character. This finding suggests a need to move beyond ideological debates and instead focus on how different pedagogical tools can be thoughtfully integrated to serve a common, humanistic goal, leading to an education that is a practice of liberation [23].

Third, this research underscores the indispensable role of systemic educational management. The success of the character programs was not accidental; it was the result of

a coherent and continuous management cycle. The adherence to the POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling) framework, though perhaps not explicitly named by the principals, was evident in their practices. Planning was collaborative and data-driven. Organization provided clear structures and roles. Implementation was multifaceted and consistent. And evaluation was formative, feeding back into the next planning cycle. This demonstrates that a successful character education program is not simply a list of activities but a managed system that is integrated into the school's core operational and budgetary plans (RKAS) [24]. This systemic approach ensures sustainability, coherence, and a shared sense of purpose across the entire school community. It elevates character education from a peripheral "add-on" to a central, non-negotiable mission of the school, driven by kindness-based leadership [25]. The study powerfully argues that without such deliberate and systematic management, even the most well-intentioned character initiatives are likely to remain fragmented and ineffective.

## 5 Conclusion

This study concludes that the systematic management of the learning process, grounded in the principles of Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, is a highly effective framework for enhancing disciplinary behavior and fostering positive socio-emotional development in children aged 5-6. The findings from the case studies at PAUD Pelita Hati and TK Sa'adatuddarain demonstrate that a proactive, integrated, and continuous management approach is superior to reactive or punitive disciplinary measures. By meticulously planning character-based objectives, consistently implementing strategies of modeling and positive reinforcement, continuously evaluating progress through authentic observation, and systematically acting on those evaluations to refine strategies, the schools created a powerful learning system for discipline.

The research confirms that this management model successfully cultivates key disciplinary traits such as self-regulation, responsibility, and respect for rules, which in turn positively impact children's emotional management and peer interactions. The key implication for early childhood education is the need to shift the paradigm from "disciplining children" to "managing for discipline." This requires equipping teachers with not only pedagogical skills but also core management competencies. For school leaders and policymakers, this study underscores the importance of supporting the implementation of such systematic, school-wide approaches to character development. Future research could explore the long-term impact of this management model on children's academic readiness and social success in primary school.

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