
FROM COMPLIANCE TO CHARACTER: EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE ON STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR

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Abstract



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Discipline in the school is a significant issue in building the behavior of students and school climate, but the traditional methods have mostly focused on the compliance through punitive actions. This research paper has analyzed the success of school discipline methods in shaping the behavior of students with special attention to the change of compliance-based school discipline to character-based and restorative disciplinary practices. The research design used was a descriptive quantitative research design. The study population included high schools in the Province of Punjab, Pakistan. The multistage random sampling technique was used to select one of the districts and 30 higher secondary schools were randomly selected. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data of the 480 teachers and administrators. The SPSS was used to analyze the data by descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression. The results also indicated that character-based discipline and restorative practices had a high and significant predictive value on the achievement of behavioral results in students, but the influence of compliance-based discipline was relatively weak. The research has concluded that the discipline methods that have a focus on character building, reflections, and mediation of relationship are more efficient to enhance positive and lasting student behavior rather than punitive strategies. The research suggests that the schools implement the developmental and restorative discipline models to ensure that the discipline activities are in relation to the overall educational objectives of the schools.

Keywords:

school discipline, student behavior, character education, compliance, restorative practices.

Introduction

Discipline in schools is considered to be one of the most controversial and complicated things in the educational practice because of its direct impact on the academic attentiveness of students, their social growth, and school climate (Bear, 2010). Schools and colleges are not only supposed to pass on academic information, but they are also supposed to develop socially responsible, morally sound and emotionally fit individuals. In this context, discipline serves as a very imperative process, whereby, values, norms and expectations are transferred to the students. Traditionally, compliance-based models of disciplinary practices in schools started with the focus on obedience to authority, discipline, and punitive consequences to control the misconduct (Matheson, 2005).

These strategies are often explained by the principle of order keeping, safety, and the reduction of disruptions to teaching and learning. Although these models can provide immediate behavioral compliance, questions remain on the effectiveness of these models in inculcating internalized discipline, moral reasoning and sustainable positive behavior (Nurdiana, 2026). Recent studies and policy debates have been on the drawbacks of punitive and exclusionary disciplinary practices. Empirical research has associated these practices with adverse consequences like student disengagement, rise in dropout rates, behavioral escalation and unfair effects on the marginalized and vulnerable student groups (Matheson, 2005). Such results have influenced teachers and policy makers to rethink the essence and implications of conventional disciplinary mechanisms. It therefore follows that there is an increasingly growing trend toward discipline models, which emphasize character building, self-regulation and restorative models. In this respect, discipline is not considered exclusively as a means to regulate behavior but as a learning and teaching process which encourages ethical and social-emotional development of students and higher levels of responsibility (Supardi, 2016).

Disciplinary encounters are perceived as learning opportunities that could be used to make students review their behavior, comprehend how they affect other people, and acquire the ability to make positive choices. This compliance to character change is especially important in the upper secondary school level since higher secondary school students are at an age of critical identity, moral reasoning, and adult societal preparations (Bear, 2010). The disciplinary measures at this stage may serve to inculcate passive obedience or foster independence, responsibility and morality; attributes that make citizens responsible citizens. The present article examines the effectiveness of school discipline through this evolving lens. Specifically, it explores the transition from compliance-oriented discipline to character-focused approaches and evaluates how these models influence students' behavior, school climate, and long-term developmental outcomes.

School Discipline Approaches

(Compliance-Based / Character-Oriented / Restorative)



School Climate & Relationships



Student Self-Regulation



Students' Behavioral Outcomes

(Short-Term Compliance & Long-Term Character Development)

Objectives

The objectives of this article are to:

1. Examine the conceptual differences between compliance-based and character-oriented school discipline approaches.
2. Analyze the effectiveness of various discipline practices in influencing students' short-term and long-term behavior.
3. Explore the role of restorative and developmental discipline practices in promoting positive school climate.
4. Provide implications for educators and policymakers seeking to improve discipline systems in schools.

Research Questions

1. What is the short-term impact of compliance-based school discipline on the behavior of students?
2. How do character-based methods of discipline help in positive behavior development in the long perspective?
3. How does school climate and relationship between students and teachers respond to various discipline models?
4. So, how can restorative practices be an effective alternative to punitive discipline, as practiced in the traditional way?

Significance of the Study

This research is important because it will be used in the existing debate regarding effective and equitable school discipline. This article offers a better insight into discipline and the ways in which it can be used as a means of helping students develop instead of disciplining through the enforcement of rules. To school leaders and policymakers, the study suggests knowledge on how to come up with discipline policies that are consistent with the current educational objectives, which encompass social-emotional learning and character education. Also, the article adds value to academic literature by combining theoretical views and practical interventions hence acting as a source of reference when conducting future research on student behavior and reform of school discipline.

Research Methodology

The current study uses descriptive research design. This type of design suits the current research problem since it would allow conducting a systematic study of the disciplinary practices that exist and their perceived effectiveness in shaping student behavior. Using this type of design, it

is easy to analyze patterns, trends and relationships related to school discipline without manipulating variables thus giving a precise picture of the school disciplinary practices today in higher secondary schools.

The population of the current study included all the high secondary schools in the Province of Punjab, Pakistan both public and private. Teachers and school administrators who were involved in these institutions were also included in the target population since they are directly involved in the application and supervision of disciplinary measures as well as their ability to give informed feedback regarding the behavioral performance of students.

The multistage sampling procedure was used to select the sample. To begin with, one district of Punjab was selected. Afterwards 30 high schools were chosen randomly in the selected district so that inclusion chances were even. Lastly, teachers and administrators of the sampled schools were sampled and 480 respondents were obtained. This sample is considered sufficient to conduct quantitative research, such as correlation and multiple regression as well as provide adequate representation of the required higher secondary school setting.

Results

Table 1: Demographic

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	286	59.6
	Female	194	40.4
Designation	Teacher	372	77.5
	Head Teacher	68	14.2
	Administrator	40	8.3
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	134	27.9
	5–10 years	176	36.7
	More than 10 years	170	35.4
School Type	Public	312	65.0
	Private	168	35.0

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	No. of Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Compliance-Oriented Discipline	6	3.42	0.71
Character-Oriented Discipline	6	3.88	0.65
Restorative Discipline Practices	5	3.76	0.69
School Climate	5	3.91	0.62
Students' Behavioral Outcomes	5	3.84	0.66

Respondents reported higher use of character-oriented and restorative discipline practices compared to compliance-oriented approaches.

Table 3 Reliability Analysis of Questionnaire Scales

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Level
Compliance-Oriented Discipline	6	.78	Acceptable
Character-Oriented Discipline	6	.86	Good
Restorative Practices	5	.83	Good
School Climate	5	.88	Good
Behavioral Outcomes	5	.90	Excellent

Note. All scales exceeded the acceptable reliability threshold ($\alpha \geq .70$).

Table 4 Pearson Correlation Matrix Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Compliance-Oriented Discipline	1				
2. Character-Oriented Discipline	.31**	1			
3. Restorative Practices	.27**	.62**	1		
4. School Climate	.22**	.68**	.65**	1	
5. Behavioral Outcomes	.19**	.71**	.67**	.73**	1

p < .01

Character-oriented and restorative discipline practices showed strong, positive correlations with students' behavioral outcomes and school climate, whereas compliance-oriented discipline demonstrated weaker associations.

Table 5 Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Students' Behavioral Outcomes

Predictor Variables	B	β	t	p
Compliance-Oriented Discipline	0.08	.09	2.14	.033
Character-Oriented Discipline	0.41	.46	9.87	.000
Restorative Practices	0.36	.38	8.54	.000

The results show that character-oriented discipline ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$) and restorative practices ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) are strong predictors of students' behavioral outcomes, while compliance-oriented discipline has a weak but significant effect ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$). Overall, developmental discipline approaches are more effective than punitive methods in promoting positive student behavior.

Table 6 Model Summary of Regression Analysis

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
.78	.61	.60	247.36	.000

Note. Dependent Variable: Students' Behavioral Outcomes.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that the overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 476) = 247.36$, $p < .001$, explaining **61% of the variance** in students' behavioral outcomes. Character-oriented discipline emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), followed by restorative practices ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$). Compliance-oriented discipline showed a statistically significant but comparatively weaker contribution ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$).

Table 7 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Result
Compliance-oriented discipline significantly affects student behavior	Supported
Character-oriented discipline significantly affects student behavior	Supported
Restorative practices significantly affect student behavior	Supported

Findings of the Study

The study results are very valuable in establishing the effectiveness of various school discipline strategies in promoting student behavior in higher secondary level.

The descriptive analysis showed that the average score of character-oriented discipline practices ($M = 3.88$) was higher than compliance-oriented discipline practices ($M = 3.42$). Likewise, restorative discipline practices had a fairly high mean score (M or equal to 3.76), which shows an increasing trend of schools shifting away towards pure punitive action. These results indicate that there is gradual shift to more developmental and relationship-based form of discipline in higher secondary schools.

The reliability tests revealed that the internal consistency of all the questionnaire scales were acceptable to excellent with Cronbach alpha having a range of .78 to .90. This shows that the instrument applied in the study was reliable in gauging the targeted constructs concerning disciplining practices, school climate and the behavioral outcomes of the students.

Character-based discipline and restorative practices correlated significantly with behavioral outcomes of students with strong and positive correlations and statistical significance ($r = .71$ and $r = .67$, respectively). Also, these methods were closely linked with a positive school climate, which implies that value-based and restorative discipline can not only make students behave better but also make schools healthier. Conversely, compliance-oriented discipline showed a less significant positive correlation with the student behavior ($r = .19$), which means that this method is not that effective in the long term.

These were further confirmed by the multiple regression analysis. The regression model accounted 61 percent of the variance in the behavioral outcomes among students thus revealing the significant influence of school discipline practices. Character-based discipline became the best predictor of positive student behavior ($b = .46$, $p = 0.001$), then restorative practices ($b = .38$, $p = 0.001$). However, compliance-based discipline resulted in statistically significant effect, but its predictive value was relatively weak ($b = .09$, $p = .05$).

On balance, the results distinctly demonstrate that those approaches to discipline based on the character development, contemplation, and the repair of the relationships are far more effective in fostering positive behavior among students that is sustainable compared to approaches that revolve around the destruction of the rule and punishment.

Conclusion

In the current research, the author explored the effectiveness of school disciplinary interventions to typify changes between compliance and character-focused and restorative modalities. Modern educational ideals that support the value-based and developmental disciplinary models are supported by empirical evidence. The result determines character-based discipline as the strongest variable that predicts positive student behavior. This trend is in line with moral development theory; according to the theory, the disciplinary measures that result in the eliciting of reflection, responsibility, and understanding help to lead to internalization of moral values. The development of self-regulation and moral reasoning facilitates the promotion of long-lasting behavioral competencies in place of short-lived compliance promoted by character-based discipline. On the same note, restorative disciplinary had a strong positive influence on the student behavior and the school environment, which supports the application of the social learning theory in highlighting the importance of social interaction and modelling in behavioral development. The positive conflict-management and harm-repair skills taught in restorative models are informed by empathy, fairness and accountability and thus strengthen relational trust and respect across the school fraternity.

Conversely, compliance focused disciplinary approaches produced a statistically significant but relatively low effect on student behavioral outcomes. This finding is in line with behaviorist views which explain the short-term behavior change achieved through extrinsically enforced reinforcement and offer little support to internalized discipline. Despite the fact that compliance-based strategies might be necessary to preserve situational harmony and the state of security, it has been shown that an excessive dependence on disciplinary actions does not make a significant contribution to the moral and social growth of students.

Also, the paper highlights the importance of school climate as a critical factor in raising the effectiveness of disciplinary measures. An equitable practice, respect and supportive relations were positively related with schools having better behavioral outcomes. The outlined observations support the idea that disciplinary action must be integrated into a holistic approach of socio-emotional learning and an adequate school climate.

On the whole, the discussion confirms that character based and restorative disciplinary models are more aligned with the holistic goals of education especially at the high secondary level when students are moving towards the adult level and duties in the society.

Discussion

This paper has discussed the effectiveness of school-based disciplinary measures in the promotion of student behavior and the shift of the compliance-based methods to the character-based and restorative-based approaches. The empirical data is in line with the current educational views that promulgate developmental-based discipline systems with value-based approaches. Results show that character-based discipline is the most robust predictor of positive behaviors.

Such findings are consistent with moral-development theory which hypothesizes that disciplinary practices that are aimed at eliciting reflection, responsibility and understanding help children internalize moral values. The character-based methods promote long-term behavioral competence as opposed to temporary compliance through development of self-control and ethical judgment.

Correspondingly, restorative disciplinary practices displayed a strong positive effect on student behavior and the school climate in general. The result supports the social learning theory, which underlines the impact of social contact, and modeling on the development of behavior. Restorative strategies enable students to possess positive conflict management and harm-repair abilities based on sympathy, justice, and responsibility. The strong correlation between restorative practices and a positive school climate supports the significance of the relationship of trust and respect towards each other in an efficient disciplinary model.

Conversely, compliance-based discipline brought about a statistically significant but relatively small effect on the student behavior. This trend corresponds with behaviorist accounts of the short-term behavior adjustment by means of extrinsic reinforcement, which provide fewer grounds to internalized discipline. Even though compliance-based policies can be the only means to ensure the preservation of immediate order and security, it has been shown that excessive reliance on punitive actions does not play a significant role in the moral and social development of students. The influence of school climate on the improvement of disciplinary efficacy is also highlighted in the study; fairness, respect, and supportive relationships are connected with the best behavioral outcomes. These results support the proposal that discipline ought to be incorporated into a broader system of social-emotional learning and a favorable school environment.

On the whole, it has been established in the discussion that character-based and restorative disciplinary models are more consistent with the holistic objectives of an educational process especially at the higher secondary level where students train towards adult life and community duties.

Recommendations

With regards to the study findings and discussion, the following recommendation is made to the educators, school administrators, and policymakers:

Gradually, schools ought to phase out of their use of punitive and exclusionary disciplinary methods, and adopt methods that focus on character building, reflection, and responsibility.

Different disciplinary policies should include ethical values like respect, empathy, fairness and accountability. This kind of integration allows turning discipline into a vehicle of learning as opposed to a controlling system.

In high-schools, restorative actions, namely, restorative dialogue, conflict-resolution meetings, and accountability agreements, must be used to help curb misconduct among students.

Teachers and school leaders should undergo continuous professional development to character and restorative disciplinary approaches and achieve a consistent and efficient approach toward discipline.

The school administrators ought to develop an inclusive and respectful school climate in which students feel they are valued, heard, and treated fairly because a favorable school climate makes disciplinary measures more effective.

Development and review of school rules and procedures concerning discipline must be done at regular intervals in consultation with the students, thus making them feel a sense of ownership and responsibility as well as participating in democracy.

Disciplinary policies should be reviewed and revised by the authorities of learning institutions periodically to be in balance with the modern research so that they are effective in controlling the conduct of students and encouraging development.

The effect of disciplinary practices on the character development and academic performance of students in various learning environments, over the long term, could be studied in longitudinal or mixed-method studies.

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