

Managing Character Education through Positive Discipline: A Bullying Prevention Strategy in Indonesian Elementary Schools

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Abstract. This study explores the implementation of character education using a positive discipline approach as a strategy to prevent bullying in elementary schools. In response to the national mandate for Character Education Strengthening (PPK), many schools still face challenges in translating policy into practice, particularly in creating safe and respectful learning environments. This research was conducted at SDN 115 Turangga, Bandung, using a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that character education at SDN 115 is managed systematically through collaborative planning, distributed organizational roles, and consistent implementation of positive discipline. Discipline is framed not as punishment, but as a process of value internalization, guided by empathy, reflection, and restorative practices. Supporting factors include strong school leadership, teacher commitment, and parental involvement. The study concludes that positive discipline provides an effective, sustainable model for shaping student behavior and preventing bullying. It recommends wider adoption of this approach through structured teacher training, institutional support, and alignment with character education policy.

Keywords: character education, positive discipline, school management, bullying prevention, elementary education

1 Introduction

In the face of increasingly complex social challenges in the 21st century, primary education in Indonesia is expected to foster not only cognitive development but also the formation of strong character values[1]–[3]. One of the most pressing concerns in elementary schools today is the persistent occurrence of bullying ranging from verbal harassment to psychological abuse which undermines both student well-being and the learning climate. This reality highlights a significant gap between policy and practice in the implementation of character education, particularly the Character Education

Strengthening Policy (*Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* or PPK) mandated by the Ministry of Education through Permendikbud No. 20 of 2018.

Despite the national commitment to shaping students into responsible and ethical citizens, the execution of character education programs often lacks consistency, contextual relevance, and sustainability[4], [5]. Numerous studies have pointed out that punitive disciplinary measures are ineffective in reducing bullying behaviors and may even exacerbate student resistance or trauma.[6], [7] To address this gap, educational institutions must adopt more constructive and empathetic approaches to discipline methods that not only correct behavior but also promote self-awareness, empathy, and accountability.

Positive discipline has emerged as a viable alternative to traditional punitive models. Rooted in social-emotional learning and relational pedagogy, the positive discipline approach focuses on mutual respect, logical consequences, and internal motivation[8], [9]. It treats misbehavior as a learning opportunity rather than a punishable offense. Teachers, in this model, act as facilitators and mentors, guiding students to reflect on their actions and understand the impact of their behavior on others.[10], [11] This approach aligns with the broader objectives of character education, especially in cultivating traits such as empathy, responsibility, self-discipline, and resilience.

In primary school contexts, the implementation of positive discipline must be systematically integrated into the overall management of character education. This includes planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating character-building initiatives with the active participation of all stakeholders school leaders, teachers, parents, and the broader school community. An inclusive school culture that embraces diversity, promotes safety, and fosters open communication is essential to ensure that positive discipline can thrive and bullying can be meaningfully prevented.

Given the persistent gap between character education policy and actual behavioral outcomes in schools, this study seeks to investigate the implementation of the Character Education Strengthening Policy using a positive discipline approach as a strategy to prevent bullying. The research focuses on SDN 115 Turangga, Bandung, as a case study, with the aim of understanding how positive discipline can be operationalized within school management systems and embedded in everyday school life.

This study is grounded in two main theoretical frameworks: George R. Terry's[12]–[15] theory of management and the positive discipline model promoted by the Ministry of Education and Culture. It also refers to the legal framework surrounding character education in Indonesia. The research explores not only how policies are translated into practice but also identifies supporting and inhibiting factors that influence their effectiveness.

Ultimately, this research seeks to offer a practical model of school-based character management that integrates positive discipline as a preventive strategy against bullying. By analyzing real-world practices and challenges, the study aims to contribute to the discourse on character education reform and provide actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and school leaders.

2 Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to explore the phenomenon of bullying prevention and character education implementation in its natural setting, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and strategies used by the school community. The case study design was selected to gain rich, contextual insights into how the positive discipline approach was applied within the management of character education at SDN 115 Turangga, Bandung [16]–[19].

Data collection was conducted using method triangulation, combining three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used to gather narrative accounts from school principals, classroom teachers, and guidance counselors, focusing on their experiences and reflections regarding bullying prevention and positive discipline practices. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to directly observe classroom interactions, school-wide disciplinary routines, and teacher-student dynamics. Document analysis included the review of school policy documents, character education plans, disciplinary records, and reports on student behavior [20], [21].

The research subjects were selected purposively, focusing on individuals directly involved in the implementation of character education and positive discipline. These included the school principal, vice principal for student affairs, class teachers, and guidance personnel. The selection criteria emphasized individuals with active involvement and strategic decision-making roles in character-building initiatives. The research was conducted from February to April 2025.

In this study, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument (*human instrument*), playing an active role in interpreting meaning from the field and interacting directly with informants [22]. Supporting instruments included interview guides, observation checklists, documentation templates, and validity matrices to systematize and clarify the data collection process.

To ensure data trustworthiness, the study adopted four criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was reinforced through prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation of data sources, and member checking. Transferability was ensured by providing thick descriptions of the research context. Dependability and confirmability were supported by systematic documentation and audit trails that recorded all stages of the research process [23], [24].

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three stages: (1) data reduction, where raw data were selected, coded, and organized by theme; (2) data display, which involved presenting findings in the form of matrices, narrative summaries, and diagrams; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, a process carried out iteratively to ensure that findings were consistent, logical, and grounded in the data. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection to allow for adaptive and responsive inquiry during fieldwork.

The implementation of the research spanned the entire academic and operational context of the school, involving both daily routines and structured programs. It was conducted over a three-month period, covering preparation, field data collection, and synthesis of results. The approach was designed to provide meaningful contributions to school-based bullying prevention strategies and enhance the integration of positive discipline in character education management.

3 Results

3.1 Planning of Character Education through a Positive Discipline Approach

The planning of character education at SDN 115 Turangga, Bandung, integrates the positive discipline approach as part of a strategic effort to create a safe, respectful, and nurturing learning environment. The school's character education planning is not a standalone activity but is embedded into the broader School Activity Plan (*Rencana Kegiatan Sekolah* or RKS) and the annual character development programs. These plans are aligned with the national Character Education Strengthening (*PPK*) policy and emphasize five core values: religiousness, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity.

Planning is conducted collaboratively by the school principal, vice principal, classroom teachers, and the guidance team. The planning process typically begins with a needs analysis based on the previous year's student behavior reports, teacher observations, and informal parent feedback. From this analysis, the school identifies key behavioral challenges such as verbal bullying, exclusion, and lack of empathy and sets specific character-building priorities for the upcoming academic year.

A notable feature of the planning process is the integration of positive discipline principles into daily routines and weekly schedules. Rather than focusing on punitive rules, the school develops positive behavior expectations that are clearly communicated to students. These include routines such as greeting teachers, managing emotions, using respectful language, and resolving conflicts through dialogue. These behavioral expectations are embedded into classroom agreements and displayed visually in hallways and classrooms.

Interview data revealed that teachers actively participate in designing class-specific character strategies. For example, one grade 5 teacher noted: *"We do not wait for incidents to happen. During planning, we discuss preventive strategies—what values to focus on this term, and how to model them in class routines."* (Interview, March 2025) This proactive stance reflects the shift from reactive discipline to preventive character education, in line with **positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS)**.

Planning documents collected by the researcher include character education calendars, behavior monitoring templates, and teacher training agendas on positive discipline methods. The school also includes activities like class meetings, student reflection journals, and role-playing scenarios in its planning as tools for reinforcing values and managing student behavior positively.

The school's planning process also reflects elements of **participatory management**, as outlined in George R. Terry's management theory. All stakeholders—including teachers, staff, and in some cases parents—are involved in setting behavior goals, contributing to a shared vision for school culture. This participatory process increases teacher buy-in and ensures that planned character strategies are contextually relevant and realistic.

Overall, the planning of character education through the positive discipline framework at SDN 115 Turangga is systematic, inclusive, and student-centered. The school's approach demonstrates an understanding that discipline is not merely rule enforcement but a continuous process of value internalization supported by consistent planning, modeling, and reinforcement.

3.2 Organizing the Implementation of Character Education through Positive Discipline

The organization of character education at SDN 115 Turangga is grounded in collaborative structures and clearly defined roles that support the implementation of a positive discipline approach. The school management ensures that character-building efforts are not isolated to moral instruction but are integrated into the day-to-day operational and instructional activities across the institution.

At the core of the organizational structure is the school principal, who functions as the primary policy driver and coordinator. The vice principal for student affairs is tasked with operationalizing character education programs and ensuring their alignment with classroom activities. Additionally, a guidance teacher and selected class teachers serve as focal points for monitoring student behavior and promoting positive interactions. Each homeroom teacher is responsible for implementing character routines and modeling expected behaviors in their classrooms.

One key feature of the school's organizational approach is the establishment of **class-based character teams**, in which students are assigned rotating roles—such as peer mediators, classroom monitors, and value ambassadors. These roles empower students to participate actively in maintaining a respectful and disciplined classroom environment. A teacher interviewed noted:

"Our students take turns leading greetings and managing classroom behavior. We train them to give reminders kindly and respectfully." (Interview, March 2025)
This approach reflects the principles of **student agency and shared responsibility** within the positive discipline framework.

To support consistency, the school holds weekly coordination meetings involving homeroom teachers and the student affairs team. These meetings are used to review behavioral incidents, evaluate the implementation of positive discipline practices, and adjust strategies as needed. Teachers also share challenges and exchange strategies during these sessions, contributing to a **professional learning community** focused on social-emotional learning and discipline.

The school also institutionalizes character education through its use of visual tools and routines. Posters displaying core values, emotional regulation charts, and "I-message" scripts for conflict resolution are placed throughout the school. Morning

assemblies include short discussions or storytelling on specific values such as empathy, respect, or patience. These repeated organizational routines aim to normalize pro-social behavior and reduce the likelihood of bullying or exclusionary practices.

In terms of communication, the school leverages **multi-channel strategies** to involve parents and guardians in the implementation of character education. WhatsApp groups, school bulletins, and home-school notebooks are used to inform parents of weekly value themes and student progress. The school encourages parents to model the same values at home, creating coherence between school and home environments.

The delegation of character-building responsibilities across different roles reflects **functional organizational management**, where tasks are assigned based on area-specific competence. While the principal leads at the policy level, teachers operationalize the program through classroom management, and students are given ownership of daily discipline tasks. This distributed model fosters collective accountability and enhances the sustainability of positive discipline implementation.

In summary, SDN 115 Turangga organizes its character education program through a structured yet participatory approach that emphasizes collaboration, consistency, and student involvement. The integration of positive discipline into daily routines, leadership roles, and teacher collaboration demonstrates an institutional commitment to discipline that is both humane and effective.

3.3 Implementation of Positive Discipline Practices in Character Education

The implementation of positive discipline at SDN 115 Turangga is carried out as an integral part of classroom management, daily school routines, and interpersonal interactions. The approach is grounded in respect, empathy, and logical consequences, replacing punitive discipline with proactive, reflective, and educational strategies.

Teachers consistently apply classroom agreements that are co-constructed with students at the beginning of each academic term. These agreements include expected behaviors, such as active listening, using polite language, and seeking help appropriately. Rather than presenting rules as top-down mandates, teachers frame them as community commitments, thereby fostering ownership and accountability. Visual reminders of these agreements are displayed in classrooms and revisited regularly through class discussions and student reflections.

In cases of behavioral violations, the school applies a **restorative approach** rather than punishment. Students are invited to reflect on their actions using structured tools like “reflection sheets” or guided conversations with the teacher. The goal is to help the student recognize the impact of their behavior, identify better alternatives, and, when necessary, make amends to those affected. One teacher described this process as follows:

“When a student speaks rudely or acts out, we don’t immediately scold. We ask them: ‘What were you feeling? What was your goal? How else could you have responded?’” (Interview, March 2025)

Positive reinforcement is also a central element of the implementation process. Teachers and staff regularly use verbal praise, reward charts, and class-based recognition to highlight acts of kindness, cooperation, and responsibility. These

acknowledgments are seen as more effective motivators than fear-based discipline. For example, students who consistently display the value of respect may be asked to mentor others or lead morning reflections.

Classroom observations confirmed that positive discipline is embedded in instructional strategies. Teachers model respectful communication, maintain calm tones when redirecting behavior, and give students opportunities to correct themselves before issuing formal warnings. Non-verbal cues—such as proximity, gestures, and eye contact are used intentionally to guide student behavior in a respectful way. This technique aligns with **responsive classroom practices** and supports emotional regulation in younger learners.

To prevent bullying, the school conducts weekly sessions on social-emotional learning. Topics include managing anger, recognizing bullying behavior, being an upstander, and practicing empathy. These sessions are delivered through storytelling, group discussions, and role-playing. By proactively addressing social dynamics and emotional skills, the school seeks to reduce incidents of aggression and increase peer support.

Peer mediation and student leadership are also embedded into daily routines. Students in leadership roles (such as class captains or value ambassadors) are trained to handle minor conflicts among peers through respectful dialogue. These roles give students a sense of purpose and agency, and they contribute to a more peaceful and respectful classroom culture.

In terms of school-wide systems, staff coordinate closely to ensure consistency in applying positive discipline. Minor infractions are managed at the classroom level, while more serious concerns such as repeated bullying are referred to the school counselor, who facilitates restorative conversations with students and their families. This tiered approach ensures that discipline is both immediate and developmentally appropriate.

Overall, the implementation of positive discipline at SDN 115 Turangga is characterized by consistency, empathy, and collaboration. The school has successfully shifted from reactive punishment to proactive support, demonstrating that discipline can be achieved through respect, structure, and student engagement.

3.4 Evaluation of Character Education Outcomes

Evaluation of character education at SDN 115 Turangga is an ongoing process embedded within daily routines, teacher reflections, and institutional monitoring systems. The school does not rely solely on quantitative discipline records but uses a formative and holistic evaluation model to assess both behavioral outcomes and the development of student values over time.

Teachers conduct continuous informal evaluations through observation of student interactions, classroom participation, and behavioral consistency. Positive changes—such as improved cooperation, increased empathy, or reduced verbal aggression—are documented in teacher journals and discussed during weekly staff coordination meetings. These evaluations serve not only as a behavioral tracking tool but also as a foundation for adjusting instructional strategies and interventions.

Formal evaluation occurs at multiple levels. At the classroom level, teachers use behavior monitoring charts and student self-assessment forms to engage learners in reflecting on their own conduct. These tools are not used to rank students but to help them recognize growth areas and take responsibility for their actions. Students are encouraged to set weekly behavioral goals and track their progress, reinforcing self-regulation and intrinsic motivation.

At the school-wide level, the vice principal for student affairs compiles reports on discipline trends, bullying incidents, and the outcomes of restorative interventions. These data are used to inform the school's annual character development review. The school also uses periodic surveys with students and teachers to gather qualitative feedback on the effectiveness of character programs and classroom climate.

The evaluation process includes parental feedback, which is collected through parent-teacher meetings and communication tools such as WhatsApp groups. Parents are invited to share observations about their children's behavior at home and any changes they notice as a result of the school's character programs. This feedback loop creates alignment between school and home, and reinforces character values across different environments.

One of the notable evaluation strategies is the use of student reflection journals, which are implemented in upper-grade classrooms. Students are prompted to write about their actions, emotional responses, and lessons learned from weekly challenges or interpersonal conflicts. These reflections offer rich insights into student growth and are reviewed periodically by homeroom teachers.

Teachers also evaluate the effectiveness of specific character-building activities, such as role-playing, storytelling, or peer mediation, by analyzing student engagement, behavioral outcomes, and feedback. Activities that yield positive behavior shifts are retained and improved, while less effective ones are revised. This evidence-based refinement process ensures that character education remains responsive and impactful.

The evaluation model at SDN 115 Turangga emphasizes growth over punishment. Instead of punishing students for misbehavior, the school focuses on identifying root causes and tracking improvement over time. This shift from compliance-based evaluation to developmental evaluation reflects the school's philosophical alignment with the principles of positive discipline.

Overall, the evaluation of character education outcomes is structured, reflective, and inclusive. It serves both diagnostic and developmental purposes, helping teachers, students, and parents understand where progress is being made and where further support is needed. Through this model, SDN 115 Turangga reinforces its commitment to building a school culture rooted in respect, responsibility, and empathy.

4 Discussion

This study has shown that the implementation of character education through a positive discipline approach at SDN 115 Turangga is both systematic and transformative. The school's commitment to cultivating student values through respectful, student-centered methods demonstrates a progressive shift from punitive to

preventive disciplinary systems. This aligns with global trends in education that emphasize social-emotional learning and restorative practices as foundational to student development.

The planning process observed at SDN 115 reflects the application of participatory management principles [12], in which teachers, administrators, and students are collectively involved in designing character strategies. The co-creation of classroom behavior norms promotes ownership and shared responsibility, which research shows is essential in building sustainable school cultures [25]. Instead of externally imposing values, the school nurtures internalization through inclusion and proactive modeling.

Organizationally, the delegation of roles across school stakeholders, including students, illustrates the school's use of **distributed leadership**. This aligns with Hallinger and Heck's model [26], which suggests that school improvement is most effective when leadership functions are shared. By empowering students to lead behavior routines and mediate conflicts, SDN 115 enhances student agency while reducing dependence on top-down authority.

The implementation of positive discipline is also informed by **constructivist learning theories**, particularly Vygotsky's social development theory [27] and Bandura's social learning theory [28]. Students learn discipline not through punishment but through social modeling, feedback, and reflection often in the context of real-life situations. This experiential learning is further enhanced through reflection journals, peer role-plays, and daily teacher guidance.

The use of reflection tools and student behavior tracking aligns with **formative assessment** principles in education. Rather than judging students based on behavioral infractions, the school uses behavior as a dynamic indicator of growth. These practices reflect a shift toward what Stiggins [29] calls **assessment for learning**, where the goal is to inform and support development rather than merely evaluate it.

One of the key innovations in this school's model is the **restorative approach to misbehavior**. Instead of applying punishment for rule violations, the school invites students to understand the impact of their actions and make amends. This practice is aligned with restorative justice principles and has been shown to reduce repeated misbehavior while improving empathy and school climate [30].

Moreover, the school's emphasis on positive reinforcement over punitive measures supports the **positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS)** framework. Research shows that students are more likely to repeat positive behaviors when those behaviors are acknowledged and rewarded in meaningful ways. SDN 115 uses praise, classroom roles, and recognition as motivators, leading to stronger engagement and student morale.

From an administrative standpoint, the integration of positive discipline into school policy, communication systems, and parental engagement channels reflects strong **institutional coherence**. According to Fullan [31], sustainable change in schools occurs when structural, cultural, and instructional systems align toward a shared goal. SDN 115 demonstrates such alignment in its character management ecosystem.

The inclusion of parents in feedback and reinforcement processes further illustrates an understanding of **Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory**. Behavior is not shaped solely within classrooms but is influenced by interactions across home, peer,

and community environments. By aligning home and school values, the school amplifies its influence on student character outcomes.

The evaluation system used at SDN 115 also exemplifies reflective school management. The school's decision to use both qualitative and quantitative data in reviewing behavioral progress and adjusting strategies reflects an adaptive approach to management one that values context and continuous learning. This is consistent with **learning organization theory** [32], where institutions evolve through reflection and responsiveness.

Despite the strengths of this model, the study also acknowledges that full implementation requires time, consistent training, and institutional support. Not all teachers may be equally skilled in applying restorative practices, and resistance from parents or traditionalist staff can pose barriers. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing professional development, shared leadership, and policy reinforcement.

In sum, the implementation of positive discipline as a strategy for character education at SDN 115 represents a meaningful model for other schools seeking to reduce bullying and foster a values-based learning culture. By combining strategic planning, distributed roles, reflective evaluation, and restorative practices, the school demonstrates how discipline can be reframed not as punishment, but as a process of human development.

5 Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of character education through a positive discipline approach at SDN 115 Turangga has successfully fostered a respectful, empathetic, and student-centered school culture. Through strategic planning, distributed organizational roles, and reflective practices, the school has shifted from punitive discipline to proactive character development. Teachers serve not as enforcers but as mentors, while students are engaged as active participants in managing behavior and cultivating shared values. The integration of restorative practices, peer mediation, and behavioral reflection not only reduces bullying but also strengthens students' emotional intelligence and sense of responsibility.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools institutionalize positive discipline as a core strategy within character education programs. Educational leaders should provide sustained professional development for teachers on restorative and relational practices, ensure structural support for implementation, and involve parents as partners in reinforcing values beyond the classroom. Policymakers are encouraged to revise disciplinary regulations to align with developmental and preventive approaches. Further research should explore the long-term impact of positive discipline on student outcomes and assess its scalability in diverse educational settings.

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