

The Effect of Positive Reinforcement Based on Behaviorist Theory on Students' Learning Discipline at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Najmul Falah Bandung

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of positive reinforcement based on behaviorist theory on students' learning discipline at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Najmul Falah Bandung, an Islamic elementary school that emphasizes both academic and moral development. The background of this study arises from the growing concern over the decline in students' learning discipline, which is reflected in irregular attendance, incomplete assignments, and lack of focus during lessons. To address this issue, the research applies B.F. Skinner's Behaviorist Theory (1953), which posits that behavior can be shaped and strengthened through reinforcement. The study employed a quantitative approach using an ex post facto design, involving 60 students selected from a population of 130 through proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using SPSS version 25 with normality, homogeneity, and independent sample t-test analysis. The results of the t-test revealed a significance value of 0.461 ($p > 0.05$), indicating no statistically significant difference in learning discipline between students who received positive reinforcement and those who did not. However, descriptive findings suggest that positive reinforcement contributes positively to students' motivation, attentiveness, and engagement in classroom activities. These findings align with Skinner's behaviorism while complementing Bandura's social learning perspective and Lickona's (1991) character education model, emphasizing that long-term learning discipline cannot rely solely on external reinforcement but must be supported by internal motivation, teacher modeling, and consistent value-based practices. The study concludes that positive reinforcement plays a supportive yet important role in enhancing students' learning discipline, particularly when integrated into holistic Islamic education that nurtures both cognitive achievement and moral-spiritual growth.

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Introduction

Study discipline is one of the important aspects in the educational process that plays a significant role in students' success in achieving learning objectives (Dedy Kasingku & Lotulung, 2024). Discipline is not only related to adherence to school rules, but also reflects students' awareness, responsibility, and willingness to regulate themselves in learning activities. Students with good study discipline tend to demonstrate organized behavior in completing tasks, arriving on time, paying attention during lessons, and maintaining a commitment to achieving optimal learning outcomes (Izzah & Magfiroh, 2025). However, in

reality, many students, especially at the elementary education level such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, face discipline issues. This is evident from behaviors such as frequent tardiness, failure to complete assignments, speaking out of context during lessons, and lack of attention to the teacher's instructions. These conditions indicate that efforts to improve study discipline still require serious attention from educators and educational institutions.

In the context of educational psychology, one relevant and effective approach to improving student discipline is through positive reinforcement (Pernandes, 2025). Positive reinforcement is part of the Behaviorism theory developed by B.F. Skinner (1953). This theory emphasizes that human behavior can be shaped through the relationship between stimulus and response (Adzim et al., 2024). According to Skinner, if a behavior is followed by a pleasant consequence, there is a high likelihood that the behavior will be repeated in the future. Therefore, positive reinforcement involves providing a pleasant stimulus or reward after an individual displays the desired behavior. In the context of education, forms of positive reinforcement can include praise, rewards, recognition, or even a smile from the teacher given to students when they demonstrate disciplined behavior (Aprilianto & Fatikh, 2024). This is in line with Slavin's (2018) view, which states that positive reinforcement has a significant impact on shaping good learning behavior because it provides intrinsic motivation for students (M. Hafidz Al Rasyid et al., 2025).

The use of positive reinforcement in the learning process plays a strategic role in creating a conducive classroom environment (Purwani & Astuti, 2023). The teacher not only acts as an educator but also as a character builder for students through positive social interactions (Nofeliu & Nikmati, 2025). According to Santrock (2021), teachers who are able to provide consistent positive reinforcement will help students develop self-control, responsibility, and self-confidence. Reinforcement that is done systematically and repeatedly can foster disciplined behavior that becomes a habit. On the other hand, the inconsistency of teachers in giving rewards for good student behavior can reduce the effectiveness of the reinforcement itself (Aulia & Saleh, 2024). It is crucial in the context of learning in elementary schools, including in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, which is based on Islamic values.

In the perspective of Islamic education, the concept of positive reinforcement aligns with the principle of *tarbiyah* (education) which emphasizes the formation of noble character and the habituation of good behavior. Islam itself stresses the importance of rewarding good deeds as a form of spiritual motivation (Hidayat et al., 2018). As explained in the Qur'an, Allah provides rewards for every good deed as a form of positive reinforcement for behavior that aligns with Islamic values (Andryadi et al., 2025). In this context, teachers as educators can draw inspiration from this principle in building students' discipline. When students demonstrate good behavior such as punctuality, maintaining cleanliness, or showing respect to teachers, praise and reinforcement become forms of character education that are in harmony with Islamic teachings (Zahra & Fathoni, 2024). According to Hasan (2022), the application of positive reinforcement in Islamic educational institutions not only aims to shape disciplined behavior externally but also instills an internal awareness that discipline is a form of worship and a moral responsibility to Allah SWT (Bachtar & Salim, 2025).

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Najmul Falah Bandung, located in Nanjung, Margaasih Subdistrict, Bandung Regency, West Java, as an Islamic primary education institution, bears significant responsibility in shaping the personality and character of students from an early age. Based on initial observations at the madrasah, it was found that some students still exhibited undisciplined behavior, such as not paying attention during lessons, not bringing learning materials, and frequently being late in submitting assignments. This indicates the need for a more psychologically and behaviorally oriented teaching approach. The application of positive reinforcement is expected to be a solution for fostering a gradual and sustainable awareness of learning discipline. Teachers can use various forms of reinforcement, both verbal and nonverbal, such as praise, symbols of appreciation, additional points, and other forms of motivation. Thus, positive reinforcement not only enhances students' compliance with rules but also strengthens their learning motivation.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of positive reinforcement in

improving students' learning discipline. For instance, a study by Woolfolk (2019) found that consistently giving praise can increase students' intrinsic motivation and active participation in class (Muthi, 2025). A similar study by Slameto (2021) revealed that the implementation of a well-planned reward system helps students develop learning awareness and responsibility toward their school tasks. However, most of these studies were conducted in general schools with a purely psychological approach, while research examining positive reinforcement within the framework of behavioristic theory and connected to Islamic educational values remains limited. Therefore, this study has novelty in integrating psychological aspects (behavioristic theory) with a moral and religious approach, which is characteristic of madrasahs (Rista, 2025).

Additionally, the phenomenon of low student learning discipline can also be caused by the lack of consistent application of positive reinforcement strategies in the school environment. Some teachers still use a punishment approach to address disciplinary violations (LYNNETTE ADHIAMBO RAKIRO, 2025). Although punishment may suppress negative behaviors in the short term, Skinner (1953) argued that punishment is ineffective in building long-term positive behaviors because it creates fear and anxiety (Urooj Chang et al., 2025). On the other hand, positive reinforcement provides a pleasant emotional experience, encouraging students to voluntarily repeat good behavior. Therefore, this study considers it crucial to examine the impact of positive reinforcement on improving students' learning discipline, taking into account both the behavioristic theoretical dimension and the Islamic educational values that form the moral foundation for students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Najmul Falah Bandung.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that positive reinforcement holds significant potential in shaping students' learning discipline when applied systematically and consistently. This study is crucial as it aims to explore in depth how the application of positive reinforcement, from the behavioristic theory perspective, can influence students' learning discipline within the context of Islamic education. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational science, particularly Islamic educational psychology, as well as provide practical benefits for teachers in implementing effective teaching strategies to build disciplined character and a sense of responsibility for learning among students in the madrasah environment.

Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach because the data obtained were numerical and analyzed statistically to determine the relationship between variables. Quantitative research is defined as a systematic investigation of phenomena through the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns and test hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The design of this research was *ex post facto*, which means that the researcher investigated a possible cause-and-effect relationship between variables without manipulating the independent variable. According to Sugiyono (2017), *ex post facto* research is used to examine phenomena that have already occurred and to identify the factors that may have caused them. In this context, the independent variable, namely positive reinforcement, had already been implemented by teachers before the research was conducted, while the researcher observed its possible influence on the dependent variable, students' learning discipline.

The population of this study consisted of 130 students enrolled at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Najmul Falah Bandung. From this total, 60 students were selected as the sample using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportional representation from each class. The sample was divided into two groups: thirty students who received positive reinforcement during learning and thirty students who did not. This grouping was based on teacher observations and records of classroom management practices.

The research involved two variables: positive reinforcement (independent variable) and learning discipline (dependent variable). Positive reinforcement was defined as any verbal or nonverbal stimulus given by teachers to increase desirable behavior, such as praise, symbolic rewards, and recognition (Skinner, 1953). Learning discipline referred to students' consistency in obeying learning rules, completing tasks on time, and maintaining order during the learning

process (Lickona, 1991). The theoretical framework was grounded in Behaviorist Learning Theory, which emphasizes observable behavior changes resulting from environmental stimuli and reinforcement (Skinner, 1953; Slavin, 2020).

Data collection used four main techniques: questionnaires, observation, interviews, and documentation. The main instrument was a Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 20 items measuring students' perception of positive reinforcement and 20 items measuring learning discipline. Each item was rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Observations were carried out to record the consistency of teachers' reinforcement strategies, while interviews with class teachers provided contextual understanding of reinforcement practices. Documentation, such as attendance records and discipline notes, was used to validate the quantitative findings. Before conducting data analysis, the research instruments were tested for validity and reliability. The validity test was performed using the Corrected Item-Total Correlation method, where each item was considered valid if its correlation coefficient (r -count) exceeded the r -table value of 0.361 ($N = 30$). The reliability test employed Cronbach's Alpha, and the instrument was considered reliable if the alpha coefficient exceeded 0.70 (Sugiyono, 2017). The results showed that all items were valid, and the reliability coefficient was 0.83, indicating that the instrument was consistent and dependable for use in this research.

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 25, applying several statistical procedures. First, normality testing was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, both of which indicated that the data were normally distributed, as all significance values were above 0.05. Second, the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances confirmed homogeneity with a significance value of 0.067 (> 0.05). Finally, the Independent Samples T-Test was used to test the hypothesis and determine whether there was a significant difference in learning discipline between students who received positive reinforcement and those who did not. The test results showed a t -value of -0.743 and a significance level of 0.461 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that there was no significant difference in students' learning discipline between the two groups.

This result suggests that while positive reinforcement is a central principle of behaviorist learning theory, its impact on learning discipline among students of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Najmul Falah Bandung was not statistically significant. The finding implies that reinforcement strategies alone may not be sufficient to influence students' discipline without the integration of intrinsic motivation, family background, and broader school culture. These aspects align with the view of Bandura (1986), who emphasizes that behavior is shaped not only by reinforcement but also by social and cognitive factors. The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Najmul Falah located in Margaasih District, Bandung Regency, from May to July 2025. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study: permission was formally obtained from the school, all data were kept confidential, and participation by students was voluntary with informed consent from teachers and parents.

Results and Discussion

1. Positive Reinforcement Variable (X)

The results of the questionnaire showed that the majority of students received regular positive reinforcement from their teachers during the learning process. The most common forms of reinforcement included verbal praise, extra credit for discipline and task completion, and symbolic rewards such as stars or public acknowledgment. The mean score for positive reinforcement was 78.3 out of 100, which falls into the high category, indicating that reinforcement practices in the school were well implemented.

Table 1. Positive Reinforcement Category (X)

No	Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1	High	41	68.3%
2	Moderate	14	23.3%

No	Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
3	Low	5	8.4%
Total		60	100%

2. Learning Discipline Variable (Y)

The learning discipline variable showed diverse results. Most students (63.3%) were in the high category, while the rest were in moderate or low categories. The mean total score was 75.6 out of 100, also in the high category.

Table 2. Learning Discipline Category (Y)

No	Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1	High	38	63.3%
2	Moderate	16	26.7%
3	Low	6	10.0%
Total		60	100%

3. Assumption Tests

Prior to hypothesis testing, normality and homogeneity tests were performed to ensure the data met the assumptions of parametric statistics.

Table 3. Normality Test Results (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk)

Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig.	Shapiro-Wilk Sig.	Conclusion
With Positive Reinforcement	0.124	0.071	Normal
Without Positive Reinforcement	0.140	0.066	Normal

Since all significance values are greater than 0.05, both data groups are normally distributed.

Table 4. Homogeneity Test Results (Levene's Test)

Variable	Sig.	Conclusion
Positive Reinforcement → Learning Discipline	0.067	Homogeneous

The Levene's test yielded a significance value of 0.067 (> 0.05), indicating homogeneous variances across groups. Thus, the data were suitable for Independent Sample T-Test analysis.

4. Hypothesis Test (Independent Sample T-Test)

Table 5. Independent Samples Test Results

Variable	t-value	Sig. (p)	Conclusion
Positive Reinforcement → Learning Discipline	-0.743	0.461	Not Significant

The t-test result showed $t = -0.743$ and $p = 0.461$ ($p > 0.05$), meaning no significant difference in learning discipline between students who received positive reinforcement and those who did not.

The findings revealed that positive reinforcement did not have a statistically significant effect on students' learning discipline, even though descriptive data showed a positive tendency toward better learning behavior among students.

According to B.F. Skinner's (1953) behaviorist theory, positive reinforcement functions as a stimulus that strengthens desired responses. In an educational context, this means that students are more likely to repeat disciplined behaviors when they receive positive

consequences, such as praise or recognition. However, the present findings suggest that reinforcement alone is not sufficient to produce sustained behavioral change.

This is consistent with the views of Ormrod (2020) and Slavin (2018), who found that positive reinforcement effectively shapes external behavior in the short term but may not lead to long-term internalized discipline without accompanying moral and intrinsic motivation. External rewards may influence behavior temporarily, but enduring discipline requires internal self-regulation and habitual moral training.

From an Islamic educational perspective, discipline is not merely about compliance but also embodies values of *adab* (proper conduct) and responsibility toward knowledge. As Lickona (1991) emphasizes, character formation must encompass three essential dimensions: knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good. Thus, reinforcement strategies must be integrated with value-based education and spiritual habituation to instill deeper moral awareness and self-discipline.

The findings also align with Albert Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory, which asserts that behavior is shaped not only by external reinforcement but also through observation, imitation, and social context. In this study, teacher modeling was found to play a crucial role. Students who observed consistent and disciplined teachers tended to emulate similar behaviors, while inconsistent reinforcement practices reduced overall effectiveness.

Environmental and familial factors further contributed to the results. Interviews with teachers revealed that several students lacked parental supervision and home reinforcement, weakening the overall influence of positive reinforcement provided at school. This supports Bandura's notion that reinforcement is mediated by social and cognitive variables rather than functioning in isolation.

Statistically, the significance value of 0.461 (> 0.05) confirms that there was no significant difference in learning discipline between both groups. However, from a practical standpoint, the application of positive reinforcement still fostered improved motivation, confidence, and participation among students—suggesting that while the measurable impact on discipline is limited, the affective and motivational outcomes remain valuable for classroom engagement. The results reinforce Sugiyono's (2017) observation that *ex post facto* research is correlational in nature, meaning that causality cannot be directly inferred. In this context, positive reinforcement should be regarded as a supporting factor rather than a primary determinant of students' learning discipline.

Conclusion

Based on the results and analysis of this study, it can be concluded that positive reinforcement based on behaviorist theory does not have a statistically significant effect on students' learning discipline at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Najmul Falah Bandung. The statistical analysis using the Independent Sample T-Test obtained a significance value of 0.461 ($p > 0.05$), indicating no significant difference in learning discipline between students who received positive reinforcement and those who did not.

However, the descriptive results show that the implementation of positive reinforcement has a positive practical tendency in motivating students, fostering confidence, and encouraging participation during learning activities. This suggests that positive reinforcement remains an important pedagogical tool for building a supportive and engaging classroom environment, even if its measurable effect on discipline is limited.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings reinforce the behaviorist concept proposed by B.F. Skinner (1953), which emphasizes that reinforcement shapes behavior, but also confirm the arguments of Bandura (1986) and Lickona (1991) that behavioral change and discipline require not only external stimuli but also social modeling, moral internalization, and consistent habituation. Therefore, discipline formation among students cannot rely solely on external reinforcement, but must be integrated with character education, teacher modeling, and a value-based learning culture.

In conclusion, positive reinforcement functions as a supporting factor rather than the main determinant of learning discipline. It can strengthen students' motivation and external behavior, but sustainable discipline requires the involvement of internal and environmental factors particularly family support, school culture, and religious values embedded in Islamic education.

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