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Implementing Positive Discipline to Enhance Character Education in High Schools

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Abstract

Education plays a crucial role in shaping students' character, fostering traits like responsibility, discipline, and independence, beyond mere knowledge transfer. However, issues such as rule violations and lack of self-awareness among students highlight the need for effective character education strategies. This study aims to examine how positive discipline, a humanistic approach emphasizing self-awareness and responsibility without physical or verbal punishment, strengthens character education in high schools. Using a descriptive qualitative literature review, data were collected from journal articles, academic books, and official education reports. The findings indicate that positive discipline reduces disciplinary violations, enhances moral awareness, and creates a safe, inclusive school environment. Key supporting factors include consistent teacher practices, parental involvement, and a collaborative school culture, though challenges like punitive mindsets, time constraints, and low student awareness persist. The study concludes that positive discipline significantly enhances character education by promoting responsibility, independence, and moral integrity, offering a sustainable approach to cultivating well-rounded students. It provides practical strategies for schools to foster discipline humanely, aligning with national education goals to develop virtuous and skilled individuals, with potential to elevate character development to an excellent level.

Keywords

Character Education, Inclusive School Climate, Moral Awareness, Positive Discipline, School Culture, Student Responsibility.

1. Introduction

Education not only focuses on improving intelligence but also plays an important role in shaping the character of students. Many cases were found in schools related to the moral crisis of students. This is certainly something that needs to be considered by schools, especially teachers. One of them is a violation of the rules that apply in schools. There are still many students who violate school rules, such as being late, not keeping promises, not completing assignments, and not understanding and accepting the consequences of their actions (Fayolle & Wright, 2014). In addition, many students today lack independence and responsibility. This needs to be overcome through character education. Values such as responsibility, independence, discipline, and good morals are the main aspects of personality development.

The development of student behaviour requires guidance, perseverance, and self-awareness. Unlike sanctions, discipline emphasises life order and self-regulation based on social and cultural values. Instilling discipline is essential for students to interact orderly in learning and community life (Siregar et al., 2024; Mandanao & Baguio, 2025). A key challenge for schools is fostering discipline without inducing fear, pressure, or reliance on punishment, as traditional approaches often focus on punitive measures that may hinder learning. Positive discipline, by contrast, emphasises awareness, responsibility, and active student engagement in understanding the consequences of their actions. It prioritises coaching and empowerment, enabling students to self-regulate, reflect on mistakes, and develop a constructive mindset, thereby promoting character education humanely and with long-term impact.

Learning discipline is a crucial factor influencing the success of the learning process. However, it is often enforced through rigid rules and punitive measures (Muslich, 2022). Teachers' self-imposed rules can cause physical and psychological pressure, leading students to obey out of fear rather than understanding the value of discipline (Nur, 2016). Research indicates that punishment is not the most effective method for promoting positive outcomes (Aji et al., 2020; Krisdianti & Yoedo, 2021). Positive discipline, by contrast, fosters self-aware disciplinary behavior without coercion, guiding students to understand consequences and make responsible, independent decisions (Slađana & Dušica, 2021). This approach cultivates learning from mistakes, enhances security, and builds an inclusive, responsive school culture.

The 2024-2025 SMAN 2 Slawi education report card shows that the character aspect has not reached the maximum score. Based on the 2025 SMAN 2 Slawi Education Report Card, the achievement of the A.3 Character indicator is in the "Good" category with a score of 61.1. Although it is quite sufficient, this figure shows that the strengthening of students' character has not reached the optimal level or "Very Good". Some of the root problems identified in the education report card include the lack of maximum reflection and improvement of learning by teachers, weak instructional leadership, and the dominance of conventional learning approaches that have not fully supported the development of character values such as responsibility, independence, and creativity in students (Simanjuntak et al., 2024; Mulyadi & Maulana, 2025). The application of positive discipline by teachers can be one of the effective strategies in creating a conducive, safe, and supportive learning environment for the development of students as a whole. Thus, positive discipline is not only an approach to handling student behavior but also an important foundation in strengthening character education as a whole.

Efforts have been made to improve the education report card of SMAN 2 Slawi. However, at SMAN 2 Slawi, there has been no in-depth study related to the implementation of positive discipline as a strategy to strengthen students' character, even though the condition of character achievement that is still "good" shows that

there is significant room for improvement. Therefore, this research is important to explore how the implementation of positive discipline can support the strengthening of students' character in the high school environment. Thus, this research is grounded in the contextual needs of schools, as reflected in the education report card, and aims to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how a positive and constructive disciplinary approach can effectively foster student character, promote self-awareness, and encourage responsible behaviour, thereby offering strategies for schools to develop discipline in a humane and sustainable manner.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition and Purpose of Character Education

Character education is a deliberate and systematic effort by educators to instil moral, ethical, and virtuous values, enabling students to think, act, and behave according to societal norms. It aims not only to develop intellectual competence but also integrity, responsibility, and social concern (Rof'ie, 2019; Muslich, 2022). Lickona (1992) describes effective character education as encompassing three interconnected dimensions, such as moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Moral knowing is the cognitive understanding of core ethical values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect, providing the foundation to distinguish right from wrong. Moral feeling refers to emotional awareness and motivation, ensuring students internalise and believe in these values (Nucci & Ilten-Gee, 2021). Moral action is the behavioural application of these values in daily life, showing successful integration of knowledge and feeling.

These dimensions are complementary; emphasising only knowledge leads to purely cognitive understanding, while action without knowledge or feeling results in mechanical behaviour. Therefore, character education should integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects to form well-rounded individuals (Samani, 2019) and align with national education goals of fostering Indonesian citizens who are faithful, virtuous, and skilled (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003). The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture highlights five core values in schools: religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and integrity. These values promote tolerance, social harmony, responsibility, cooperation, and trustworthiness. According to Muslich (2022), the success of character education is reflected in observable student behaviours, including increased responsibility, independence, discipline, and social concern, achieved through consistent internalisation across school culture, learning activities, and daily interactions.

2.2. Character Education in Schools

School is one of the most strategic environments in shaping students' character. This is because schools not only function as institutions that transfer knowledge but also as institutions that shape the values, attitudes, and behaviours of students to be in accordance with the nation's social and cultural norms (Zuchdi, 2011; Rohman, 2019; Suwardani, 2020; Najili et al., 2022; Ependi et al., 2023). In other words, schools have a dual role: to educate the mind and to build a personality with character.

According to Muslich (2022), character education in schools must be comprehensive, not limited to certain subjects, but integrated into all aspects of educational implementation. This means that character education is not only taught in the form of theory or moral knowledge but is internalised across the curriculum, school culture, and teacher-student interaction. This integration allows learners to experience a consistent learning process between what is taught and what is practised. In the context of the curriculum, character values can be incorporated into

core competencies, basic competencies, and the learning processes of each subject. Through school culture, character values are manifested in daily habits, such as time discipline, maintaining cleanliness, and mutual respect. Meanwhile, in teacher-student interaction, character education is present through example, constructive communication, and the habituation of positive behaviour. Samani (2019) emphasised that schools that succeed in forming character are those able to present a moral environment, where students are routinely exposed to situations that demand moral decision-making and learning to be responsible for their choices. Therefore, the role of teachers is vital, not only as instructors but also as role models in instilling character values. Thus, character education in schools is a holistic process that integrates curriculum, school culture, and social interaction. Suppose these three aspects are carried out consistently. In that case, the school can become a centre for the character development of students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally, socially, and morally mature.

2.3. Discipline in Education and Positive Discipline in Education

In the context of education, discipline is defined as the regularity of student behaviour in accordance with applicable school norms and rules. Critically, discipline transcends mere formal obedience; it is a form of self-control arising from personal awareness and responsibility. Discipline has an internal dimension where students learn to organise their conduct based on their own convictions, rather than yielding to external pressure (Siregar et al., 2024). However, school discipline is often narrowly interpreted as punishment (punitive). Goodman (2006) observed that many schools enforce discipline through harsh sanctions, resulting in student obedience driven by fear rather than genuine moral awareness. This highlights the essential need for a paradigm shift from a punitive model to an approach that is more humanistic, participatory, and educational, ensuring that discipline serves as a genuine tool for character formation, rather than just a mechanism of control.

Emerging as a viable alternative to the punitive approach, positive discipline is an educational framework centred on fostering students' self-awareness, responsibility, and independence without the use of physical or verbal punishment. Slađana and Dušica (2021) highlight that this approach encourages students to actively understand the consequences of their actions and subsequently learn how to correct their mistakes, moving beyond the passive acceptance of sanctions imposed by the teacher. Aji et al. (2020) identifies several key characteristics of positive discipline: it emphasizes positive teacher-student relationships to cultivate a supportive learning environment; it utilizes reflection on mistakes as a genuine means of learning rather than as a focus for punishment; it employs logical consequences that are educational rather than harmful; and it actively encourages student participation in decision-making, thereby instilling a sense of responsibility and ownership over the rules. Consequently, positive discipline is not merely a method for reducing negative behaviour; it proactively builds students' crucial social-emotional competence, fundamentally strengthening character education

2.4. Theories Support, Implementation, and Relevance

The theoretical foundation of positive discipline is supported by key psychological and educational frameworks, establishing it as a strategy for character development beyond mere classroom management. Social Learning Theory posits that behaviour is learned through observation, interaction, and reinforcement (Bandura, 1986; Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022; Mujahidah & Yusdiana, 2023), aligning with positive discipline's focus on teacher modelling, reflective practice, and rewarding constructive behaviour. Humanistic Theory emphasises nurturing student potential through freedom, empathy, and responsibility, while self-control theory highlights the role of internal regulation in preventing deviant behaviour

(Hirschi, 2017; Rogers, 1969). Together, these theories underscore that positive discipline strengthens self-awareness, social learning, and moral responsibility.

In practice, positive discipline enhances character education by fostering responsibility, independent decision-making, and consistent moral behaviour without relying on punishment (Lickona, 1992; Muslich, 2022). Effective implementation requires teacher consistency as moral role models, parental involvement, and a supportive, inclusive school culture (Slađana & Dušica, 2021; Sher & Inammullah, 2025). Challenges include teachers' habitual reliance on punitive methods, students' initial lack of moral awareness, and limited time for reflection, which can be mitigated through training, parent engagement, and school-wide support (Aji et al., 2020; Siregar et al., 2024).

At SMA Negeri 2 Slawi, the 2025 Education Report Card shows a character score of 61.1 (Good category), indicating progress but revealing gaps in responsibility, independence, and social concern. Positive discipline addresses these gaps by reducing code violations through reflective practices, promoting self-control over fear-driven obedience, and enhancing parental and school involvement to reinforce values such as responsibility, independence, discipline, and integrity. Thus, it functions both as a behaviour management method and a systematic means to support character education in line with national policies and prior research.

3. Methods

This study uses the literature review method with a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives, specifically analyzing the implementation of positive disciplines in strengthening character education, based on theoretical studies, previous research results, and relevant official reports. According to Snyder (2019), a literature review aims to identify, evaluate, and interpret previous research that is related to the topic being studied. Thus, this study does not collect primary data from the field but rather utilises secondary data obtained from various academic sources and official documents.

The literature review procedure was carried out by searching articles in national (Garuda, Sinta) and international (Scopus, Google Scholar, Elsevier) databases using the keywords 'positive discipline' and 'character education'. After being selected based on relevance criteria, year of publication (2016–2025), language, and only from credible journals, the researcher then took the data.

The data sources in this study include: (1) national and international journal articles discussing the concept and implementation of positive discipline and character education; (2) academic books covering character education theory, educational psychology, and classroom management; and (3) the 2025 State High School Education Report Card, showing a character achievement score of 61.1 (Good category). The literature review followed a structured thematic analysis model adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure systematic identification and interpretation of recurring patterns related to positive discipline and character education.

Data analysis was conducted in four stages: (1) literature identification, selecting credible and relevant journals, books, and reports with theoretical and empirical contributions; (2) literature evaluation, assessing the quality and relevance of the identified sources to identify similarities, differences, and gaps; (3) synthesis of findings, extracting patterns, trends, and key themes on positive discipline and connecting previous research to conditions at SMAN 2 Slawi; and (4) thematic analysis, developing main themes such as implementation strategies, impacts on student responsibility and independence, and supporting or inhibiting factors. The thematic analysis framework focuses on three main aspects: (a) supporting factors, including teacher consistency, parental involvement, conducive school culture, and

management support; (b) challenges, such as habitual use of punitive approaches, students' fear-based compliance, and limited time for reflection and dialogue, highlighting that the shift to positive discipline requires continuous adaptation; and (c) impacts on character education, enhancing student responsibility, independence, discipline, and fostering a safe, inclusive, and supportive school environment that integrates moral knowing, feeling, and action. This framework ensures a systematic and comprehensive understanding of positive discipline's relevance in strengthening character education, particularly at SMAN 2 Slawi, providing an in-depth view of its application in secondary education.

4. Results

Based on the results of the literature review, several main findings were obtained related to the implementation of positive discipline in strengthening character education, namely: Positive discipline is validated as a no-penalty approach because it successfully increases students' self-awareness and responsibility without resorting to physical or verbal punishment (Slađana & Dušica, 2021). This approach emphasises learning from mistakes through reflection, not threats or fears. These findings are highly relevant to the condition of schools in Indonesia, which often use a punitive approach where punishment is considered the main means of discipline enforcement. In fact, punishment only results in momentary obedience, while positive discipline fosters deeper and more sustained awareness.

Lickona (2019) emphasised that true character education must involve three dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Positive discipline is an effective medium to integrate these three aspects because students not only understand the correct grades but also learn to feel the impact of each action and try to improve it. Thus, character education doesn't stop at the cognitive realm but is completely internalised into everyday attitudes and behaviours.

Aji et al. (2020) research shows that the application of positive discipline in secondary schools can reduce the number of disciplinary violations by up to 30% in one semester. These results prove the effectiveness of positive discipline in shaping student awareness. The data is in line with the achievements of the 2025 SMAN 2 Slawi Education Report Card, where the character indicator obtained a score of 61.1 (good category). Although it is quite good, this achievement still has significant room for improvement to be able to reach the Very Good category. Therefore, positive discipline has great potential to strengthen character achievement in the school. Muslich (2022) emphasised that the success of positive discipline is greatly influenced by teacher consistency, school management support, and parent involvement. These factors are an important foundation for positive discipline to be applied in a sustainable manner. In line with that, Siregar et al. (2024) also emphasised the importance of a conducive school culture, where discipline is not only imposed through rules but becomes a habit that is internalised in students' daily lives. With support from various parties, positive discipline will be easier to apply and have a real impact on character building (Siregar et al., 2024).

In the context of SMAN 2 Slawi, positive discipline is a key strategy to improve character achievement, as indicated in the education report card. The application of positive discipline is implemented through the collaboration of parents and teachers to build character in children's educational activities. This activity is a routine forum held every six months with the theme: building synergy between teachers and parents in implementing positive discipline to shape student character. The primary goal is to equalise perceptions of the positive discipline concept, explore practical strategies for its application both at school and at home, and draw up a collaboration agreement between teachers and parents in accompanying children. Participants in this activity consist of school principals, homeroom teachers, guidance and counselling teachers, and parents of students.

The results of this activity are in the form of a positive discipline collaboration map document between teachers and parents, the formation of a joint commitment to strengthening student character, and increased communication between teachers and parents in accompanying children to be more disciplined and characterful. The results of this literature review show that positive discipline is relevant to be implemented in secondary schools, including at SMAN 2 Slawi. In addition to being proven effective in reducing violations, this approach is also able to integrate the values of character education into the real experience of students and strengthen the achievement of character indicators that still need to be improved.

5. Discussion

The results of the literature review show that positive discipline cannot be seen solely as a technical strategy in classroom management, but is an important instrument in strengthening character education (Krisdianti & Yoedo, 2021; Simanjuntak et al., 2024). If associated with the context of SMAN 2 Slawi, the character indicator score of 61.1, which is still in the good category, shows that there is a great opportunity to improve these achievements through the consistent application of positive discipline.

The literature shows that the punitive approach does not build long-term awareness but instead fosters pseudo-obedience because it is driven by fear. Aji et al. (2020) found that punishment does not train students to understand mistakes and correct them consciously, so the impact is temporary. In contrast, positive discipline emphasises learning through reflection, understanding consequences, and student involvement in decision-making (Berkowitz & Bier, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2022). According to Lickona (1992), which emphasises the importance of integration between moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Thus, positive discipline can be a bridge for students to internalise moral values in daily behaviour. In the context of education in Indonesia, many schools still use a punishment-based discipline approach. Punishment is considered a quick way to discipline students, even though its effectiveness is limited. The biggest challenge is to change the paradigm of teachers from punitive to positive approaches. However, this challenge also opens up opportunities for transformation, where schools can switch to a more humanistic, inclusive coaching pattern and support the overall development of students' character.

If this transformation is successful, positive discipline can become an alternative that is not only effective but also in accordance with the values of character education mandated by national policies. The application of positive discipline at SMAN 2 Slawi has practical implications that can be felt by all parties involved in education in detail as follows: for teachers, positive discipline encourages the birth of positive language habits in daily interactions with students, replacing punishment patterns with more constructive educational consequences, such as reflection assignments, social projects, or writing improvement commitments. Teachers also play a role in scheduling regular classroom reflection sessions so that students can assess their behaviour and progress, as well as integrate positive discipline values into all subjects, so that they are not limited to student activities (Campoli & Darling-Hammond, 2022; Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). Meanwhile, for parents, the application of positive discipline requires active involvement in regular meetings with teachers to equalise perceptions of the rules and consequences that apply in schools. For parents, this program is also expected to support them at home by enforcing rules that are in line with school values, such as discipline during study time and homework responsibilities, as well as participating in parenting programs or workshops to strengthen positive discipline-based parenting.

For students, the application of positive discipline provides space for self-reflection after making mistakes so that they not only receive punishment, but also

learn to improve themselves. Students are also involved in the drafting of classroom and school rules, which foster a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. In addition, they receive guidance to make restitution, for example, repairing losses due to violations or making a positive contribution to the school environment. In terms of school culture, positive discipline fosters a safe and supportive atmosphere where students are not afraid to make mistakes because they are confident they will be guided to correct them. The consistent practice of discipline by all teachers also promotes uniformity in rules, thereby strengthening the sense of justice and order. Furthermore, the school will be formed as a collaborative community, where teachers, students, and parents work together to foster a character of responsibility and independence. Thus, positive discipline at SMAN 2 Slawi is not limited to formal policies; it is manifested in concrete actions that are sustainable and have an impact on the holistic formation of student character.

6. Conclusion

The application of positive discipline at SMAN 2 Slawi has proven to be an effective strategy in strengthening character education, because it is able to replace traditional punishment patterns with educational consequences that foster student awareness, responsibility, and independence. The 2025 Education Report's character indicator score of 61.1 indicates the need for improvement through implementing positive discipline to reduce violations and strengthen moral knowing, feeling, and action. Teacher consistency in using positive language, parental support for school rules, and student participation in reflection and rule-making foster a safe, collaborative school culture. Consistent application of positive discipline enhances classroom management, strengthens student character toward the Excellent category, and supports the national education goal of developing intelligent and virtuous individuals.

The implementation of positive discipline carries important implications for teachers, parents, and students, as it encourages reflective and participatory approaches, fosters student engagement in rule-making and self-reflection, and promotes responsibility, independence, and moral awareness within a safe and inclusive school culture. It also demonstrates the practical relevance of social learning, humanistic, and self-control theories in guiding holistic character development. However, this study has limitations, as it relies solely on secondary data, focuses specifically on SMAN 2 Slawi, does not assess the long-term effects of positive discipline, and does not account for variations in teacher practices, parental involvement, or school support, which may influence the consistency and effectiveness of its implementation. For future research, it is recommended to explore the long-term impact of positive discipline on student character development across different schools and regions, to examine additional factors that influence its effectiveness, such as teacher training, parental engagement, and school resources, and to investigate how positive discipline can be integrated with digital learning or other innovative educational practices to further enhance student responsibility, independence, and moral development.

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Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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