

THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SUPPORTING STUDENT DISCIPLINE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Physical Education has strategic potential in shaping elementary school students' discipline due to its activity-based learning characteristics, rules, and direct experience. This study aims to analyze the role of Physical Education in shaping elementary school students' discipline through the learning process that takes place in the school environment. The study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The research subjects included Physical Education teachers and elementary school students. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, learning observations, and documentation, then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions by applying triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure data validity. The results of the study indicate that the formation of student discipline through Physical Education takes place through teacher role models, the application of clear and consistent learning rules, and the habituation of disciplined behavior integrated into physical activities. Students learn to understand the meaning of discipline through direct experience that links orderly behavior with the smooth running of learning activities. This study concludes that Physical Education not only functions as a means of developing physical abilities, but also as an effective vehicle for internalizing the value of discipline in the learning lives of elementary school students.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a systematic and sustainable process aimed at developing students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor potentials as an integrated whole (Masithoh & Khasanah, 2025). At the elementary school level, education plays a strategic role as a foundational phase in shaping students' personality, attitudes, and learning behaviors, as this period is highly sensitive to habit formation and environmental influence (Ermayanti et al., 2024). Values instilled at this stage strongly influence students' character development at subsequent educational levels and

in broader social contexts (Scholz-Kuhn et al., 2025). Therefore, basic education functions not only as a medium for knowledge transmission but also as a crucial vehicle for character formation that determines the quality of future human resources (Görün et al., 2025).

One essential character value supporting educational success is discipline. Discipline extends beyond mere compliance with rules to encompass self-control, responsibility, and consistency in fulfilling students' obligations. Internalized discipline enables students to manage time effectively, demonstrate orderly behavior, and develop sustainable learning habits, which tend to persist into adulthood when cultivated from the elementary level (Tri et al., 2024). Moreover, discipline is closely linked to students' social adaptation, cooperation, and adherence to norms, making it a prerequisite for creating a conducive and effective learning environment (Amelia & Dafit, 2023).

Student discipline is influenced by multiple internal and external factors, including self-awareness, motivation, family background, peer interaction, technological development, and school learning patterns. Learning approaches that are overly cognitively oriented often limit meaningful character internalization. In this context, Physical Education possesses distinctive characteristics due to its emphasis on physical activities, games, and sports that directly engage students. PE learning integrates physical, emotional, and social dimensions, allowing character and attitude formation to occur through holistic and experiential learning processes (Sudirman, 2025; Muhasibi et al., 2023).

During PE learning, students are consistently required to comply with rules, manage time, cooperate with peers, and take responsibility for assigned roles. These activities provide real experiences through which students learn the consequences of discipline and indiscipline, fostering self-awareness beyond teacher supervision (Ali et al., 2021). The contextual and activity-based nature of Physical Education enables continuous habituation of disciplined behavior, reinforcing the importance of order, safety, and responsibility through repeated practice (Salahudin et al., 2024). Thus, Physical Education serves as an authentic pedagogical space for internalizing discipline through direct experience rather than abstract instruction (Komaludin et al., 2024).

Empirical studies support the strategic role of PE in strengthening student discipline. Research by Rakhman & Amirudin (2025), Setyawan (2018), Kurnia et al. (2025), and Baihaqi & Mu'arifin (2025) consistently shows that structured, innovative, and well-managed Physical Education learning fosters discipline, responsibility, compliance with rules, and punctuality among elementary school students. However, most previous studies conceptualize discipline as a general character outcome and predominantly employ quantitative approaches, leaving limited understanding of how discipline is formed through Physical Education learning processes (Fauyan & Wati, 2021).

Qualitative studies examining the role of Physical Education in shaping discipline at the elementary level remain limited, as most focus on secondary education or extracurricular sports contexts (Annisa, 2019). Additionally, practical challenges such as limited facilities, time constraints, and perceptions of PE as academically marginal often hinder systematic character integration in Physical Education learning (Handayani et al., 2024). Qualitative research is therefore essential to explore teacher practices, learning interactions, and disciplinary habituation within PE contexts, as it captures pedagogical and social dynamics that quantitative methods cannot fully explain (Sumiati & Mustoip, 2021).

Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore and describe the role of Physical Education in shaping elementary school students' discipline through an in-depth analysis of the learning process, teacher strategies, and disciplinary practices embedded in Physical Education activities.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative design. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to deeply understand the role of Physical Education in shaping elementary school student discipline through the learning process, teacher-student interactions, and disciplinary practices that occur in the school environment. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of research subjects contextually and naturally, making it suitable for studying character education in the context of Physical Education learning (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). A descriptive qualitative design was used to systematically describe phenomena without manipulating the research variables.

Data were collected at an elementary school that regularly implements Physical Education instruction, selected purposively based on contextual relevance and institutional openness. Participants included Physical Education teachers as primary informants and upper-grade elementary students (Grades IV–VI) as supporting informants, selected through purposive sampling. Teacher inclusion criteria comprised active teaching status, a minimum of two years of experience, and direct involvement in Physical Education instruction, while students were required to actively participate in Physical Education learning and consent to involvement, informants who did not meet these criteria or whose participation was limited during the research period were excluded.

The primary instrument in this qualitative research is the researcher herself, who acts as both data collector and data analyst. The researcher was directly involved throughout the research process to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena within the field context. To support the data collection process and make it more focused and systematic, supporting instruments were used in the form of semi-structured interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation. The semi-structured interview guidelines were developed to gather in-depth information regarding the role of Physical Education teachers in instilling student discipline, the learning strategies used, and the disciplinary practices implemented during learning activities. The observation sheets were used to directly record student disciplinary behavior, such as compliance with rules, punctuality, and responsibility in participating in Physical Education lessons. Meanwhile, documentation serves as supporting data, including learning tools, school regulations, and learning activity records, thereby strengthening the research results and credibility through the application of source and technique triangulation (Nurfajriani et al., 2024).

As a reference for conducting interviews, an interview guideline was developed that referred to the research focus and student discipline indicators. This guideline aims to maintain consistency in data collection and provide researchers with flexibility to develop questions appropriate to the field context. The interview guideline is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines

| Interview Focus | Indicator |
|---|--|
| Teachers' understanding of student discipline | Teachers' views regarding the meaning of discipline in Physical Education learning |
| The role of Physical Education teachers | Teachers' actions and responsibilities in instilling student discipline |
| Learning strategies | Learning methods and approaches that encourage disciplined behavior |
| Implementation of learning rules | Consistence in implementing rules and regulations of the game |
| Student responses and behavior | Student compliance, responsibility, and order during learning |
| Supporting and inhibiting factors | Internal and external conditions that influence the formation of discipline |

Source: (Dudley, 2025; Liu et al., 2025 ;Scholz-Kuhn et al., 2025)

The interview guideline used in this study first underwent a content validation process using expert judgment techniques. Validation was conducted by involving experts with competence in the field of Physical Education learning and qualitative research methodology to ensure that each indicator developed was aligned with the focus and objectives of the study. The validation process focused on several key aspects, including the suitability of the indicators to the research problem, the clarity and accuracy of the wording of the questions, and the suitability of the instrument for use in the context of research at the elementary school level. Furthermore, validation also aimed to ensure that the interview questions were able to explore data in depth without causing ambiguity or multiple interpretations by informants.

Expert input and suggestions were used as the basis for revising the interview guideline, including improving wording, sharpening the focus of questions, and adjusting indicators to be more contextual to the characteristics of

Physical Education learning in elementary schools. Instrument revisions were conducted systematically before data collection, ensuring the instrument was truly appropriate, relevant, and capable of producing valid and credible data. The application of expert judgment in the instrument validation process is expected to improve the quality of research findings and support the validity of the data obtained (Susanto et al., 2023).

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, lasting 30–60 minutes for each informant. Observations were conducted during several Physical Education learning sessions to obtain a consistent picture of student discipline behavior. Documentation was used as supporting data to strengthen the findings from the interviews and observations. The data collection process took four to six weeks, observing ethical research principles, including informant consent and data confidentiality.

Data analysis was conducted continuously from the beginning of data collection until the research was completed. The analysis process refers to the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers selected, focused, and grouped data according to the research focus. The data presentation stage was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate researchers in understanding patterns and relationships between data. The conclusion drawing stage was carried out by verifying findings through source and technical triangulation, as well as member checking with informants to ensure data validity (Miles et al., 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Teachers' Understanding of Student Discipline

The results of interviews with Physical Education teachers indicate that discipline is understood as a student's conscious attitude in complying with learning rules, managing their own behavior, and being responsible for activities carried out during the learning process. One teacher stated that *"discipline is understood as student awareness in controlling behavior, obeying learning rules, and being responsible for Physical Education activities as part of character building."* This statement emphasizes that teachers do not interpret discipline narrowly as mere compliance with teacher orders or instructions, but rather as an integral part of student character building that is closely related to self-control, social awareness, and personal responsibility. This holistic understanding places discipline as a value that needs to be cultivated through a consistent and meaningful learning process, rather than through a coercive or repressive approach, so that students are expected to be able to internalize discipline as a personal need in learning activities.

Observations confirmed that teachers' understanding of discipline was reflected in their daily learning practices. Teachers always began lessons by explaining the objectives, activity rules, and expectations for student behavior. These explanations were not delivered in an authoritarian manner, but rather through a dialogic approach that positioned students as the subjects of learning. Teachers explained the rationale behind each rule, such as the importance of safety, cooperation, and order in physical activity. Thus, students understood the rules as a shared need, not as a restriction on freedom.

The Role of Physical Education Teachers

Interview results indicate that teachers are aware of their role as role models for students in developing discipline. One teacher stated that *"discipline is not enough to be conveyed only through instructions or advice but must be demonstrated through the teacher's actual behavior in every learning activity."* This statement reflects the teacher's awareness that role models have a strong influence on the process of internalizing discipline values by students. Through this consistent behavior, teachers strive to instill discipline in students implicitly and continuously, so that the value of discipline is not only understood conceptually but also practiced and exemplified in the context of daily learning.

Observation results confirmed the interview findings. Teachers arrived on time to the field or classroom, prepared equipment before students arrived, and managed learning activities in an orderly manner. When rules were broken, teachers reprimanded students appropriately and educationally without humiliating them. This approach

created a safe and conducive learning environment, where students felt valued and motivated to improve their behavior.

Learning Strategies

Interview results indicate that teachers consciously design learning that integrates the value of discipline into physical activities. One teacher stated that *"I design Physical Education learning through games, group exercises, and activities carried out gradually so that students are accustomed to being orderly, working together, and obeying the rules during the activity."* This statement indicates that discipline is not taught separately but is instilled through a learning design that demands order, cooperation, and compliance with the rules. This finding is reinforced by the statement of one student who stated that *"in physical education class we have to line up, follow the rules of the game, and cooperate with friends so that the activity can run well."* This shows that learning strategies based on activities and direct experience make students understand discipline as part of the learning process, not just an obligation imposed by the teacher, so that the value of discipline can be internalized naturally according to the characteristics of elementary school students.

Observations show that each learning activity has clear rules, such as group division, movement sequence, and time limits. When students violate the rules, the activity is disrupted and learning objectives are not achieved. This situation provides students with firsthand experience of the consequences of undisciplined behavior. Conversely, when students comply with the rules, the activity runs smoothly and is enjoyable.

Implementation of Learning Rules

Interview results indicate that Physical Education teachers emphasize the importance of consistency in enforcing rules throughout the learning process. One teacher stated that *"I keep the learning rules simple and tailored to the students' ages, then apply them consistently so that students become accustomed to them and understand the consequences of each behavior."* This statement indicates that teachers not only convey the rules at the beginning of the lesson, but also continuously remind and enforce them during every physical activity. This finding is reinforced by a student's statement that *"if we break the rules during PE class, the teacher always reminds us of and we have to follow the same rules every meeting."* This indicates that consistent implementation of rules helps students understand discipline as a habit that must be carried out continuously, thus creating order and smoothness in Physical Education learning.

Observations show that teachers provide positive reinforcement when students demonstrate disciplined behavior, such as praise or group recognition. Furthermore, teachers encourage students to engage in a brief reflection at the end of the lesson to evaluate the activity. This reflective process helps students understand the meaning of discipline and fosters internal awareness.

Student Responses and Behavior

Interview results indicate that students understand the rules of Physical Education learning and feel the direct benefits of implementing discipline in learning activities; one student stated, *"Physical education lessons become more orderly, safe, and fun when everyone follows the rules, so we are not afraid of bumping into each other and can play neatly."* This student's statement was reinforced by the observation of one of the teachers who revealed that students became easier to direct, returned to activities more quickly after instructions, and showed responsibility in tidying up equipment after completing activities. These findings indicate that discipline is perceived by students as a shared need that supports the comfort and safety of the learning process, rather than as a burden or punishment, so that internalization of disciplinary behavior tends to occur through repeated shared experiences in the context of physical activity.

Observations showed changes in student discipline behavior, such as increased orderliness in lining up, compliance with teacher instructions, and responsibility in maintaining sports equipment. These changes occurred gradually through consistent practice. Triangulation between interviews and observations indicated that discipline was beginning to be internalized as a positive habit.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Interview results indicate that infrastructure support, a supportive school culture, and cooperation between teachers are key supporting factors in establishing discipline through Physical Education. One teacher stated that *“when the school provides adequate tools, a consistent schedule, and all teachers are aligned in implementing the rules, instilling discipline becomes easier to implement and more sustainable.”* On the other hand, field findings also identified practical obstacles such as limited learning time and inadequate facilities, which force teachers to adjust strategies to ensure the goal of instilling discipline remains achievable; one student stated that *“sometimes physical education lessons feel short and there are limited tools, so we have to rush and don’t have time to repeat discipline habits.”* These conditions indicate that the success of internalizing discipline depends on the synergy between school policies, the availability of resources, and the ability of teachers to adapt learning designs so that instilling discipline can be consistent despite limitations.

Discussion

These teachers' perspectives serve as a conceptual foundation that influences how they design, implement, and evaluate Physical Education learning. Teachers consciously integrate the value of discipline into every stage of learning, from establishing activity rules and implementing physical activities to post-learning reflection. Discipline is positioned as the result of a habituation process experienced directly by students through physical activities that require regularity, cooperation, and responsibility. This finding aligns with the view that discipline formation will be more effective when developed through contextual and participatory learning experiences, enabling students to understand the meaning of discipline as a shared need in the learning process, not merely an individual obligation (Aminah et al., 2022; Darnawati et al., 2025). This process explains why discipline can develop as an internal awareness. When students understand the rationale behind rules, they are more likely to comply out of awareness, rather than fear of sanctions. This finding aligns with Widyasari & Wakkhudin (2023), who asserted that disciplinary character education in elementary schools will be more effective if teachers have a comprehensive understanding of values and consistently apply them in their lessons. Teachers' reflective understanding is a crucial prerequisite for successfully internalizing disciplinary values in students.

Furthermore, this process explains how discipline is formed through social learning mechanisms. Students observe and imitate the disciplined behavior displayed by teachers. Teachers' role models provide moral legitimacy to the rules they implement, so students view discipline as a value worthy of adherence. This finding supports research by Saputra et al. (2024) which states that the role models of Physical Education teachers have a significant influence on the development of disciplinary character in elementary school students. These findings explain why Physical Education is effective as a medium for developing discipline. Physical activity provides an authentic learning context, where the relationship between disciplined behavior and activity outcomes can be truly felt. This aligns with Sudirman (2025) who stated that activity-based and hands-on experience-based Physical Education learning is effective in instilling the values of discipline and responsibility in elementary school students.

Regarding the practical application in class, interviews focused on rule implementation indicate that teachers emphasize the importance of consistency in enforcing learning discipline. Rules are kept simple and tailored to the students' ages and abilities, conveyed at the beginning, and continually enforced. Observations indicate that teachers provide positive reinforcement when students demonstrate disciplined behavior and encourage brief reflection at the end of the lesson. These findings suggest that discipline is not built solely through external control, but through a process of reflection and habituation. Annisa (2019) research supports these findings by emphasizing that consistent rule implementation and collaborative reflection with students play a crucial role in building sustainable discipline in elementary schools.

The impact of this approach is that discipline develops as part of the student's character, not just situational compliance. This finding aligns with Fauyan & Wati (2021), who stated that activity-based learning and hands-on experience can encourage the internalization of discipline values in elementary school students. The integration of data shows that discipline is formed through social learning mechanisms and ongoing habituation, which aligns with

the findings of Supriyana & Lestari (2023) confirming that activity-based learning has a significant contribution to the internalization of discipline values. Furthermore, the results of this study also emphasize the importance of school environmental support and consistent application of character values in learning as prerequisites for the successful formation of sustainable discipline (Azizah et al., 2024). Thus, Physical Education functions not only as a means of developing physical abilities but also as an effective pedagogical space to support the strengthening of character education.

Overall, the results and discussion of this study indicate that Physical Education plays a substantial and strategic role in shaping elementary school student discipline through a learning process based on direct experience, teacher role models, and consistent and reflective implementation of rules. Discipline does not develop solely because of external control, but rather through a process of internalization of values that occurs when students understand the meaning of rules, experience the consequences of behavior in real life, and observe concrete examples from teachers as role models. These findings reinforce the view that Physical Education is a vehicle for experiential character education that allows students to learn the value of discipline in a contextual and meaningful way (Komaludin et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Physical Education plays a strategic and substantial role in shaping elementary school students' discipline through a contextual, consistent, and experiential learning process. Student discipline is not formed instantly or through supervision alone, but rather through integrated habits in physical activities, the application of clear and fair rules, and teacher role models at every stage of learning. The Physical Education learning process provides space for students to directly experience the relationship between disciplined behavior and the smooth running of learning activities, so that the value of discipline can be internalized as self-awareness.

Research findings indicate that teachers' understanding of discipline, their role as role models, activity-based learning strategies, and consistent rule implementation are key factors supporting the successful development of student discipline. Furthermore, students' positive responses to Physical Education lessons demonstrate that discipline is perceived as a shared need that supports orderly, safe, and enjoyable learning. However, the success of developing discipline is also influenced by the supportive school environment, including the availability of facilities and infrastructure and the management of learning time.

Overall, this study successfully provides an in-depth overview of the process and mechanisms of developing student discipline through Physical Education in elementary schools. However, this research is limited by its scope, which was confined to specific school contexts and relied primarily on qualitative perspectives, potentially affecting the generalizability of the findings. Consequently, future research is recommended to expand the scope by involving a larger and more diverse number of schools, as well as utilizing mixed-method approaches to quantitatively measure the long-term impact of Physical Education interventions. These findings open up opportunities to develop Physical Education learning models specifically designed to strengthen discipline within the broader elementary school context.

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