



Transforming School Behavior Management: Integrating Positive Discipline within Educational Leadership Frameworks

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the forms of student behavior management in schools and to explore how educational institutions transition from reactive disciplinary practices to positive, supportive approaches. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate five main strategies employed by teachers: stern reprimands, standing punishments, cleaning tasks, verbal appreciation, and praise. The first three represent traditional, reactive disciplinary methods that effectively manage immediate classroom disruptions but have limited impact on fostering long-term behavioral awareness. In contrast, verbal appreciation and praise reflect the initial implementation of positive reinforcement, promoting students' confidence, responsiveness, and cooperation. The imbalance between punishment and reward practices highlights the lack of structured behavior management policies and the need for systematic educational management. The study concludes that schools are gradually shifting toward a more humanistic and proactive approach to behavior management. The implications emphasize the importance of clear written guidelines, teacher training to enhance competence in positive disciplinary strategies, and the development of a supportive school culture that integrates social-emotional learning and leadership principles to strengthen overall classroom management.

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INTRODUCTION

Student behavior management is a critical aspect that significantly affects the quality and success of the teaching and learning process in schools worldwide. Effective behavior management is not only essential for maintaining discipline but also plays a pivotal role in shaping students' character, motivation, and social-emotional development. Inadequate behavior management can lead

to classroom disruption, low academic achievement, absenteeism, and deviant behaviors, ultimately impacting societal productivity and well-being (Karasova & Nehyba, 2023). Schools are expected to create learning environments that balance discipline with positive reinforcement, preparing students to become responsible citizens. Therefore, studying behavior management is crucial, as it addresses both educational quality and broader societal concerns. By understanding and improving how schools manage student behavior, particularly through proactive and positive approaches, policymakers, educators, and communities can foster a generation that is academically competent, socially responsible, and psychologically resilient (Dewi & Suriansyah, 2025).

Despite national regulations prohibiting violence and repressive practices in education, many schools, particularly in rural areas, continue to rely on traditional, reactive disciplinary models (Setiyadi et al., 2025; Raynel Matheus Kapioru et al., 2025). Reactive discipline, often characterized by verbal reprimands or physical punishment, focuses on immediate behavioral control rather than long-term character development. This approach fails to promote intrinsic motivation, positive social interaction, and a constructive school climate, which are critical dimensions of educational management. Moreover, rural schools face unique challenges due to socio-economic and cultural factors, such as limited resources, close-knit communities, and local norms that influence student behavior (Tempur, 2024). Consequently, there is a pressing need for school administrators and educational leaders to adopt proactive, humanistic behavior management strategies that align with contemporary educational management principles, ensuring that disciplinary practices contribute positively to both learning outcomes and students' holistic development (Munandar et al., 2025).

Field observations in rural schools, such as MTs Islamiyah in Sentul Village, reveal a persistent reliance on reactive disciplinary methods. Teachers reported frequent use of harsh verbal reprimands, minor physical punishments, and strict rule enforcement. While some students temporarily comply, many exhibit resistance, including declining motivation, increased absenteeism, and indifference toward learning activities. Conversely, teachers who apply positive strategies, such as giving appreciation, fostering respectful interactions, and modeling courteous behavior, receive noticeably better responses from students (Wibowo & Salfadilah, 2025). This indicates that behavioral outcomes are closely linked to the quality of classroom management and leadership. The field phenomenon highlights a gap between educational regulations, theoretical best practices, and actual implementation. It underscores the need for rural schools to reorient behavior management towards strategies that are not only effective in controlling behavior but also consistent with educational management principles that emphasize motivation, engagement, and student-centered leadership.

Previous research has extensively examined positive approaches to behavior management, particularly in urban school contexts. Studies show that reinforcement-based strategies, such as reward systems, appreciation, and recognition, significantly reduce student misbehavior and enhance learning motivation (Mia Anisa Syahputri & Ade Akhmad Saputra, 2025). The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, developed in the United States, emphasizes preventive, consistent, and reward-based strategies rather than reactive punishment (Horner & Sugai, 2015). The theoretical foundation is supported by B.F. Skinner's behaviorism, which posits that behavior can be shaped through stimuli, responses, and positive reinforcement (Putri & Nawangtoro, 2025). While these studies provide critical insights into behavior management, their focus is primarily on urban schools or institutionalized educational settings, often neglecting the social, cultural, and leadership dimensions inherent in rural contexts. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on how positive behavior management strategies are operationalized in rural schools where community culture and local values play a central role in students' behavioral patterns.

Moreover, research examining rural education highlights unique challenges, such as close student-teacher relationships, traditional community norms, and limited access to modern pedagogical tools (Tempur, 2024; Mubarok et al., 2024). While some studies have reported improvements in student behavior through positive reinforcement and empowerment strategies, few have explored the integration of educational management principles, leadership, and local cultural values in shaping sustainable behavior management models. This gap is critical, as effective behavior management in rural schools requires alignment with the broader dimensions of educational leadership, including planning, supervision, and creating a supportive school climate. Addressing this research gap is important to develop contextually relevant strategies that enhance both student behavior and overall school performance, ensuring that rural schools can serve as exemplary models of humanistic and effective educational management (Karasova & Nehyba, 2023; Munandar et al., 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to integrate modern behaviorism and PBIS principles with rural education management, religious values, and local cultural wisdom. Unlike previous studies that focused solely on technical behavior management strategies, this research emphasizes a holistic approach that incorporates the dimensions of school leadership, organizational planning, and classroom climate management. By combining positive reinforcement strategies with the cultivation of noble character and tarbiyah values, this study produces a model that is contextually tailored to rural Islamic schools. This approach is particularly important in Indonesia, where rural schools often lack

structured guidance for sustainable behavior management (Wibowo & Salfadilah, 2025). Consequently, the study offers a novel framework for educators and policymakers, demonstrating that proactive, positive, and culturally aligned behavior management can lead to meaningful improvements in both student behavior and educational outcomes.

Based on the identified gaps, this study aims to analyze how behavioral management reorientation in rural schools can shift from reactive discipline to a positive, proactive approach. Specifically, it seeks to identify existing practices, obstacles, and innovative strategies that integrate educational management principles, including planning, leadership, supervision, and classroom climate development. The research argues that student behavior management should not merely enforce rules but foster intrinsic motivation, self-responsibility, and character development. By focusing on rural schools, this study contributes to bridging the gap between theory and practice, offering evidence-based strategies that are adaptable, sustainable, and aligned with local culture and educational leadership frameworks (Munandar et al., 2025; Satria & Fauzan, 2024). The findings are expected to provide actionable insights for administrators, teachers, and policymakers to enhance both learning environments and holistic student development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the research objective, which is to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of behavior management in rural schools. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to explore the meaning, patterns of interaction, and social dynamics behind the shift in behavior management from a reactive discipline to a positive approach.

The research location was set at MTs Islamiyah in Sentul Village, Gading District, Probolinggo Regency. This school was chosen because it was considered to represent the typology of rural schools that still face obstacles in student behavior management but are beginning to show improvement efforts through more positive strategies. The research subjects consisted of the head of the madrasah, teachers, educational staff, and several students. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance and direct involvement in behavioral management practices at the school.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques. First, participatory observation was used to directly observe patterns of interaction between teachers and students, including forms of discipline and efforts to reinforce positive behavior. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, school principals, and students to obtain rich

information about their experiences. Third, documentation was used to collect written data such as school rules, disciplinary records, and other supporting archives.

The main research instrument was the researcher himself, supported by observation and interview guidelines. Data analysis was performed using Miles and Huberman's interactive technique, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure validity, source triangulation was used by comparing information from the principal, teachers, and students, as well as technique triangulation by combining the results of observation, interviews, and documentation. Member checks were also conducted by reconfirming the data with the informants to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation. With this methodological design, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the reorientation of behavior management in rural schools, particularly in relation to the shift from reactive discipline to a more humanistic and constructive positive approach.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The phenomenon of student behavior management at MTs Islamiyah in Sentul Village, Gading District, shows an interesting dynamic. This school, located in a rural environment, demonstrates how traditional disciplinary patterns still dominate teachers' daily practices, but at the same time, there is a new tendency to apply a more humanistic positive approach. This situation shows that the institution is in a transitional phase towards more educational behavior management practices, although the process has not yet been fully implemented. The rural social context, which values kinship, gives a unique flavor to disciplinary practices in schools, creating a tug-of-war between old, deeply rooted habits and new patterns oriented towards guidance (Fu, 2025).

To provide a more concrete illustration of this dynamic, consider a very common situation: a student arrives late to class. A senior teacher, who has been teaching for many years, will usually immediately reprimand the student in a loud voice and punish them by making them stand in front of the class or clean the school grounds. The student's response is defensive; they look down and try not to attract attention. On another occasion, a younger teacher faced a similar situation but chose a different approach. He asked the student the reason for being late and encouraged the student to improve his habits in a more persuasive manner. Surprisingly, the student's response was calmer and did not show excessive anxiety. This simple simulation reflects a pattern that occurs in real life at school, while also showing the very different emotional impacts of the two disciplinary approaches used by teachers at the institution.

One teacher once said that "children seem to follow instructions more easily when given simple praise, but they also quickly obey when reprimanded in a firm voice." This brief statement contains two important messages: teachers know that praise can motivate students to learn, but at the same time they also feel that punishment is the quickest way to curb deviant behavior. From this, it is clear that behavioral management practices in schools are currently at a crossroads between the old punishment-oriented approach and a new pattern that emphasizes guidance. A general overview of observations in schools also shows a similar situation, where positive approaches are slowly growing but are not yet strong enough to replace the reactive patterns that have been ingrained for years. Based on the results of the study, it was found that behavior management in rural schools is as follows:

Table. Findings on Behavior Management at MTs Islamiyah Sentul Village

No	Research Results	Key Facts	Student Responses	Emerging Barriers
1	Harsh reprimands	Teachers still use stern reprimands to quell disruptive behavior. This approach is a legacy of old disciplinary patterns in rural schools.	Some students became fearful or shy, while others showed apathy because they were used to being scolded harshly.	Severe reprimands are effective for quick discipline, but they do not bring about long-term behavioral change and reduce learning comfort.
2	Standing punishment	Standing punishment is still used as a form of behavioral control, especially by senior teachers. This practice arises due to a lack of training in positive behavior management.	The students obeyed because they had no choice, but some admitted that they did not understand the reasons for the punishment, so they did not develop behavioral awareness.	Standing punishment is not in line with the positive discipline approach and tends to perpetuate reactive patterns.
3	Cleaning the Yard	Cleaning the school grounds was used as a form of social punishment. Teachers believed that this activity would make students "repent" while also keeping the school clean.	Students accepted the assignment even though they felt it was not a solution to the problem, but merely an additional burden.	This practice is not very educational because it focuses on physical work rather than on understanding the values of discipline or responsibility.

4 Appreciation	Appreciative efforts began to emerge, such as giving simple recognition when students exhibited good behavior. This was an early sign of a shift toward a positive approach.	Students are more enthusiastic and feel appreciated. Positive behavior is more easily repeated when teachers consistently give appreciation.	The application of appreciation is not yet evenly distributed because not all teachers are accustomed to using positive approaches in learning.
5 Verbal praise	Verbal praise is given spontaneously to reinforce good behavior, although it is not yet a structured social-emotional strategy.	Praise makes students feel closer to their teachers and boosts their self-confidence..	Praise often depends on the personal initiative of teachers, rather than school policy, so consistency has not yet been established.

The table summarizes various forms of behavior management that are still used at MTs Islamiyah Desa Sentul. Each finding shows how disciplinary practices in rural schools are at a crossroads between old reactive patterns and new efforts that are beginning to move toward positive reinforcement. This picture emerges from teachers' experiences in dealing with everyday classroom situations, while also reflecting the real conditions of schools that do not yet have specific guidelines on behavior management. The differences in student responses to each strategy also show that the teacher's approach greatly influences the learning atmosphere and the development of student behavior. Overall, these findings provide a basis for understanding the need for more focused, consistent, and appropriate behavioral management changes in rural school environments. Below is a more detailed explanation of the research results:

Severe reprimands

In an interview with a PAI teacher, he explained that severe reprimands are still often used when students are considered to be disrupting the classroom atmosphere. The teacher mentioned that this method was chosen because it was considered to be able to quickly stop negative behavior. Several senior teachers also said that this method has long been used in schools and is considered part of the basic discipline that students must obey. From the students' perspective, some admitted to feeling nervous and afraid when receiving stern reprimands, while others chose to remain silent and not show resistance even though they were actually uncomfortable with the treatment.

The results of the interviews were consistent with school documentation showing that there were no specific guidelines on how to reprimand or deal with behavior. Attendance records and teacher duty reports show several cases of minor violations accompanied by notes stating "has been severely reprimanded by the teacher concerned." In addition, classroom observation sheets show that teachers raise their voices when disciplining students who talk among themselves or do not pay attention to the lesson. All of this documentation reinforces the fact that harsh reprimands are still the main practice in managing student behavior at school.

Research findings show that harsh reprimands are still the most widely used disciplinary strategy by teachers when dealing with disruptive behavior. This practice is maintained because it is considered to be a quicker way to control the classroom situation, even though it does not fully support the formation of positive behavior in the long term. Research results on the use of harsh reprimands show that schools still rely on a reactive disciplinary approach in disciplining students. Teachers often raise their voices to stop behavior that is considered disruptive, such as talking during class or not paying attention to instructions. Although harsh reprimands are considered effective in certain situations, student responses show that this approach does not always result in constructive behavioral change. Some students tend to feel pressured and choose to obey because they are afraid of receiving another reprimand. Meanwhile, some other students respond passively, which shows that harsh reprimands do not encourage personal awareness or responsibility.

The data description also shows that this practice stems from long-established habits in rural school environments. Teachers feel the need to maintain authority and order in the classroom, so a strong verbal approach is considered the quickest and easiest option. However, without clear behavioral management guidelines, harsh reprimands are used without considering the emotional impact on students (Suprapto & Sari, 2024). This condition shows that schools are actually in a transitional phase, where traditional disciplinary patterns are still used despite the emergence of a new awareness of the importance of a positive approach.

Standing Punishment

In an interview with a senior teacher, he explained that standing punishment is still used when students are considered undisciplined, for example, not paying attention to the teacher's explanations or disturbing their classmates. The teacher said that this practice is seen as a form of educational reprimand without the need for physical contact. According to him, standing in front of the class or in the corner of the room can have a deterrent effect while

reminding students to focus more. However, some of the students interviewed said that they did not always understand the reasons for their punishment. Some admitted that they only followed instructions so as not to cause more problems, but they felt that the punishment did not adequately explain what was wrong with their behavior.

The interview results were consistent with the daily violation records, which showed several entries listing the action of "standing in front of the class for several minutes" as a consequence for minor violations. In the learning observation sheet, there were one or two instances recorded where students were instructed to stand while the teacher gave further instructions. Furthermore, the school's internal documents do not include official procedures regarding the use of standing as a punishment, so its use depends entirely on the habits of each teacher. This documentation confirms that standing as a punishment is still part of the school's rule enforcement practices even though it has no clear policy basis.

Research findings show that standing punishment is still used as a means of enforcing discipline, especially by senior teachers. This practice is carried out because it is considered simple and effective, even though it is not accompanied by an explanation that helps students understand the reasons and objectives of the punishment. The results of research on standing punishment reveal that schools still maintain a disciplinary pattern that relies on minor physical actions as a form of behavior control. This punishment is given for violations that are considered minor, such as talking while the teacher is explaining or not completing instructions on time. Teachers believe that standing for a few minutes can provide enough pressure to remind students to be more orderly.

However, the students' responses show that this practice is not entirely educational. Many students simply follow orders without understanding the reasons for their punishment, so that awareness of the need to improve their behavior does not grow naturally. This situation shows that standing punishment is more mechanical in nature and does not give students room to reflect on their mistakes or learn from the situation.

From the perspective of the rural school context, the use of standing punishment stems from old habits passed down between teachers without any standard guidelines. The absence of policies governing behavior management has led teachers to use methods that have been familiar for a long time (Duwita et al., 2024). This practice reflects a pattern of behavior management that is still reactive and emphasizes instant compliance rather than meaningful behavioral change. Even though standing punishment is considered less severe than other methods, this approach is still not in line with efforts to develop a school climate that uses positive reinforcement as the basis for behavior management.

Cleaning the Schoolyard

The teachers interviewed explained that cleaning the schoolyard is often used as a form of punishment for students who commit minor offenses, such as arriving late, not bringing their school supplies, or talking while the teacher is explaining something. Teachers believe that this task not only has a deterrent effect, but also instills a sense of responsibility for the cleanliness of the school environment. Meanwhile, some students who were given this punishment said that they carried out the task because they did not want to prolong the problem with the teacher. However, some students felt that this activity was more like extra work rather than a lesson in discipline.

In line with school documentation, in the form of a record book of violations and daily reports by teachers on duty, there were a number of entries that listed "cleaning the yard" as a follow-up to certain violations. Photos of cleaning activities carried out by several students based on teacher instructions were also found in the school area. In addition, field observations revealed moments when students were instructed to sweep the backyard after being deemed to have not followed classroom instructions properly. There are no official documents regulating the use of such punishments, so their application depends on teacher practices and situational conditions at the school.

The findings show that cleaning the school grounds is still used as a form of social punishment that is considered capable of disciplining students and maintaining school cleanliness, even though students tend to perceive it as an additional workload that does not directly teach them good behavior.

The results of research on the practice of cleaning the school grounds show that schools still rely on a discipline approach based on physical work as an effort to enforce rules. Teachers consider this strategy to be quite effective in giving students direct responsibility, especially in the context of rural schools that have a tradition of mutual cooperation and closeness to environmental activities. This punishment is often given after minor violations and is carried out with the hope that students will reflect on their behavior through activities that are considered beneficial to the school.

However, from the students' perspective, this punishment is not always accepted as a means of learning behavior. Some students only carry it out so as not to add to their problems, without really understanding the relationship between their actions and the punishment given. This condition shows that cleaning the yard is seen more as an additional task that must be completed, rather than a process of reflection on rule-breaking behavior.

These findings also reveal that the use of physical activity-based punishments persists due to the lack of clear behavioral management guidelines. Teachers use methods that are considered most practical and appropriate for the

culture of rural schools. Although seemingly harmless, this approach does not directly help students understand the concepts of responsibility and discipline in a deeper way. This practice remains part of a reactive disciplinary pattern that relies on pressure through physical tasks, rather than through behavioral awareness coaching. This situation highlights the need for a shift towards a more educational and targeted approach so that student behavior formation can take place more effectively and sustainably.

Appreciation

Based on the statement of one of the teachers interviewed, simple forms of appreciation have begun to be implemented in the learning process, especially when students show positive initiative or follow class rules without being asked. Teachers said that appreciation does not always take the form of gifts, but can be in the form of brief acknowledgments, words of encouragement, or small notes in students' assignment books. From the documentation collected through classroom observation, there were moments when teachers expressed their gratitude or verbal encouragement to students who helped tidy up the classroom or completed their assignments faster while maintaining order. Several students also admitted that they felt cared for when teachers gave them appreciation, even though it was in a very simple form.

Research findings show that appreciation is beginning to be used as a strategy to reinforce positive behavior in rural school environments. Although it is still sporadic and depends on the initiative of certain teachers, this pattern marks an effort to move from a reactive disciplinary approach to a more educational positive reinforcement.

Field analysis results show that the appreciation process has emerged as part of a change in teachers' perspectives on managing student behavior. Appreciation in the form of brief praise, recognition of effort, or expressions of gratitude encourages students to repeat positive behaviors because they feel emotionally valued. This pattern has a different impact compared to the punishment approach, as students show more active engagement and the classroom atmosphere becomes more conducive. However, this practice has not been implemented uniformly across all classes. Some teachers still adhere to old disciplinary patterns, so the use of appreciation has not been integrated as part of school policy. This inconsistency means that positive behavioral change has not been comprehensive, but it still indicates that schools are moving towards more constructive and humanistic behavior management.

Verbal Praise

The teachers interviewed explained that verbal praise is often given as a form of spontaneous appreciation when students display behavior that is considered positive. Teachers mentioned that simple words such as "good," "well done," or "thank you" are said when students pay attention, complete tasks according to instructions, or show initiative in helping with class activities. Students who receive praise admit to feeling more confident and motivated to maintain this behavior because they feel that their efforts are appreciated.

Classroom observations revealed several situations where teachers provided immediate verbal reinforcement after students responded appropriately. Observation notes showed that verbal praise occurred mainly during material delivery and class discussions. However, no official school documents regulating the use of this strategy were found, so its application depended entirely on the habits and interaction styles of each teacher.

Research findings indicate that verbal praise has begun to be used as a positive reinforcement strategy to encourage good behavior in students, although its application has not been consistent across all classes due to the lack of guidelines regulating this practice.

The results of research on verbal praise show that teachers have begun to use verbal rewards as a way to reinforce positive student behavior in the classroom. Praise is given spontaneously in response to behavior that is considered desirable, such as working quickly, maintaining order, or showing full attention to the subject matter. This form of praise, which is brief but targeted, makes students feel noticed, thereby increasing their motivation to learn and their self-confidence. Although this strategy has a positive impact on the classroom atmosphere, its implementation is still not comprehensive because it depends on the personal initiative of teachers. This inconsistency shows that the positive reinforcement approach is still in its early stages of development in this school. Overall, the use of verbal praise illustrates a gradual shift from a reactive disciplinary pattern to an approach that is more supportive of character building and students' emotional development.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that behavior management at MTs Islamiyah Desa Sentul is currently in a transitional phase. Teachers continue to employ reactive disciplinary methods, such as harsh reprimands, standing penalties, and yard cleaning, reflecting traditional behavior management practices that emphasize immediate corrective actions (Ispas, 2022; Boer et al., 2022). These methods are often seen as the quickest way to maintain control, particularly in schools with limited teacher training (Khan, 2024; Robinson &

Barrable, 2023). At the same time, positive reinforcement strategies, including verbal appreciation and praise, are beginning to emerge, demonstrating an initial shift toward educationally oriented approaches that consider students' emotional and social development (Wibowo & Salfadilah, 2025). This combination of old and new practices highlights the challenges rural schools face in balancing deeply rooted disciplinary traditions with modern, humanistic educational expectations.

Reactive discipline, while effective in producing immediate compliance, often fails to generate lasting behavioral change (Boer et al., 2022). In rural contexts, such practices are reinforced by cultural norms, seniority traditions, and the lack of structured policy guidance, causing inconsistencies in classroom management (Sommarström & Oikkonen, 2021; Silfiana et al., 2025). The study found that teachers' reliance on personal experience rather than formalized school policies contributes to uneven implementation, which can confuse students and hinder a coherent approach to behavior management. These findings align with previous research indicating that schools without clear disciplinary guidelines often display uneven teacher practices, emphasizing the critical role of educational management frameworks in providing structure and consistency.

Conversely, the emerging use of verbal appreciation and praise reflects the principles of positive reinforcement, which asserts that rewarding desirable behavior increases the likelihood of its repetition (Karademir et al., 2022). Consistent praise has been shown to improve student motivation, participation, and cooperative behavior, creating a more conducive learning environment compared to punishment-based strategies (Ecuyer et al., 2025; Hegyi, 2023). This shift aligns with broader educational management goals, emphasizing the creation of supportive classroom climates, fostering student engagement, and integrating social-emotional development into teaching practices. The presence of these practices in MTs Islamiyah Desa Sentul demonstrates an opportunity for schools to adopt proactive, student-centered behavior management approaches.

The study highlights the necessity of combining policy, training, and cultural adaptation to support this transition. First, schools must develop clear, written behavior management guidelines to standardize teacher practices and reduce reliance on inconsistent personal approaches (Silfiana et al., 2025). Second, ongoing teacher training is essential to introduce positive discipline strategies, enhance understanding of students' emotional responses, and reduce dependence on physical or verbal punishment (Munandar et al., 2025). Third, promoting verbal appreciation and recognition can help cultivate a positive school culture, strengthening teacher-student relationships and providing a foundation for long-term character development (Wibowo & Salfadilah, 2025).

Finally, mentorship programs for teachers can facilitate the adoption of these strategies, ensuring the transition from reactive to proactive behavior management is sustainable and culturally sensitive.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that rural schools are in a dynamic process of transforming behavior management from reactive, control-oriented approaches to positive, educationally oriented strategies. This shift requires structural support through clear policies, cultural alignment with local traditions, and teacher competency development. By integrating positive reinforcement, emotional consideration, and social-emotional learning into classroom practices, schools can foster a healthier learning environment that balances discipline with motivation and character formation (Sari, 2024; Karademir et al., 2022). The study underscores the importance of viewing behavior management not merely as rule enforcement but as a multidimensional educational management function that nurtures students' holistic growth and prepares them for long-term success.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that behavior management in rural schools remains in a transitional phase, where reactive disciplinary strategies, such as harsh reprimands, standing punishments, and yard cleaning, coexist with emerging positive reinforcement practices, including verbal appreciation and praise. The key lesson learned is that effective behavior management requires a balanced approach that combines clear rules, consistent policies, and supportive strategies that consider students' social-emotional development. By integrating positive reinforcement with structured guidelines, schools can foster greater student awareness, responsibility, and self-regulation. These findings demonstrate that behavioral change is not achieved solely through punishment but through a thoughtful, humanistic approach that strengthens student motivation, character, and engagement in the learning process.

The study contributes to the academic field by providing empirical evidence of behavior management practices in rural schools, a context often overlooked in existing research, and by linking these practices to educational management principles, such as leadership, policy, and classroom climate. It advances the theoretical understanding of how behaviorism and positive reinforcement can be integrated with culturally sensitive and humanistic educational strategies. However, the study is limited to a single school, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the scope to multiple rural schools across different regions, examine long-term impacts of positive behavior management, and explore how teacher training and community involvement further support sustainable behavioral change.

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