



The Role of Schools in Handling in Disciplinary Behaviour and its Implications for the Formation of Student Character (Multi-Case Study in Three Secondary Schools in Timor Leste)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the role of schools in addressing student indiscipline and its impact on character formation in three high schools in Timor Leste. Using a multi-case study approach and qualitative methods, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The results show that indiscipline is influenced by family factors, social environment, and weak internalization of character values in schools. The handling carried out is preventive, curative, and reflective, but has not been systematically integrated. This study recommends a holistic and collaborative character education approach between schools, teachers, students, and parents.

INTRODUCTION

Education has a fundamental function in shaping the personality of students as a whole, both in terms of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. The education system in the current global context is not enough to only provide students with academic knowledge, but must also be able to shape students into individuals with character, noble morals, and able to live in harmony in a pluralistic society (Wanti et al., 2024; Abdhiyani et al., 2025). One of the main institutions that has responsibility in this process is the school in order to achieve this goal. Schools are not only a place where the learning process takes place, but also an arena for character building through various formal and non-formal activities (Denkowska et al., 2020). However, the reality in the field shows that there are still many students who exhibit deviant behavior, violate applicable norms, and show attitudes that are contrary to the disciplinary values set by the school. Behaviors such as truancy, being late for school, smoking in the school environment, bullying friends, and lack of respect for teachers are phenomena that cannot be underestimated today. This phenomenon reflects the gap between the ideal goals of education and the reality of practices that occur within educational institutions themselves, especially in terms of character formation of students.

The increasing indiscipline behavior of students over time shows that the process of internalizing character values has not been running effectively and comprehensively. Character education, which should be an integral part of the education system, is often only placed as a complement to the curriculum, not as the main foundation. According to Annur & Yuriska (2021); Saputra et al., (2023), basically character education is not just teaching good values, but the process of forming habits that are deeply rooted in the individual. When students fail to understand or appreciate the importance of school rules and norms, it shows the weakness of instilling basic values such as discipline, responsibility, and respect. Weak supervision, lack of role models from teachers, and inconsistent enforcement of rules are often the main reasons why students do not feel morally bound to the norms that have been set by the school. Therefore, it is important to see this problem not merely as the fault of students, but as a systemic failure that requires comprehensive intervention from the school and all education stakeholders.

The problem of indiscipline behavior and character building is also relevant to study in the context of education in developing countries, including Timor Leste. As a country that is building its education system after independence, Timor Leste faces various challenges in providing quality and character-based education. Many schools are still struggling with limited resources, low teacher training because most teachers in Timor Leste have not received adequate training in implementing character education, so that the character building process tends to depend on individual teacher initiatives, rather than on structured school policies. As a result, the response to student deviant behavior is reactive, unplanned, and has little long-term impact. This shows the urgency to strengthen school capacity in handling indiscipline behavior as an integral part of character building, as well as the weakness of the

school management system. As a result of this condition, handling student deviant behavior becomes increasingly complex, because it is not only related to individual behavior, but also to the conditions of the education system that is in progress. Therefore, understanding how schools in Timor Leste handle indiscipline behavior and build student character is a very important issue to be studied scientifically.

Indisciplined behavior that is allowed to continue to develop without proper handling can have serious consequences, both for the students themselves and for the school environment as a whole. Students who are not trained in character tend to have difficulty adjusting to the social environment and the world of work in the future. Moreover, deviant behavior can damage a healthy learning climate, disrupt the learning comfort of other students, and reduce the authority of teachers and school authorities. Instilling values and discipline cannot be done through a punishment approach alone, but must be combined with a moral and reflective approach that can touch the inner consciousness of students (Irianto 2020). The role of teachers in this case as models and character facilitators is very crucial. Teachers must be able to be role models in speech and action and be able to create a dialogical space that allows students to reflect on their actions and understand their impact on themselves and others (Haryani 2024).

Handling indiscipline behavior must be done through a holistic and sustainable approach. Schools need to design character development programs that are not only formal and normative, but also touch on the psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of students. Activities such as value-based learning, daily habits that internalize ethics, involving students in social activities, and providing space to voice opinions are real forms of an effective character education approach. Latifah (2014); Widodo & Mansur (2022) emphasize that the success of character education depends on the integration of these values into all aspects of school life, from the curriculum, school management, to the school culture that is built together, so that schools are not only places to learn, but also communities of values that consistently shape the character of students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the complexity of the problems that have been described, this study is very important to conduct in order to examine in depth how the role of schools actually is in handling indiscipline behavior of students and to what extent the handling has an impact on character formation in East Timor. This study will focus on three high schools in East Timor, namely SMA 10 Desember, SMA Finantil, and SMA 5 de Maiu, each of which has a different context, approach, and internal policy in dealing with discipline problems. Through a multi-case study approach, it is expected that effective handling strategy patterns can be found and can be recommended for implementation in schools in East Timor, so this study is directed to answer the real needs in the world of education in East Timor because only through structured, contextual, and consistent character education can the young generation in the long term be formed into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also

morally and socially mature. Therefore, the involvement of all parties needs to be mobilized in realizing this and this study is expected to be one of the initial contributions towards systemic change in character education in East Timor.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. A qualitative approach aims to understand and interpret complex social phenomena in a natural context and based on the perspectives of participants (Creswell, 2016). In the context of this study, a qualitative approach is used to explore in depth how schools handle students' indiscipline behavior and its impact on their character formation, emphasizing the subjective meanings given by the principal, teachers, and students to these actions. The type of research used is a multiple case study. A multiple case study is a study that examines more than one case or location with the aim of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the same phenomenon in different contexts (Yin, 2018). The selection of this type is relevant because the study was conducted in three different schools, each of which has different characteristics, policies, and approaches in dealing with student behavior. With a multiple case study, researchers can compare and contrast findings from the three schools to obtain a more complete picture and conditional generalization. This research was conducted in three senior high schools in Timor Leste, namely SMA 10 December, SMA Finantil, and SMA 5 de Maiu.

The selection of the location was based on the consideration that these three schools have diverse school cultures, different implementation of rules, and unique dynamics of student behavior. The data sources in this study are divided into two, namely primary data obtained directly from the research subjects through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and interactions in the field. The primary data sources in this study were the Principal, Guidance and Counseling Teachers, Homeroom Teachers, and Students who had violated school rules. While secondary data, namely data obtained from relevant documents or archives, including school rules and reports of student violations. The population in this study were all elements of the school that played a role in the process of fostering student discipline and character, namely the principal, BK teachers, homeroom teachers, and students. The sample was determined purposively (purposive sampling), namely the determination of research subjects intentionally based on the consideration that the subjects have relevant information to the focus of the study (Sugiyono, 2017). The number of samples consisted of 3 Principals (1 from each school), 3 BK Teachers, 3 Homeroom Teachers, and 15 Students (5 from each school)

Data collection techniques were carried out using four main methods, namely Semistructured Interviews, namely open interviews with flexible question guides. This technique allows researchers to explore the experiences, views, and assessments of informants in depth (Creswell, 2016), Participatory Observation, namely direct observation of interactions in the school environment, both between teachers and students and between students. Observations were made on the implementation of coaching and application of rules, Documentation Study, namely data collection from official documents

that support the validity of the main data, such as reports of violations and regulations. The main instrument in qualitative research is the researcher himself who acts as a human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers will use several tools including interview guidelines and observation sheets.

Data were analyzed using an interactive model according to Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2014) which consists of three stages, the first is the data reduction stage, namely the process of selecting, simplifying, and focusing raw data based on the focus of the research, the second is the data presentation stage, namely compiling data in the form of thematic narratives, tables, or matrices to assist interpretation, the third is the conclusion drawing and verification stage: Making interpretations and conclusions based on the patterns found, then verifying with other data, and the last is the data validity test stage to ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is comparing information obtained from various sources (principals, teachers, students, and documents) to see the consistency of the data (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, technique triangulation is the use of more than one data collection technique (eg interviews, observations, and documentation) against the same source to strengthen validity (Sugiyono, 2017). In addition, member checking is carried out by confirming the findings or direct quotes to informants to ensure the suitability and validity of the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dominant Forms of Indisciplinary Behavior Occurring in Schools Based on the results of interviews with several informants from the three schools, it shows that indisciplinary behavior commonly found includes actions such as being late to school, playing truant, wearing inappropriate uniforms, smoking in the school area, using cell phones during lessons, and aggressive and impolite behavior towards teachers and peers. The principal at SMA 10 Desember noted that in the past month, there were 25 cases of lateness and 9 cases of playing truant. Meanwhile, the results of interviews at SMA Finantil, violations of speech ethics were the main concern, while at SMA 5 de Maiu, the main problem lay in compliance with dress codes and student involvement in negative activities outside of school. School documentation shows that indisciplinary behavior is often carried out by students who have a history of not being involved in school activities such as extracurricular activities or OSIS. The researcher's observations showed that in several classes, there were students who openly ignored teacher instructions or entered and left the class without permission. This indicates resistance to school authority, as well as weak internal control of students over applicable institutional norms.

Field findings related to factors causing indiscipline behavior show that deviant behavior of students cannot be separated from family conditions, social environment, and lack of consistent character building from schools. The guidance and counseling teacher at SMA Finantil said that most students with problematic behavior come from dysfunctional family backgrounds, either due to parental divorce, poor living standards, or lack of father or mother figures in the lives of students. In addition, the flow of external culture through social

media also greatly influences students' mindsets and behavior, where students tend to imitate a free lifestyle that is contrary to school norms. The results of interviews with the homeroom teacher of SMA 5 de Maiu, it was found that several students who showed negative behavior were actually due to the lack of special attention from parents to these students, which resulted in students tending to do things that were not normal for children their age. Psychological factors such as feeling ignored, academic stress, and low self-esteem were also found to contribute to indiscipline behavior. Deviant behavior of adolescents is often rooted in an identity crisis and the need for self-recognition.

School handling efforts: preventive, curative, and reflective in The schools where the research was conducted have various approaches in handling indiscipline behavior. The preventive approach is carried out through the socialization of rules, providing motivation during ceremonies, character building through religious lessons and religious activities, and organizing extracurricular activities that involve students actively in organizations and leadership. At SMA Finantil, there is a joint prayer program where students are invited to reflect on moral values for 15 minutes before the lesson begins. The curative approach is carried out through individual counseling, calling parents, giving additional assignments with educational value, and even involving students in social activities as a form of constructive punishment. SMA 10 Desember, for example, has a special program for students who violate school rules or break the rules, where the students are asked to clean the school environment. This is considered more constructive than physical punishment or suspension. Interestingly, the reflective approach was developed informally at SMA 5 de Maiu, namely through open discussion sessions between teachers and students about the deviant behaviors that the students do. This approach emphasizes students' emotional and intellectual involvement in understanding the meaning of norms and their consequences, which directly strengthens the process of internalizing character values.

Students' perceptions of regulations and guidance, most students stated that they understood school rules, but felt that their implementation was often inconsistent or only focused on the punishment aspect without understanding. A student from SMA Finantil revealed that the student had been punished for bringing a cellphone to class, but was never given an explanation as to why it was prohibited. However, on the other hand, students who had undergone intensive counseling admitted that they were more motivated to change because they felt they were being cared for personally. Students also expressed a desire to be involved in the process of drafting or evaluating school rules. Many students believed that with such involvement, the rules would be more relevant and better received. At SMA 10 Desember, the average student stated that they changed after being given trust by the teacher, because they felt responsible as an example for their friends.

The role of internal school coordination in terms of effective handling of indiscipline behavior is highly dependent on the synergy between the principal, guidance counselor, and homeroom teacher. At SMA Finantil, there is a weekly meeting specifically to discuss problematic students, with an evaluation of the

actions taken and a follow-up plan. Meanwhile, at SMA 10 Desember, the principal emphasized the importance of empowering teachers as role models of character in everyday life, not just in formal learning. Guidance counselors from the three schools agreed that the best intervention is one that is carried out collaboratively, not just relying on guidance counselors as the central point of resolution when students experience problems.

The phenomenon of indiscipline behavior found in the three schools that were the research locations, namely SMA 10 Desember, SMA Finantil, and SMA 5 de Maiu, showed patterns of rule violations that could not be considered trivial or incidental. Violations committed by students were not only in the form of absence without explanation and lateness, but also included disrespect for teachers, uncontrolled use of electronic devices, and lack of concern for dress codes and cleanliness of the school environment. This behavior is a reflection of the degradation of character values, especially the values of responsibility, discipline, and respect for authority that should be firmly embedded in students. According to Hosaini et al., (2017), character is formed through habits that are carried out consistently, so that deviant behavior that is carried out continuously will form a negative personality if not handled immediately.

The results of the interviews that have been conducted, it was found that these indiscipline actions mostly stem from the weak internalization of character values in the school environment. The principals of the three institutions admitted that the rules had indeed been formally formulated, but their implementation had not touched on the affective aspects of students. This means that students know what they can and cannot do, but on average students do not understand or believe why the rules are important. This shows that the character building process in schools has not been carried out holistically, but is only in the cognitive and normative realms. This is in accordance with the studies presented by Puyo (2021); Stec & Kulik (2021) that character education that only relies on a cognitive approach will find it difficult to produce sustainable behavioral changes, because it has not touched on aspects of moral awareness and intrinsic values in students.

Furthermore, the role of teachers in instilling discipline and character values also appears to be less than optimal. The results of interviews with homeroom teachers and BK teachers found that teachers often do not enforce rules consistently, either because of empathy for students' conditions or because of a lack of support from school management. This condition shows a gap between the values that the school wants to uphold and the reality of its implementation in the field. This inconsistency is reinforced by the statements of Diamond & Lewis (2019); Mustaqimah et al., (2024) who stated that failure to enforce discipline often occurs when there are no professional ethical standards that are applied uniformly across all components of the school. As a result, students see rules as something flexible and dependent on who applies them, not as an objective value system that must be respected.

In addition to internal school factors, family background and social environment are also significant contributors to students' deviant behavior.

Several interviews with guidance and counseling teachers revealed that many students come from dysfunctional families, either due to divorce, poverty, or permissive parenting. This situation causes students to come to school with unstable emotional conditions, minimal parental attention, and weak social control from home. According to Marzuki & Setyawan (2022), the family environment is the main foundation in character formation, and the absence of parents' role in supervising children's behavior can cause them to seek identity and recognition through deviant behavior. In this context, schools face a double challenge, not only having to educate academically, but also functioning as a compensator for the values that should be formed at home.

Character development programs that have been attempted by schools, such as religious activities, flag ceremonies, and leadership training, have not been fully able to respond to the root of the problem. This is because these activities are still formalistic and have not been directly linked to real events that students face every day. Character education will be more effective if it is based on experience (experiential learning) (Pratiwi et al., 2021). In this case, students are invited to reflect on their actions, understand the consequences, and make conscious decisions based on the values they have learned.

Another weakness found in handling indiscipline behavior is the absence of an integrated and sustainable counseling system. The role of BK teachers is often understood narrowly, namely as a party that only functions to provide advice or impose sanctions. Ideal guidance and counseling services must be preventive, corrective, and developmental (Habsy et al., 2019). This means that BK teachers need to be involved from the start in the process of identifying potential problems, developing individual approach strategies, and accompanying students in the process of changing behavior. In the three research schools, the counseling program was not well structured and did not have adequate documentation to assess the effectiveness of the interventions carried out. Student involvement in formulating and evaluating school rules is also an aspect that needs serious attention. Students feel less involved in the decision-making process concerning their lives at school, which they feel is only an object of ready-made rules, without room for dialogue or expressing aspirations. This condition is contrary to the principle of participatory character education which emphasizes the importance of making students active partners in creating a healthy school culture (Lysgaard et al., 2020; Iksal et al., 2024). Student involvement not only increases compliance with rules but also strengthens a sense of belonging and responsibility towards the school community.

Strengthening cooperation between schools and parents is also one of the important recommendations from the results of this study. The principals of the three schools agreed that intensive communication with parents can help understand the background of students and develop more personalized intervention strategies. Unfortunately, the frequency of meetings between schools and parents is still very limited, often only occurring when students commit serious violations. A harmonious relationship between schools and parents can create synergy in fostering student character, because effective

character education must take place simultaneously at school and at home (Purandina 2020; Darna 2023).

The challenge in dealing with indisciplined behavior of students is not only about enforcing rules, but is closely related to how schools build a culture that respects values, emotional involvement of teachers, dialogue with students, and active participation of all school members. Therefore, a repressive approach alone must be abandoned, and replaced with a humanistic approach that emphasizes understanding, empathy, and mentoring. The idea of transformative character education is not just about transferring knowledge, but forming whole people through meaningful relationships and internalized values.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that indiscipline behaviour of students in high schools in Timor Leste is a real and complex phenomenon. Forms of behaviour that do not heed school rules such as absence without permission, violation of dress code, to disrespect towards teachers are manifestations of weak internalization of character values such as discipline, responsibility, and respect for norms. Although each school has rules and character development programs, the results of the study show that the implementation of the rules has not been fully effective due to the low consistency of discipline enforcement, limited intensive assistance from teachers and homeroom teachers, and lack of parental involvement in the development process.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so further research is still needed on this topic.

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