AL-TA'LIM JOURNAL
Faculty of Islamic Education and Teacher Training
Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang

Volume 33 Issue 2 Year 2026 Pages 145-156
ISSN 1410-7546 | e–ISSN 2355-7893
http://dx.doi.org | DOI: 10.15548/jt.v33i2.1132

# Teachers' Strategies in Developing Students' Character of Independence and Discipline

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Abstract: Basic education is the initial stage of character formation, playing an important role in building students' personality. Independence and discipline are fundamental aspects that must be developed early so students can manage themselves and their responsibilities. However, many elementary students have not optimally demonstrated these attitudes. This study aims to analyze teachers' strategies in developing students' independence and discipline and identify obstacles faced at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Participants comprised 9 purposively selected individuals: 1 principal, 2 classroom teachers, and 6 students. Data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation were analyzed using an interactive model comprising data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure validity, rigorous triangulation procedures were implemented: technique triangulation (cross-verifying observations, interviews, documents), source triangulation (comparing perspectives from teachers, students, principal), and time triangulation (collecting data at different intervals). Results showed teachers applied main strategies including role models, positive habituation, assigning responsibility, and positive reinforcement. The obstacles faced include diverse student backgrounds, unsupportive family environments, and limited teacher time. This study confirms that consistent and contextual teacher strategies play a crucial role in shaping students' character.

Keywords: Teacher strategy; the character of independence; disciplined character; elementary school; character education.

How To Cite: J. R, M., Ardiansyah, A., & Lisnawaty, S. (2026). Teachers' strategies in developing students' character of independence and discipline. *Al-Ta lim Journal, 33*(2). doi:https://doi.org/10.15548/jt.v33i2.1132

**Article info:** Submitted: **29th Desember 2025** | Revised: **11th June 2026** | Accepted: **30th July 2026**

## INTRODUCTION

Basic education has a strategic role in shaping children's character and personality. At this stage, students are in a period of social and moral development that is greatly influenced by the school environment and the teacher's example. Two-character values that need to be developed from an early age are independence and discipline, because both serve as the foundation for the formation of responsibility, self-control, and the ability to think independently. Independence encourages students to act without depending on others Syahrizal et al., (2022) while discipline forms order in thinking, behaving, and complying with applicable norms (Bissoli, 2014; Hanurawan et al., 2024; Nasution & Bahri, 2022). These two values are an integral part of national character education efforts. Recent international literature asserts that modern character education must evolve beyond traditional compliance, serving instead as a foundational framework to develop students' internal self-regulation and moral resilience in increasingly complex educational settings (Byram et al., 2023; Carr, 2024; Darabi et al., 2023; Kallitsoglou & Repana, 2021; Rouzi et al., 2025; Tillott et al., 2026).



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However, empirical realities demonstrate inconsistencies in students' independent and disciplined behaviors (Skiba et al., 2014; Thornberg, 2007; Welsh & Little, 2018). Many students remain highly dependent on teacher instructions, lack initiative, and exhibit suboptimal adherence to school regulations. This phenomenon is further complicated by the school's ecological context. Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli shares an integrated campus with secondary and vocational high school students. This multi-level educational environment exposes elementary students to cross-level social interactions, increasing their susceptibility to negative behavioral modeling from older peers (Berg & Aber, 2015; Jones et al., 2021; Marsh et al., 2012). Consequently, teachers face the dual challenge of acting not only as academic instructors but also as moral anchors capable of mitigating these external influences through targeted character education strategies (Bruhn et al., 2002; Hutson, 2025).

Previous studies have explored various strategies for instilling character values. For instance, Lestari (2021), highlighted the efficacy of role modeling and habituation in fostering discipline, while Utami (2024). emphasized delegating responsibility to cultivate early childhood independence. Similarly, Yupita (2022) demonstrated that consistent enforcement of rules significantly impacts discipline formation. Despite their significant contributions, these studies tend to treat independence and discipline as isolated variables rather than interconnected dimensions. Furthermore, they predominantly focus on homogeneous school environments, leaving a critical gap regarding how teachers manage character development in complex, multi-level school ecosystems characterized by cross-tier social dynamics. To address this gap, this study offers a distinct novelty by concurrently investigating the integration of independence and discipline within an ecologically complex, multi-level school environment.

This research expands the practical application of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development Rubach et al., (2023) by examining how teachers counteract negative cross-level behavioral modeling through proactive pedagogical interventions. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the teachers' strategies in developing the character of independence and discipline among students at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli, and to identify the specific environmental and situational obstacles encountered during its implementation. To guide this research systematically, this study addresses two main questions of the research: (1) How do teachers apply strategies to develop the character of independence and discipline among students at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli? and (2) What obstacles do teachers face in implementing this character development strategy in the school environment?

Based on this description, the purpose of this study is to analyze the strategies employed by teachers in developing the character of independence and discipline among students at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli. The research also aims to identify the obstacles encountered by teachers during the implementation of these character education strategies. Specifically, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive description of the pedagogical methods, classroom practices, and educational approaches used by educators to foster students' independent and disciplined behavior. In addition, it evaluates the environmental, institutional, and situational constraints that may affect the effectiveness of character development programs. The findings are expected to contribute to improving character education practices and provide valuable insights for teachers, school administrators, and future researchers in the field of elementary education.

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## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to provide an in-depth, interpretive understanding of teachers' strategies in developing elementary students' independence and discipline (Gioia, 2021; Larsen, 2023; Mey, 2023; Pahleviannur et al., 2022). The research was conducted at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli, Central Sulawesi. This location was deliberately selected due to its unique ecological characteristics; the elementary school is situated within the same complex as secondary and vocational schools, creating cross-level social dynamics that significantly impact student behavior. The participants consisted of 9 individuals selected through a purposive sampling technique: 1 school principal, 2 Phase B classroom teachers (Grades III and IV), and 6 students. The selection criteria for the educators required them to be actively involved in implementing character-building programs.

Meanwhile, the 6 students were specifically selected based on early observational track records of frequent indiscipline (e.g., tardiness) to allow the researchers to observe tangible behavioral transformations resulting from the teachers' interventions. The data collection process was integrative, utilizing three primary techniques. First, passive participant observation was conducted inside the classrooms and school grounds to factualize the implementation of pedagogical strategies without disrupting natural learning activities. Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out using an interview protocol ide based on specific behavioral indicators of independence and discipline. This protocol allowed researchers to deeply explore the perspectives of the principal and teachers regarding their pedagogical decisions and environmental challenges. Third, document analysis was performed on learning modules, student attendance records, and school discipline regulations to synchronize formal policies with empirical field realities (Hidayat, 2023).

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model comprising three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Crucially, the data reduction phase involved a systematic coding process where interview transcripts and observation notes were transcribed, coded, and categorized into thematic nodes (e.g., "habituation strategies," "micro-responsibilities," and "environmental obstacles"). Finally, to ensure the credibility, dependability, and validity of the qualitative findings, rigorous triangulation procedures were executed (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021; Flick, 2018; Nurrisa et al., 2025; Sato, 2021). This included technique triangulation (cross-verifying observation notes with interview transcripts and documents), source triangulation (comparing narrative consistency among the principal, teachers, and students), and time triangulation (collecting data across multiple periodic intervals to verify behavioral consistency).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from observations and interviews revealed consistency between teachers' statements and the practices observed in the field regarding the development of students' independence and discipline at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli. The results indicate that teachers consistently applied character-building strategies through positive habituation, role modeling, responsibility, and positive reinforcement. Positive habituation encouraged students to develop independent learning routines and follow school rules. Teacher role modeling provided concrete examples of punctuality, discipline, and responsibility. Meanwhile, assigning responsibilities encouraged students to take initiative and complete tasks independently. Positive reinforcement through praise and

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appreciation further motivated students to maintain desirable behaviors. These findings demonstrate the importance of consistent teacher involvement in character development.

Regarding positive habituation, the third-grade teacher explained that developing students' independence is carried out through consistent daily practices and direct guidance during learning activities. The teacher stated, *"We encourage students to do their tasks independently, such as preparing their books and stationery before the lesson begins. When they have an assignment, we ask them to try completing it by themselves before asking for help."* The teacher further explained that students are gradually trained to take responsibility for their own learning needs and activities. According to the teacher, this habituation is important because students need to learn not to depend entirely on teachers or classmates. By providing opportunities to work independently, teachers encourage students to become more confident, responsible, disciplined, and accustomed to completing their tasks without excessive assistance.

Teacher role modeling was also identified as an important strategy in developing students' independence and discipline. One teacher stated, *"Teachers have to set an example first. If we ask students to arrive on time, we as teachers must also arrive on time. If we want students to be responsible, we must also demonstrate responsibility."* The teacher further explained that students tend to observe and imitate the behavior demonstrated by their teachers in daily school activities. Therefore, teachers are expected to consistently demonstrate punctuality, discipline, responsibility, and commitment in carrying out their duties. This approach was supported by field observations, including an unplanned observation conducted on October 13, 2025, which showed teachers demonstrating punctuality, consistency, and responsibility. These findings indicate that teacher role modeling provides students with concrete examples of disciplined and responsible behavior that can be practiced in their daily activities.

Furthermore, assigning simple responsibilities, such as erasing the whiteboard, helping classmates, becoming peer tutors, and leading groups, encouraged students to take initiative and develop a stronger sense of responsibility. These responsibilities provided students with opportunities to practice decision-making, cooperation, time management, and task completion independently. In addition, positive reinforcement through praise, appreciation, and recognition encouraged students to maintain desirable behaviors and motivated them to participate actively in classroom activities. The triangulation findings demonstrate a clear consistency between the strategies reported by teachers during interviews and the practices observed in the classroom. This consistency strengthens the evidence that positive habituation, teacher role modeling, responsibility assignment, and positive reinforcement contribute significantly to the development of students' independence and discipline.

**Strategies used by teachers in developing students' character of independence and discipline at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli**

The interview findings revealed that teachers at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli applied different strategies to develop students' independence and discipline according to their developmental stages. In Phase A, teachers emphasized habituation, peer learning, reinforcement, and appropriate consequences. One lower-grade teacher explained: *"In the lower grades, we focus more on habituating students to learn independently. For example, students are encouraged to study with their friends or in small groups when learning letters, numbers, and reading. We also continuously remind them*

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*about the importance of following school rules*." The teacher further explained that students who repeatedly violated school rules were given consequences according to the nature of their violations, while students who consistently demonstrated discipline received praise and appreciation.

In Phase B, particularly in Grades III and IV, teachers increasingly emphasized responsibility, independence, and self-reliance as important components of students' character development. One teacher stated, "*For students in Grades III and IV, we give them more responsibilities. They may become ceremony officers, class leaders, or take responsibility for certain classroom activities. We also encourage them to solve assignments or problems by themselves before asking for help*." The teacher further explained that assigning responsibilities allows students to practice making decisions, managing tasks, and developing confidence in their abilities. However, teachers continued to provide appropriate guidance and supervision to ensure that students did not feel neglected or left entirely on their own. This balanced approach enabled students to develop initiative while gradually learning to take responsibility for their decisions, actions, and assigned duties.

Meanwhile, teachers in Phase C emphasized positive reinforcement and teacher role modeling. One teacher explained: "*At this stage, students need consistent examples from their teachers. We try to show discipline and responsibility through the way we speak, behave, and carry out our duties. Students observe these behaviors and are expected to follow the examples they see.*" The principal also emphasized the importance of providing continuous guidance and reinforcement. The principal stated: "*We always remind and strengthen students about discipline and independence, not only during classroom activities but also outside the classroom, during morning briefings, and during Monday ceremonies. Teachers and school leaders must provide examples because students learn not only from what we say but also from what we do*."

These interview findings indicate that teachers and school leaders applied developmentally appropriate strategies across the three phases. The strategies gradually shifted from habituation and simple reinforcement in Phase A toward greater responsibility, self-reliance, and role modeling in Phases B and C. The findings suggest that consistent guidance, positive reinforcement, responsibility, and exemplary behavior are essential components in fostering students' independence and discipline. The principal also plays an important role as the main mentor and role model for students. The principal consistently reminds and strengthens students' awareness of discipline and independence both inside and outside the classroom, during morning briefings, and at Monday ceremonies. This continuous guidance demonstrates the school's commitment to character development. One teacher emphasized that consistent reminders and positive examples help students develop responsible and disciplined habits. One of the teachers said this:

> "*In terms of character building, I primarily implement a reward and punishment system to encourage students to follow classroom rules and maintain discipline. Furthermore, to cultivate independence, I habituate students to take responsibility for their daily activities. I provide each student with opportunities to take charge through simple tasks, such as politely reminding disruptive peers, erasing the whiteboard, conducting peer tutoring, retrieving textbooks from the teachers' office, and coordinating the collection of assignments. Through these activities, students are encouraged to develop initiative, confidence, and accountability in completing their responsibilities. I believe that assigning simple*

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*responsibilities allows students to learn through direct experience rather than merely receiving instructions from teachers. This approach gradually enables them to become more independent, disciplined, responsible, and confident in managing their tasks."*

The results of the interview confirmed that the *reward and punishment* strategy combined with the delegation of micro-responsibilities functions effectively as a character-building instrument. Real assignment efforts from peer tutoring to classroom logistics management are designed to exercise student autonomy at work, reduce reliance on teacher instruction, and foster collective initiative. This picture is in line with Trismayanti's study which emphasizes that positive habituation, motivation, and example are effective strategies for teachers in shaping the behavior and character of elementary school students (Trismayanti, 2020) According to him, teachers not only function as teachers, but also figures who present moral examples through daily behavior and classroom routines. In this study, habits such as arriving on time, obeying school rules, and working independently reflected the practices recommended in the study.

These findings are also reinforced by the opinions of Marlina, Dewi, and Yuliantoro, who state that improving student learning discipline requires a combination of rule enforcement, consistent habituation, responsibility, and positive reinforcement (Bahri et al., 2025; G. D. Lestari et al., 2025; Marlina et al., 2022; Ramadani et al., 2026) which concludes that the escalation of learning discipline requires a convergence between regulatory enforcement, consistent habituation, delegation of responsibility, and positive reinforcement injection (*positive reinforcement*). They underline that the character of discipline is constructed through a stable routine and appreciation of obedience, not merely a product of punishment. Based on the results of direct observation by the researcher in the classroom, this postulate was actually executed at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli, the application of *reward and punishment strategies* by teachers does not stand alone, but is integrated with observational practices of delegating authority (such as the assignment of peer tutors and classroom logistics management).

This proves that the provision of proportional sanctions and appreciation (*rewards*) goes hand in hand with the class routine to form character holistically. Overall, these two theories show that the formation of the character of independence and discipline requires the active role of teachers as exemplary figures and value guides. Through repeated habituation, reinforcement of positive behaviors, and the provision of learning experiences that support independence, students gain the opportunity to internalize moral values gradually. These findings are in line with Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which emphasizes that moral values are formed through social habituation and moral exemplarity. The use of teacher habituation and modelling helps students move from externally driven obedience to internalized moral awareness (Grusec et al., 2014; Hasanah, 2019; Hirsan et al., 2026) Thus, the role of teachers as models and facilitators of values is very important in developing student independence and discipline at the elementary school level.

**Obstacles faced by teachers in developing the character of independence and discipline of students at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli**

Based on the results of the research, teachers at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli face several obstacles in developing the character of independence and discipline of students. The difference in students' backgrounds is a major challenge because each

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child has a different parenting style, habits, and level of understanding of the value of responsibility and discipline. This condition requires teachers to adjust learning strategies and character development methods to suit the characteristics and needs of each student. Parental involvement is still limited and is also a significant obstacle. Based on the results of an interview with one of the teachers, parental support for character education is still low. The teacher explained that most parents think that schools have full responsibility in shaping their children's character. Most only take children to school in the hope that the school will handle the entire educational process, including character building.

Interviews with the principal show that the school environment also presents its own challenges. Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli is located in the same environment as secondary and vocational schools Nurul Islam, so that elementary school students interact every day with upper-class students of various levels. Elementary school students often interact with their upper-class students and from these interactions they tend to imitate the behavior and speech of their upper-class students. This pattern of cross-level association has the potential to affect the formation of students' character, especially if the behavior imitated is not in accordance with the values of independence and discipline instilled by the teacher. his empirical finding is corroborated by recent developmental studies, which emphasize that without structured pedagogical buffering, younger students are disproportionately vulnerable to negative behavioral contagion from older peers within integrated, multi-tier school systems (Karlberg et al., 2024). Interview results with the principal:

> *"We face several challenges in developing students' independence and discipline within this institution. Since our elementary school shares the same environment with secondary and vocational schools, our students frequently interact with older students. This situation creates a potential influence on their behavior, as younger students may imitate the habits and attitudes of their older peers. We have observed several instances in which elementary students copied undisciplined behaviors, including reluctance to attend classes, arriving late at school, and occasionally skipping lessons. Therefore, teachers and school leaders need to provide continuous supervision, guidance, and positive reinforcement to minimize negative influences and strengthen students' discipline and independence."*

Conceptually, these various obstacles demonstrate that the development of students' independence and discipline cannot be separated from their social and educational environment. Character education requires continuous collaboration and synergy among teachers, parents, school leaders, peers, and the wider school community. The findings support Lawrence Kohlberg's perspective that the development of moral values depends not only on formal instruction but also on consistent role modeling, social interaction, and the context in which values are practiced. Therefore, teachers' strategies for fostering independence and discipline need to be supported by parental involvement, appropriate supervision, and a positive school environment. Consistency between what students learn at school and what they experience in their surrounding environment is essential to ensure that these character values are internalized, practiced consistently, and developed sustainably in students' daily lives.

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**The importance of character development of independence and discipline for elementary school students**

The successful implementation of micro-responsibility delegation and reward-punishment strategies at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli represents the urgency of contextual character education at the elementary level. Consistent with the findings of Sari et al. (2024) independence and discipline should not be reduced to mechanical obedience, but rather positioned as the foundation for self-regulation and social responsibility. The empirical practices discovered in the field, such as peer tutoring and classroom logistics management by Phase B students, have proven capable of shifting students' learning orientation from external dependency (reliance on teacher instructions) to internal autonomy. This validates that independent character built from an early age serves as an essential instrument for students to make decisions confidently and manage their academic responsibilities proactively.

Furthermore, the integration of these two characters through consistent habituation provides a strong buffering effect against environmental disruptions. This confirms the postulates of Baso et al., (2021); Kleden (2023), who assert that character education requires structured habituation and affirmative intervention from educators. By possessing internalized discipline and independence, elementary students not only achieve academic success indicators but also build moral resilience to shield themselves from the negative influences of cross-level interactions with secondary and vocational high school students. Therefore, strengthening character through meaningful classroom responsibilities is not merely a curricular supplement, but a fundamental pedagogical investment in developing students who demonstrate integrity, independence, responsibility, and social resilience.

Ultimately, these pedagogical strategies do not merely aim for immediate behavioral compliance but are designed to nurture a long-term internalization of values, which is essential for students to navigate the complex social landscape of integrated school environments successfully. The findings of this study provide a significant theoretical contribution by demonstrating that the efficacy of character education is not solely dependent on pedagogical methods, but is fundamentally shaped by the school's ecological dynamics. By integrating the delegation of micro-responsibilities with a reward-punishment system, this study validates the transition of Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory from mere cognitive awareness to active social practice within a multi-tiered environment. Furthermore, this research highlights that 'moral resilience' in elementary students is not an innate trait but a cultivated capability that emerges when pedagogical interventions are contextually aligned with the students' immediate social challenges.

Therefore, the strategies implemented at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli provide a potentially replicable framework for other elementary institutions facing similar cross-tier social complexities. The findings demonstrate that character development cannot rely solely on classroom instruction or rule transmission. Instead, it requires continuous interaction between pedagogical practices, school culture, social relationships, and environmental supervision. Teachers play a central role through habituation, role modeling, responsibility, positive reinforcement, and appropriate guidance based on students' developmental stages. School leaders, parents, and the wider educational environment must also provide consistent support to reinforce these values. This approach suggests that character formation in the twenty-first century requires an "ecological-

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pedagogical synergy," connecting classroom practices with broader social and environmental influences to sustainably develop students' independence, discipline, responsibility, and resilience.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' independence and discipline at Nurul Islam Elementary School 01 Tawaeli can be effectively developed through the integration of positive reinforcement, reward and punishment, and the delegation of micro-responsibilities, such as peer tutoring and classroom management. The findings demonstrate that character is shaped not merely through theoretical instruction, but through students' active participation in consistent and structured routines supported by teacher role modeling. Practically, elementary schools, particularly those within integrated multi-level educational environments, should develop specific strategies to strengthen character formation. Teachers and school administrators are encouraged to provide students with meaningful responsibilities while maintaining appropriate guidance and supervision. Parental involvement should also be strengthened to ensure consistency between school and home. Future research should examine the long-term effects of micro-responsibility delegation on students' academic achievement, independence, discipline, and social resilience.

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