

REVIEW ARTICLE



Building character in madrasah: The role of educational punishment for lower grade students – A literature review

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ABSTRACT

Character instilling in students is the primary mandate of education in Indonesia, including in madrasah that combine general and religious education. One of the popular strategies in character formation in the madrasah environment is the application of educational punishment. The punishment to shape the character of lower-class students still causes controversy among educators, parents, and education experts. The study reviewed the literature on the role and effectiveness of educational punishment in shaping the character of madrasah students, with a focus on lower-class students. The method used is a literature study with descriptive analysis of the results of previous research and related policies. Research findings show that educational punishment is still commonly used in lower-class madrasah, employed through various methods. Educational punishment in the form of self-reflection and social tasks is effective in instilling discipline and responsibility in students. Physical punishment or humiliation has negative impacts, including fear, aggressiveness, and a decreased interest in learning. Positive discipline based on religious values is more effective, but its implementation is less consistent in the field. Further research on the wise application of educational punishment can reinforce students' character. It is crucial to uphold humanistic principles and consider the psychological development of children.

KEYWORDS

Character; madrasah; punishment; lower grade; literature review

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1. Introduction

Character formation is a strategic issue that is the primary concern in the Indonesian national education system, in line with efforts to create the next generation who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess noble

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character, faith, and strong national insights. In this context, madrasah plays a central role as a faith-based educational institution that has an integrative task in internalising Islamic values into the learning process and daily life of students (Uswah et al., 2023; Mantau & Buhungo, 2024).

The existence of madrasah serves not only as an institution for knowledge transfer, but also as a vehicle for the actualisation and internalisation of moral, spiritual, and social values that form the foundation of the nation's generation's character. Amid the complexity of global challenges and technological advances, the success of madrasah in carrying out character-building functions is an important indicator in the development of Indonesian human resources who are superior, have integrity, and are ready to compete both at the national and international levels (Qornain, 2023; Hastutik, 2024).

One of the important instruments that educators often use in shaping students' attitudes of discipline, responsibility, and empathy from an early age is the application of educational punishment, especially in madrasah environments that emphasise religious and moral values (Nisa Br Tj, 2023; Afrianingsih et al., 2023). However, the practice of implementing punishment at the lower grade level in schools, including madrasah, often raises complex debates, especially regarding its impact on children's emotional and psychosocial development (Heekes et al., 2022). This condition demands an in-depth evaluation of how educational punishment can be designed and applied in an educational, humanistic, and contextual manner to avoid adverse effects such as trauma, decreased self-esteem, or excessive anxiety in elementary school-age students (Nazar, 2021; Vargo & Gushanas, 2023).

A comprehensive understanding of psychological aspects and local values in the context of the classroom and school is needed to ensure that punishment as a tool for character development is not only disciplinary, but also supports the child's mental and spiritual development in a balanced manner (Mustofa et al., 2019; Lee & Solomon, 2025). Thus, madrasah can optimally carry out their role as educational institutions that form students with noble and emotionally strong character in facing life's challenges.

Every educational institution certainly wants its participants to develop optimally in all aspects, including academically, socially, and spiritually. Madrasah, as an integral part of Indonesia's national education system, bears a great responsibility in shaping a generation with noble character and adherence to

Islamic teachings. However, in the educational process, there are often behaviours of low-grade students who do not meet school norms and rules, thus demanding intervention from teachers in the form of appropriate sanctions (Putra et al., 2019; Arifin et al., 2021; Widianti & Oktaviani, 2024). The imposition of this sanction must be based on the principle of education, not just punishment (Raihani & Bshary, 2019; Sidin, 2021).

Instilling discipline and responsibility in children from an early age, especially in students from grades 1 to 3 at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, is crucial for their psychological development and character education. At this age range, children are in a rapid stage of cognitive, affective, and social development, making it easier to accept the fundamental values that will form the foundation of their future behaviour (Bujuri, 2018; Agustini, 2021). Discipline and responsibility that are taught consistently can foster positive habits, readiness to follow rules, and the ability to manage emotions and social interactions, all of which are crucial when children engage in the school environment and the wider community.

Madrasah, as an institution rooted in religious and moral values, plays a pivotal role in integrating character education and equipping students with noble values from an early age, thereby laying a strong, independent, and noble foundation for their personality throughout their lives. Unfortunately, the application of sanctions is often mistaken for a form of physical punishment or intimidation, even though educational sanctions focus on understanding norms and instilling Islamic values in a gentle and constructive manner (Rambe et al., 2024; Saleh et al., 2024).

Previous studies have explored the role of punishment and reward in developing students' character within Islamic education. Study by Usman DP et al., (2025) examined the effectiveness of reward and punishment strategies in a structured and fair manner in building the character of Islamic boarding school students in South Kalimantan, and found that this strategy had a very positive effect on discipline, motivation, and moral development while paying attention to the ethics and psychological impact on students. Research by Aquil et al. (2025) highlights the reward and punishment system in Islamic-based Madrasah Aliyah, where educational punishments, such as reflection tasks or moral advice, are effective in shaping character when adjusted to the psychological condition of students, and are more effective than physical punishment. They also emphasised the importance of consistency, collaboration, and parental involvement in the process. Meanwhile, Rahawarin et al. (2023) emphasised that the role of teachers in

applying punishment is more emphasised in the educational process, rather than repression, and prioritises dialogical communication, supervision, and exemplary behaviour to build the character of honesty, discipline, and student responsibility in madrasah.

In contrast to the three studies which focus on the effectiveness and implementation of reward and punishment strategies in shaping the character of students in the context of Islamic boarding schools or Madrasah Aliyah with an emphasis on organizational structure, ethics, collaboration, and the role of teachers as role models, this study specifically focuses on the role, mechanism, and impact of educational punishment on the formation of the character of lower-class madrasah students (grades 1–3 of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) through comprehensive literature review. This research approach highlights the dimensions of early childhood psychological development, examines the implementation of educational punishment in the context of basic madrasah, and examines the integration of religious and local values in disciplinary practices at the early education level. Therefore, academically, this research not only explores the effectiveness of educational punishment as in previous studies, but also presents contextual perspectives, age development, and specific policy needs of lower-class madrasah that have not received in-depth attention in the existing literature.

This article aims to make a new contribution by highlighting the role of educational punishment in shaping the character of lower-class madrasah students, strengthening the contextual aspects of religion and local values, and examining the integration of disciplines based on Islamic values. The purpose of the research is to identify and analyse the role and effectiveness of educational punishment in shaping the character of lower-class students in madrasah through a comprehensive literature review.

2. Literature review

2.1. The essence of character and its development in madrasah

Character is a distinctive value that is embedded in individual behaviour and is based on moral, religious, and social principles (Montgomery, 2013). The essence of character and its development in madrasah shows that character is a collection of distinctive values embedded in individual behaviour and based on moral, religious, and social principles (Efendi & Ningsih, 2020). Character not only reflects

habits or behaviours that are often practised, but also includes aspects of values and beliefs that guide acting and interacting with the environment (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the context of madrasah education, character is considered the primary foundation for shaping the personality of students who are not only academically competent but also honest, responsible, steadfast in their faith, and possess high social ethics.

In a madrasah, character development is carried out through a powerful approach that integrates Islamic values into all aspects of learning and daily life. This aligns with the vision of the madrasah as an educational institution that not only conveys academic knowledge, but also instils the religious and moral values inherent in the lives of its students (Maulidah et al., 2022). Strengthening character in madrasah according to the literature emphasises the role of teachers as role models as well as facilitators of value learning, religious activities such as the habit of praying in congregation, reading the Qur'an, dhikr, and religious social activities that build a sense of empathy and social responsibility (Jumatullailah et al., 2024). This integration is a characteristic of madrasahs that distinguishes them from general educational institutions, as well as a strategic force in shaping individuals with Islamic characteristics.

The concept of character development in madrasah is also subject to official regulations and guidelines, such as the National Curriculum and the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education (SK Dirjen Pendis) on Character Education in Madrasah (Supa'at, 2014). These policy documents affirm that character education must be programmed in a systematic, planned, and thorough manner, so that moral and religious values can be well instilled in students. The madrasah curriculum is designed to incorporate the values of education, manners, and noble morals across various subjects and extracurricular activities, with the hope that the character formed can serve as the foundation for facing life's challenges and improving the quality of human resources (Apriyani et al., 2025). Thus, character development in madrasah is not just an addition to the material content, but a holistic approach that makes character the core of education in the madrasah environment.

2.2. Theory and practice of educational punishment

Educational punishment is a sanction given to students for educational purposes, not merely a penalty (Afrianingsih et al., 2023). According to behavioristic theory

Skinner (2014) The effectiveness of punishment in learning is greatly influenced by the presence of corrective elements in the reinforcement and punishment process. Skinner distinguishes between reinforcement and punishment in modifying behaviour; reinforcement aims to increase the likelihood of repeating positive behaviour, while punishment decreases the frequency of negative behaviour. Punishment will be effective if it not only serves as a limiting tool for unwanted behaviour, but also directs individuals to learn and adopt correct behaviour as a substitute for wrong behaviour. However, in madrasah, the practice of punishment is often combined with Islamic values such as advising, giving additional tasks, or reciting holy verses (Mustofa et al., 2019).

According to the National Education System Law, discipline is one of the pillars of character formation of students. Educational sanctions are actions taken against students who violate school norms, rules, or policies. Educative sanctions are sanctions that are given to educate students to be aware of mistakes and not repeat them, without lowering self-esteem or causing trauma to children (Aquil et al., 2025).

Pedagogically, educational sanctions aim to help students understand the mistakes they have made and foster awareness to improve their behaviour, not just provide a deterrent effect. Piaget states that children of lower class age (6–9 years) are at a stage of concrete operational development, so they need a clear explanation and authentic experience of the causes and effects of an action (Piaget, 1976; Marinda, 2020).

2.3. The psychosocial impact of punishment on lower-class children

Child developmental psychology research explains that punishments that are harsh, physically punitive, or humiliating are at risk of having negative impacts, such as anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and trauma (Salkind, 2004). In contrast, educational punishment based on compassion and dialogue helps students learn lessons from mistakes without damaging them mentally (Ankomah, 2024).

The psychosocial impact of punishment on lower-class children suggests that harsh forms of punishment, especially corporal punishment and humiliating punishment, have the potential to harm children's mental and emotional development (Durrant, 2012). Research in the field of child developmental psychology confirms that this kind of punishment can cause various psychological

disorders, such as excessive anxiety, decreased confidence, and even prolonged trauma that affects the child's ability to interact socially and learn (Durrant & Ensom, 2020). Children of lower school age are still very emotionally vulnerable and have not been able to fully understand the meaning of the punishment, so that the negative impact can last until adulthood.

In contrast, educational punishment approaches that prioritise compassion and dialogue have proven to be more effective in supporting the psychosocial development of lower-class children (Heekes et al., 2022). Punishments of an educational nature, such as self-reflection, social tasks, or counselling, allow the child to learn from mistakes without suffering mental harm. This is in line with the theory of cognitive and moral development, which suggests that the process of character development is carried out by positively touching the emotional and social aspects of children, so that children can undergo the process of behaviour correction with a sense of security and a deeper understanding (Marinda, 2020). This approach also strengthens supportive teacher-student relationships and encourages the internalisation of discipline values and responsibility.

Furthermore, the literature also shows the importance of local context and religious values in determining the psychosocial impact of punishment on lower-class madrasah children. The integration of local religious and cultural values in the educational punishment process strengthens children's spiritual identity while supporting their emotional stability (Suhardini et al., 2023). This approach not only makes punishment a form of sanction but also a means of fostering a balanced character that incorporates both moral and psychological aspects. Thus, the application of punishment in madrasah must strike a balance between strict discipline and a humanistic approach that respects the psychosocial maturity of children, thereby avoiding negative impacts while supporting their optimal growth and development.

2.4. The positive discipline model and its implementation in madrasah

Positive discipline emphasises the prevention of negative behaviour through the reinforcement of good behaviour, setting a good example, mediating conflicts, and using assertive communication (Thakur, 2017). The positive discipline model focuses on preventing negative behaviour by reinforcing and encouraging positive and constructive behaviour in students. Positive discipline prioritises setting a

good example, mediation in resolving conflicts, and assertive communication that allows students to understand the consequences of their actions consciously and responsibly (Basic Education, 2012; Apiri, 2024). This model differs from the repressive punishment approach because it positions the child as an active subject in the disciplinary learning process, thereby fostering awareness and intrinsic motivation to behave well. In the realm of madrasah, the principle of positive discipline is adapted by strengthening spiritual and religious values, making the disciplinary process not only a regulation of behaviour but also part of holistic character development.

The implementation of positive discipline in madrasah strongly prioritises the exemplary aspects of teachers and a distinctive spiritual approach, one of which is by allowing students to reflect on mistakes through prayer, dhikr, or spiritual guidance (Nurishlah et al., 2022). This method aims to make the process of behaviour correction a momentum to increase spiritual awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, not just the imposition of sanctions (Saepudin, 2024). This approach is in line with the philosophy of Islamic education, which views the formation of morals and discipline as a combination of strengthening moral character and spiritual closeness to Allah SWT (Hadi et al., 2025). This approach is complemented by empathetic and dialogical communication, ensuring that students feel valued and supported throughout the disciplinary learning process.

Conceptually, discipline in Islam is known as Tahdzib, which not only contains the meaning of obedience to the rules, but also the attachment of the heart to the noble values of goodness (Al Ghazali, 1963). The Prophet PBUH gave an example of loving discipline education, which is enshrined in his words: "It is not soft for anything except to beautify it. Not taking that softness away from something unless it would make it bad" (HR. Muslim) (Fuad, 2012). This hadith serves as the normative foundation for madrasah in establishing a pattern of discipline based on gentleness, respecting the dignity of children, and prohibiting the practice of harsh or painful punishment. Therefore, a positive disciplinary approach that integrates Islamic values has the potential to produce students who are not only outwardly obedient but also have solid moral and spiritual integrity.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilising a literature review method. Qualitative methods are scientific research that aims to deeply understand social,

cultural, or human behaviour phenomena in their original context. This research emphasises the meaning, experience, and perspective of individuals or groups through the process of deep interaction and communication between the researcher and the object being researched (Tracy, 2015). Meanwhile, the research approach with literature studies or literature reviews is a method of data collection that is carried out by examining theories, opinions, and main information contained in written sources such as books, scientific journals, research reports, articles, and other documents relevant to the research topic (Mestika, 2025). This method aims to gather relevant information to build the foundation of theories, frameworks, and research hypotheses, as well as to get an in-depth picture of the issue or problems discussed.

Data were collected through the analysis of relevant primary and secondary literature, including journals, books, government regulations, and empirical research results on character education, educational punishment, and child psychology. Data analysis was carried out descriptively, examining patterns and trends from the results of previous studies. The criteria for literature selection include the credibility of the source, the relevance of the content, and the most recent research from the past decade.

The research procedure begins with an inventory of sources, including primary and secondary data, relevant to educational sanctions, discipline in madrasah, child development psychology, and education policies. Furthermore, the data obtained is analysed using a descriptive-analytical method, which involves describing the main concepts, comparing various expert views, and formulating a synthesis of the findings that emerge. The validity of data with sources is the measure or level of validity, truthfulness, and reliability of the data obtained in research, which is determined based on the strength and credibility of the data source (Miles et al., 2014). Data validity refers to the extent to which the data collected accurately represents the facts, phenomena, or realities being researched. For validation, data triangulation is conducted through comparisons between various sources, including books, journals, and government regulations, to ensure the reliability and completeness of the analysed information.

4. Results

4.1. Educational punishment is still often applied in lower-class madrasah, with various methods depending on school policies and teachers' interpretations

Research in the madrasah environment reveals that sanctions or punishments can take various forms, including reprimands, warnings, coaching, and suspensions. The implementation of these punishments is pedagogical and adjusted to the principles of Islamic education, such as justice, gentleness, and behaviour coaching. However, the diversity of methods and consistency of their application are highly determined by the autonomy and policies of the school, as well as the subjectivity of teachers in interpreting violations.

4.2. Educationally oriented punishments, such as self-reflection and social tasks, tend to have a positive impact on the development of student discipline and responsibility

Forms of punishment that are educational, such as assignments, guidance, or invitations to reflect on mistakes, have been proven to have a positive impact on habituating disciplined behaviour and building a sense of student responsibility. Recent research has found that the appropriate and proportionate provision of educational punishment can improve behaviour and raise students' awareness of the rules, with a constructive deterrent effect and minimal negative psychological risk.

4.3. The use of physical punishment or humiliation has been shown to have adverse effects, such as excessive fear, aggressiveness, and decreased interest in learning

Studies of educational psychology confirm that physical punishment, verbal violence, or humiliating treatment can increase the risk of emotional disorders, decreased self-esteem, aggressiveness, and even trauma in children. In addition to creating an uncondusive learning environment, this practice also triggers a decrease in students' concentration and motivation in learning, as well as increases the risk of social problems and mental health problems in the future.

4.4. Positive discipline based on religious values is considered more effective in building character; however, the challenge lies in maintaining the consistency of implementation in the field

A positive disciplinary approach that integrates religious values (e.g., prayer habits, congregational prayers, tadarus) and teacher examples has consistently been proven to strengthen character formation and improve the quality of education. However, the main challenges to implementation in the field are the lack of teacher training, situational pressures, and the tendency to revert to conventional methods when facing students' behavioural difficulties. The commitment of teachers and institutional support greatly determines the sustainability of positive discipline in madrasah as a character development strategy.

Table 1. Tabulation of key findings

Key Findings	Description of Findings	References
Educational punishment is still commonly applied in lower-class madrasah	Sanctions and punishments, including reprimands, coaching, and suspensions, are applied using a variety of methods, depending on school policies and teachers' interpretations.	(Rianawati & Nurhamid, 2020; Asmira et al., 2023)
Educational punishments tend to be effective in instilling discipline and responsibility	Punishments such as self-reflection, social tasks, and dialogue guidance have been shown to increase students' discipline and sense of responsibility in a positive manner.	(Damopolii et al., 2023; Nuraisah et al., 2023)
Physical punishment and humiliation have a negative impact	The use of harsh punishment increases the risk of anxiety, aggressiveness, trauma, and decreased children's interest and learning achievement.	(Desta et al., 2022; Wiggers & Paas, 2022)
Positive discipline based on religious values is more effective; however, its implementation remains a challenge.	A positive discipline approach with religious values strengthens character, but challenges in the field include consistency and a lack of teacher training.	(Nazila et al., 2025; Elkadi & Sharaf, 2023)

Source: Primary data

5. Discussion

5.1. Educational punishment is still often applied in lower-class madrasah, with various methods depending on school policies and teachers' interpretations

Educational punishment is still a common practice in the management of discipline in lower-class madrasah, although there are variations in the methods applied by school policies and teachers' interpretations (Aquil et al., 2025). The same thing was revealed Rahawarin et al., (2023) this variation reflects the complexity of the

madrasah education context, which combines religious values and local social norms, allowing each school to adapt its approach to punishment according to the characteristics of its students and environmental conditions. This is supported by opinion Usman DP et al., (2025) Although the basic principles of punishment for education in madrasah are generally similar, their implementation is highly dependent on internal policies and teachers' capacity to interpret sanctions in a contextual and humanistic manner.

5.2. Educational-oriented punishments, such as self-reflection and social tasks, tend to have a positive impact on the cultivation of student discipline and responsibility

Educational punishments, such as self-reflection and social duties, are effective in fostering discipline and a sense of responsibility in lower-class madrasah students. The statement aligns with Rahawarin et al. (2023) and Usman DP et al. (2025) this approach not only improves behaviour through corrective mechanisms but also provides space for students to internalise moral and social values. Self-reflection allows students to understand the consequences of behaviour without fear or psychological rejection. At the same time, social tasks build empathy and collective awareness. Study of Aquil et al. (2025) emphasises that the character learning process is effective when punishment is oriented to empowerment and education, not to coercion, to maintain mental well-being and support healthy character growth

5.3. The use of physical punishment or humiliation has been shown to have adverse effects, such as excessive fear, aggressiveness, and decreased interest in learning

In contrast, repeated physical punishment and humiliating actions have been shown to have adverse psychological effects, such as increased fear, aggressiveness, and decreased motivation to learn. This is in line with Durrant & Ensom (2020) emphasising that this repressive practice of punishment not only has the potential to damage children's self-esteem and emotional balance, but also disrupts a conducive learning climate that adversely affects their academic and social development. For this Mustofa et al., (2019) underlined that meta-analyses

of various studies show that the use of corporal punishment is precisely correlated with an increase in aggressive behaviour and long-term mental problems in school-age children. Madrasah, as institutions that emphasise spiritual values, must avoid such punitive practices so as not to damage the character development and psychosocial well-being of students.

5.4. Positive discipline based on religious values is considered more effective in building character; however, the challenge lies in maintaining the consistency of implementation in the field

A positive discipline approach based on religious values in a madrasah is a more effective strategy in character development. This approach aligns with Al Ghazali's (1963), in my opinion, this approach combines the principles of gentleness, the example of a teacher, and the integration of holistic Islamic values, such as the habit of prayer and reflective dialogue, thereby creating a learning environment that supports the development of moral and spiritual character. However, despite its widely recognised benefits, Nurishlah et al. (2022) emphasised that the main challenge in implementing positive discipline is maintaining consistency in the field due to the limitations of teacher training and various situational pressures. Thus, strengthening teacher capacity and developing clear operational guidelines are needed to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of this approach in shaping the character of lower-class madrasah students.

The results of this study support the theory that educational punishment is effective when designed to consider the psychological aspects of child development and local values of the madrasah, as a Piaget model approach (Marinda, 2020). Discipline internalised through a spiritual approach has been shown to increase students' intrinsic motivation. However, the main challenges lie in teacher training, implementation supervision, and the limitations of standard operational guidelines specific to lower-class madrasah.

Meanwhile, the research gap identified was characterised by a lack of innovation in developing contextual educational punishment models in madrasah and a lack of collaboration among schools, parents, and communities in character development.

6. Conclusion

Educational punishment has a crucial role in shaping the character of lower-class madrasah students if it is designed with an educational and humanistic approach that avoids violence and mental pressure. A positive disciplinary approach that is integrated with religious values has proven to be a significant factor in the effectiveness of character development in madrasah. The practical implications of these findings confirm the importance of training educators in the application of value-based educational punishment, the development of clear operational standards and procedures related to punishment, and the increased involvement of parents and communities as key supporters in shaping children's character. The limitation of this study is that the findings obtained are based on literature reviews and theoretical studies, without direct empirical data from the field. For the development of better knowledge and practice, further research is strongly recommended to empirically test the effectiveness of the educational punishment model in various regions and madrasah levels, in order to ensure the sustainability and relevance of the approach in the context of dynamic madrasah education.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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