

## The Effectiveness of Educational Punishment in Improving Student Discipline: A Case Study in South Sulawesi

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### Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of educational punishment in enhancing student discipline within public elementary schools in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Grounded in qualitative research methodology, the study utilized classroom observation, structured interviews with teachers, and document analysis to assess behavioral changes among students following the implementation of corrective disciplinary measures. The findings reveal a significant improvement in students' adherence to school rules and classroom norms after the introduction of pedagogically sound punishments. The disciplinary interventions were carefully designed to be constructive, non-threatening, and proportional to the students' infractions. Cooperation between teachers, school principals, and students played a crucial role in supporting the enforcement of discipline. The study concludes that educational punishment, when applied with consistency and empathy, serves not only as a deterrent but also as a developmental tool for shaping responsible student behavior. These findings have implications for educators and policymakers seeking effective, ethical strategies for managing discipline in primary education.

**Keywords:** Educational punishment, student discipline, classroom management

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Discipline is a fundamental component of effective and conducive learning environments. In primary education settings, student discipline reflects not only obedience to school rules but also contributes significantly to academic success and character formation (Arifin, 2018). Without sufficient behavioral regulation, teaching and learning processes are easily disrupted, hindering educational goals (Mulyasa, 2014).

One strategy commonly employed by educators to instill discipline is the implementation of educational punishment. This approach is not punitive in a physical or authoritarian sense, but rather corrective and grounded in pedagogical principles. Educational punishment aims to foster students' understanding of consequences associated with misconduct, encouraging responsible behavior (Purwanto, 2010). Such punishments may include additional academic tasks, community service within the school, or logical consequences tied directly to the misbehavior.

Numerous studies indicate that consistently and fairly applied educational punishment can positively affect student behavior. For example, a study by Rahmawati and Suhendar (2020) in West Java reported a significant reduction in student violations following a structured system of educational punishment. Similarly, Astuti and Nugroho (2019) observed improved classroom discipline after implementing a pedagogical approach to student infractions.

However, the use of punishment in educational settings often involves ethical dilemmas. While punishment can serve as a behavioral regulator, inappropriate implementation may lead to adverse psychological outcomes such as diminished self-esteem, fear, or even trauma (Santrock, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers understand the boundary between disciplinary measures that educate and those that harm.

Another important factor influencing the effectiveness of punishment is teachers' perception and consistency in its application. According to Wulandari (2021), a positive teacher perception of educational punishment contributes to its constructive implementation. Conversely, when punishment is viewed merely as coercion, it tends to be applied inconsistently and may fail to support long-term behavioral change.

Additionally, collaboration between teachers, school principals, and other stakeholders is essential in fostering a school-wide culture of discipline. Brookfield (2015) emphasizes that learning environments grounded in fairness and mutual respect play a critical role in promoting sustainable behavioral development.

Theoretical support for educational punishment can be found in behaviorist psychology. Skinner (1953) argues that undesirable behaviors can be decreased through appropriate negative reinforcement. However, in the context of elementary education, this principle must be adapted to account for students' cognitive and emotional developmental stages.

In Indonesia, particularly in rural educational settings, the implementation of discipline is often challenged by limited resources and institutional support. A study by Prasetyo, Lestari, and Fitriyah (2021) found that schools in remote areas face difficulties in maintaining consistent behavioral policies and training teachers in classroom management. These challenges highlight the need to evaluate and enhance disciplinary approaches to better support student development.

Based on this context, the present study aims to examine the effectiveness of educational punishment in shaping student discipline at the elementary level. The study focuses on SDN 35 Panyili in South Sulawesi as a representative case of public primary education in non-urban areas. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, this research seeks to contribute to the development of classroom management strategies that holistically support student growth and learning outcomes.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach using classroom action research (CAR) as its primary design. The research was conducted at SDN 35 Panyili, South Sulawesi, focusing on fifth-grade students as the main subjects. The aim was to explore how the implementation of educational punishment could improve student discipline over two action cycles. The research process included planning, implementation, observation, and reflection each step guided by principles of participatory and reflective inquiry.

Data collection was carried out using triangulated techniques, including classroom observation, structured interviews, and documentation analysis. Observations were used to monitor student behavior during the learning process, while structured interviews with teachers aimed to uncover insights regarding their perceptions and the impact of disciplinary measures. Documentation, such as student violation records and photographs of school activities, served as supplementary data to strengthen the validity of the findings.

The analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings were then interpreted qualitatively to evaluate changes in student behavior before and after the application of educational punishment. Ethical considerations were taken into account, particularly in maintaining student confidentiality and ensuring that disciplinary interventions were aligned with pedagogical standards and did not cause harm to the learners' emotional well-being.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

This research was conducted through two cycles of classroom action involving fifth-grade students at SDN 35 Panyili, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. The primary objective was to enhance student discipline through the application of educational punishment. Each cycle comprised the stages of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The results from both cycles demonstrated positive changes in student behavior, particularly in aspects related to classroom discipline.

In the first cycle, the researcher designed punishment strategies based on the initial identification of common disciplinary violations, such as tardiness, incomplete school uniforms, and leaving the classroom without permission. The implemented punishments were educational and proportional, including tasks such as cleaning the classroom or writing a statement of commitment. After two weeks, a significant reduction in the number of violations was observed compared to the initial stage.

Observations showed that students began to exhibit more orderly behavior in class. They became more compliant with school regulations, particularly in wearing proper uniforms and paying attention during lessons. Reports from classroom teachers and

supervisors indicated a marked decrease in rule violations. For instance, the number of reported violations dropped from 61 to just 6 within one week of implementing the intervention.

Some students previously known for their frequent misbehavior also showed significant improvements. They demonstrated greater responsibility and ceased repeating their infractions. Notably, students who used to leave class frequently were now able to stay throughout lessons. However, there were still a few students who showed resistance to the new rules, although their number and intensity diminished in the second cycle.

Reflections from the first cycle revealed that the consistency of teachers in enforcing rules was critical to the success of the intervention. In some cases, teachers displayed leniency toward minor violations, reducing the deterrent effect of the punishment. Therefore, in the second cycle, efforts were made to strengthen teacher commitment through discussions emphasizing the importance of fairness and consistency in applying discipline.

In the second cycle, the punishment strategies were refined based on the insights gained from the first cycle. The educational punishments remained in place but were implemented more systematically, including the use of class discussions for reflection. Observations during this phase indicated that the classroom environment became more conducive to learning. Teachers reported improved student focus and fewer disruptions due to misbehavior.

Furthermore, student questionnaire data revealed a growing understanding of the importance of discipline. Most students began to view punishment not as a punitive measure but as a form of learning. Several students stated that the consequences helped them become more cautious and responsible in their actions. This indicates that the educational punishment had a positive impact both affectively and cognitively.

Overall, qualitative data showed that the implementation of constructive punishment significantly improved student discipline. This success was reflected in three main indicators: the reduction in rule violations, increased student engagement in learning, and enhanced awareness of the importance of school regulations. The approach not only curtailed disruptive behavior but also supported the development of positive character traits.

With student discipline reaching 87.6% by the end of the second cycle, it can be concluded that a structured, consistent, and pedagogically sound approach to punishment—coupled with effective communication between teachers and students—can be an effective strategy for improving discipline in elementary education. These findings provide empirical evidence that humane disciplinary practices can foster a more positive and productive learning environment.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that the structured implementation of educational punishment significantly enhanced student discipline in the elementary classroom context. This aligns with the behaviorist theory, which posits that behavior can be shaped through the systematic application of stimulus and response (Ormrod, 2016). In this case, punishment acts as a stimulus that encourages students to conform to expected behavioral norms.

The punishment applied in this study adhered to pedagogical principles, avoiding physical or humiliating actions and focusing instead on logical consequences. According to Charles (2014), such an approach is more effective in the long term because it maintains positive teacher-student relationships while promoting students' moral responsibility. The positive student responses observed in this study reinforce this perspective.

The significant decrease in the number of violations across the two action cycles demonstrates that students can respond positively to rules when consequences are enforced consistently. Gossen (2004) emphasized that discipline is not only a matter of punishment but also depends on students' perception of fairness and the consistency with which rules are applied. In this study, the teacher's role as a fair and consistent authority figure proved essential.

Moreover, teacher involvement in explaining the rationale behind disciplinary actions contributed to students' understanding of discipline as a core value. Bear (2010) found that consequences paired with moral reasoning accelerate students' internalization of self-regulation. This study supports that finding, as students began to reflect on their actions and accept punishment as part of a learning process.

Disciplinary measures also led to a more conducive classroom environment, which in turn improved learning effectiveness. Wang and Degol (2016) argue that orderly and structured learning environments significantly support academic performance. Therefore, promoting discipline through constructive punishment can be viewed as an indirect strategy to improve educational quality.

Another key finding is the shift in students' attitudes toward punishment. Many students began to perceive disciplinary consequences as a form of instruction rather than oppression. This change suggests a healthy affective and cognitive development among students. According to Deci and Ryan (2002), disciplinary strategies that support student autonomy and intrinsic value development are more effective than those based on external control.

The effectiveness of this approach was also evident in teacher interviews, which revealed that student orderliness improved, and teachers felt less psychological strain in managing misbehavior. These findings echo Milner and Hoy (2003), who noted that teachers experience less burnout in environments with strong disciplinary structures and institutional support.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of punishment depends heavily on the method of implementation. Excessive or unexplained punishment may lead to student resistance and a breakdown in trust (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial to balance rule enforcement with empathy for students' emotional needs and developmental stages.

In summary, this study affirms that educational punishment, when applied according to pedagogical principles and in a consistent, respectful manner, can significantly enhance student discipline. This approach holds relevance not only within Indonesian elementary school settings but also in broader educational contexts where character development and learning readiness are key priorities.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has demonstrated that the structured and pedagogically grounded application of educational punishment can significantly improve student discipline in elementary education. Through two cycles of classroom action research, it was observed that

students responded positively to disciplinary measures when they were delivered consistently, fairly, and with clear educational intent. The reduction in rule violations, the improvement of classroom order, and the increase in student awareness toward behavioral expectations provide empirical support for the use of constructive punishment in primary school settings.

The findings highlight that educational punishment, when aligned with developmental and ethical considerations, is not merely a deterrent mechanism but also a tool for character formation. By incorporating consequences that encourage responsibility and reflection, educators can promote self-regulation among students. This research also underscores the importance of teacher consistency and communication in ensuring that disciplinary actions are both effective and perceived as just by students.

In broader terms, this study contributes to the understanding of how discipline strategies can be adapted to enhance not only behavioral outcomes but also the overall learning environment. Educational institutions, particularly in rural or resource-limited contexts, may benefit from adopting such strategies to foster a culture of accountability and mutual respect. Future research is encouraged to explore long-term impacts and to assess the scalability of this approach across different educational levels and cultural settings.

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