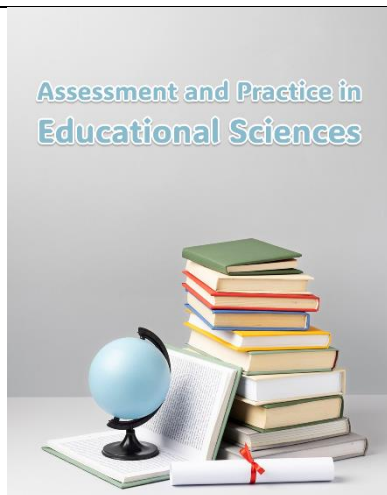




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A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis of Discipline in School Studies: From Educational Order to Power Constructs

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to conceptually and theoretically analyze the transformation of school discipline from a mechanism of educational order into a power-oriented construct within school studies. This study was conducted using a qualitative, conceptual-theoretical, and descriptive-analytical design. The research was based on documentary and library-based inquiry rather than fieldwork with human participants. The analytical corpus consisted of selected classical and contemporary texts in sociology of education, philosophy of education, school studies, classroom management, critical pedagogy, and theories of power. Sources were selected purposefully according to their relevance to school discipline, educational order, normalization, social control, symbolic reproduction, educational justice, and participatory discipline. Data were collected through systematic review, conceptual note-taking, and thematic organization of theoretical materials. Data analysis was performed using a critical-analytical and interpretive approach, through which key concepts were extracted, compared, categorized, and interpreted within their historical, social, and theoretical contexts. The inferential findings indicated that school discipline cannot be reduced to a neutral tool for classroom management or behavioral regulation. The analysis showed that discipline has historically shifted from moral obedience and teacher-centered authority toward bureaucratic, institutional, and power-based mechanisms. The findings further revealed that disciplinary practices operate through surveillance, assessment, classification, regulation, and normalization, thereby contributing to the formation of compliant educational subjects. In addition, discipline was found to function as a mechanism of symbolic and ideological reproduction, especially when school rules privilege dominant cultural norms and marginalize students with different social or cultural backgrounds. However, the analysis also indicated that discipline can be reconstructed through democratic, dialogical, participatory, and dignity-centered approaches. The study concludes that school discipline is a multidimensional educational and social construct that simultaneously produces order, regulates behavior, reproduces power, and shapes student subjectivity. Therefore, educational policymakers, school administrators, and teachers should move beyond punitive and authoritarian models and adopt participatory approaches that promote self-regulation, educational justice, critical awareness, and human dignity.

Keywords: School discipline; Educational order; Power; Sociology of education; Critical pedagogy; Educational justice.

Introduction

School discipline has long been regarded as one of the foundational conditions of educational order, classroom management, and institutional stability. In most educational systems, discipline is commonly associated with rule-following, respect for

authority, orderly conduct, learning readiness, and the prevention of disruptive behavior. From this conventional perspective, discipline appears to be a neutral and necessary instrument through which schools create the conditions required for teaching and learning. However, the concept of discipline is far more complex than its ordinary administrative meaning suggests. It is not only a pedagogical mechanism for regulating student behavior, but also a historically constructed, socially situated, and theoretically contested concept. Within school studies, discipline occupies a central position because it connects the everyday practices of classroom management to broader questions of socialization, authority, moral development, institutional control, educational justice, and the production of compliant or critical subjects. Therefore, any serious analysis of school discipline must move beyond its technical meaning and examine the conceptual, ideological, and power-related assumptions embedded in it.

In classical educational thought, discipline was largely interpreted as a moral and social necessity. Durkheim considered education to be a social institution through which the younger generation is prepared for collective life, and in this framework discipline functions as one of the main instruments for internalizing social norms, moral obligations, and collective expectations (1). In this view, the school is not merely a place for the transmission of knowledge, but an institutional space in which individuals learn to control impulses, accept social duties, and participate in a moral order larger than themselves. Durkheim's later translated work in educational sociology also reinforces the idea that discipline is inseparable from socialization, since schools participate in the formation of social beings who must live within shared rules and collective structures (2). This interpretation is important because it explains why discipline has often been justified as a legitimate educational requirement. Nevertheless, its limitation lies in the fact that it tends to present school authority as natural and necessary, without sufficiently questioning how disciplinary rules may reproduce hierarchy, inequality, or institutional domination.

The historical development of schooling shows that discipline gradually moved from personal and moral forms of obedience toward more systematic and institutionalized forms of regulation. In traditional educational settings, including pre-modern Iranian schooling, discipline was often centered on the authority of the teacher, respect for hierarchy, memorization, repetition, moral advice, and, in many cases, punitive practices (3). With the emergence of modern schooling, however, discipline became increasingly bureaucratic and formalized. The modern school organized students through age-based grouping, classroom space, timetables, attendance systems, examinations, grading, and administrative regulations. Curriculum planning also contributed to this institutionalization of order, because the curriculum does not merely determine what is taught; it also structures time, sequence, evaluation, expected performance, and acceptable forms of participation (4). In this sense, discipline became embedded in the architecture of modern education itself. It no longer depended only on direct teacher authority, but operated through a broader institutional system that regulated students' bodies, behaviors, time, movement, and performance.

Educational management literature has also contributed to the dominant understanding of discipline as a condition of school effectiveness. In this tradition, discipline is often linked to the creation of a stable, predictable, and secure school environment in which teaching and learning can occur efficiently (5). Classroom management studies similarly conceptualize discipline as part of teachers' practical repertoire for organizing instruction, reducing disruption, maintaining attention, and supporting academic achievement (6). From this perspective, discipline is not necessarily coercive; rather, it may include routines, expectations, positive reinforcement, preventive strategies, and constructive teacher–student interaction. This view is useful because it recognizes that learning requires some degree of order, continuity, and behavioral coordination. Yet, when discipline is reduced only to behavioral management, its deeper social and political dimensions remain hidden. The classroom is not simply a technical space; it is also a relational, cultural, and institutional space in which power is exercised, identities are shaped, and students learn what forms of behavior, speech, silence, obedience, and resistance are acceptable.

A major theoretical shift in the analysis of discipline occurred through Foucault's theory of disciplinary power. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argued that modern institutions such as schools, prisons, barracks, hospitals, and factories operate through subtle techniques that produce disciplined and useful bodies (7). For Foucault, discipline is not merely an external force that represses individuals. It is a productive form of power that organizes space, regulates time, observes conduct, records performance, compares individuals, and establishes norms. The school, in this framework, becomes one of the most important modern disciplinary institutions because it trains students not only to obey visible rules, but also to internalize surveillance and regulate themselves. The Persian translation and reception of Foucault's work further contributed to educational debates by emphasizing that the school may function as a site in which bodies and minds are normalized through examination, classification, and continuous evaluation (8). Deacon's interpretation of Foucault in educational contexts also shows that schooling cannot be understood only as a benevolent process of instruction, because the ordinary practices of teaching, assessment, and classroom organization are deeply connected to disciplinary technologies (9). Therefore, Foucault's contribution lies in shifting the question from "How does discipline create order?" to "What kinds of subjects does discipline produce?"

The critical analysis of school discipline is also enriched by the theory of social reproduction. Bourdieu and Passeron argued that schools reproduce social and cultural inequalities by legitimizing the dominant culture as if it were neutral, universal, and naturally superior (10). Discipline is central to this process because it defines which forms of language, behavior, appearance, participation, and attitude are considered appropriate. Students whose cultural capital is closer to the dominant school culture are more likely to be perceived as disciplined, capable, and successful, while students from marginalized or culturally different backgrounds may be more easily labeled as disorderly, resistant, or deficient. This perspective reveals that discipline does not affect all students in the same way. It may appear neutral at the level of formal rules, but its implementation can reproduce social differences and educational exclusion. Mohseni Tabrizi's sociological analysis of education similarly emphasizes that schools operate as institutions of social control and that disciplinary mechanisms are connected to broader structures of authority, conformity, and social order (11). Thus, the study of discipline requires attention not only to school rules but also to the social conditions under which those rules are interpreted and applied.

Critical curriculum theory and critical pedagogy further expand this discussion by showing that school discipline is connected to ideology, citizenship, and the hidden curriculum. Apple argued that schooling participates in the reproduction of dominant social, political, and economic values through curriculum, assessment, institutional routines, and everyday educational practices (12). In this sense, discipline is not limited to controlling visible behavior; it also teaches students what forms of knowledge, authority, competition, silence, conformity, and success are valued. Giroux's critical pedagogy challenges this model by arguing that education should cultivate agency, democratic participation, and critical consciousness rather than passive obedience (13). From this standpoint, discipline must be reconsidered as a dialogical and participatory process. Rather than treating students as objects of control, schools should recognize them as active subjects capable of reflection, responsibility, and participation in the construction of educational order. Rahimi's work on critical pedagogy and student participation similarly highlights the importance of student voice, classroom democracy, and participatory educational relations in transforming disciplinary practices (14). Therefore, critical pedagogy does not reject order, but it asks what kind of order is being produced and whether that order strengthens or weakens student agency.

In the Iranian educational context, the concept of discipline has frequently been discussed within managerial, moral, legal, and social frameworks. Bagheri's philosophy of education emphasizes the ethical and human dimensions of educational relations and suggests that school practices must be evaluated according to their contribution to human development, moral agency, and dignity (15). Khosropanah's critical philosophy of education also provides an important foundation for questioning

educational practices that become authoritarian, instrumental, or detached from human dignity (16). In his later work on educational justice, Khosropanah links educational practice to the principles of justice, participation, and respect for the learner's moral status (17). These perspectives are particularly relevant for rethinking discipline because they suggest that discipline is legitimate only when it supports moral growth, self-regulation, and dignity rather than humiliation, fear, and passive compliance. Khodadadi's attempt to redefine discipline in modern schools also reflects the need to move beyond traditional authoritarian models and toward more reflective and humane forms of school order (18). Accordingly, discipline should not be equated with silence, submission, or mechanical obedience, but should be reconstructed as a process that enables responsibility, social understanding, and ethical participation.

Recent Iranian studies have also drawn attention to the relationship between discipline, educational justice, and democratic school management. Nemati's work on discipline and social justice in Iranian education shows that disciplinary policies may reproduce inequality when they are applied without sensitivity to students' cultural, social, and individual differences (19). Soleimani's analysis of power theories and school disciplinary policies similarly demonstrates that discipline is not independent of power relations and that educational regulations must be examined in relation to normalization, authority, and social control (20). Mazaheri's work on school management and democratic discipline argues that school leaders play a crucial role in transforming discipline from coercive control into participatory order (21). Abbasi's analysis of discipline and educational justice in Iranian schools further emphasizes that disciplinary systems should be evaluated according to their consequences for fairness, inclusion, and equal learning opportunities (22). These studies collectively show that the Iranian literature has begun to move from a narrow managerial understanding of discipline toward a more critical and justice-oriented interpretation, although this conceptual shift still requires deeper theoretical development.

Contemporary educational conditions make the critical analysis of discipline even more urgent. Schools today are no longer only spaces of direct teacher instruction; they are also complex learning organizations shaped by curriculum reforms, digital technologies, social diversity, psychological needs, and changing expectations of citizenship. Recent research on learning schools and the development of students' managerial skills indicates that schools are increasingly expected to cultivate responsibility, initiative, cooperation, and self-management rather than mere obedience (23). Similarly, studies on the role of preschool and primary teachers in curriculum development show that teachers are not simply implementers of rules and curricula; they actively participate in shaping learning environments and educational experiences (24). The emergence of new fields such as artificial intelligence education also changes the meaning of discipline, because students must learn to participate critically, creatively, and ethically in technologically mediated learning environments (25). In such contexts, rigid and authoritarian discipline is increasingly insufficient. Schools require forms of order that support autonomy, collaboration, creativity, ethical reflection, and responsible participation.

Recent empirical evidence also suggests that disciplinary practices are closely connected to belonging, identity, and unequal treatment. Doyle and colleagues showed that empathy-based interventions can reduce gender gaps in school discipline and facilitate students' sense of belonging (26). This finding is important because it demonstrates that discipline is not only a matter of rules and sanctions; it is also related to relational climate, teacher perception, student identity, and emotional inclusion. When students experience disciplinary systems as unfair, humiliating, or biased, discipline may weaken belonging and increase resistance. Conversely, when discipline is grounded in empathy, participation, and justice, it can support inclusion and responsibility. This contemporary evidence reinforces the theoretical claim that school discipline must be analyzed as a relational and power-laden process rather than as a purely administrative mechanism. It also shows that theoretical analysis has practical consequences: the way discipline is conceptualized directly affects how schools respond to difference, conflict, disruption, and student development.

Despite the growing body of literature on school discipline, several conceptual gaps remain. Much of the educational literature still treats discipline as a technical requirement of classroom management or school administration, without examining its deeper relationship with power, normalization, ideology, symbolic reproduction, and educational justice. Conversely, some critical analyses emphasize power so strongly that they may neglect the practical need for order, responsibility, and shared norms in educational environments. Therefore, a balanced conceptual analysis is required—one that recognizes the necessity of educational order while also exposing the ways in which discipline can become a mechanism of control and domination. Such an analysis should clarify how discipline has historically moved from moral obedience to institutional regulation and from classroom management to power construction. It should also examine how discipline may be reconstructed through democratic, participatory, and dignity-centered approaches. This is particularly important in school studies because discipline remains one of the most visible yet least critically examined aspects of educational life.

The aim of this study is to provide a conceptual and theoretical analysis of discipline in school studies by examining its transformation from a mechanism of educational order into a power-oriented construct and by clarifying its implications for educational justice, school policy, and participatory practice.

Methods and Materials

The present study was conducted using a qualitative research design with a conceptual–theoretical and descriptive–analytical orientation. Since the purpose of the study was not to measure the frequency of a phenomenon or to test causal relationships, but rather to clarify, interpret, and critically analyze the concept of discipline in school studies, a qualitative design was considered the most appropriate methodological framework. The study focused on the semantic, historical, educational, sociological, and power-related dimensions of school discipline and sought to examine how this concept has moved from a seemingly neutral instrument of educational order toward a broader construct embedded in relations of power, normalization, and subject formation. Accordingly, the research was based on documentary and library-based inquiry rather than fieldwork with human participants. The sample of the study consisted of selected theoretical, philosophical, sociological, and educational texts related to school discipline, educational order, sociology of education, philosophy of education, critical pedagogy, and theories of power. The documentary sample included classical and contemporary books, scholarly articles, theoretical writings, and analytical sources that directly addressed discipline, schooling, power, social control, symbolic reproduction, classroom management, educational policy, and critical school studies. The selection of sources was purposeful and criterion-based. Sources were included when they had direct relevance to the conceptual analysis of school discipline, offered a significant theoretical contribution, or helped explain the relationship between educational order and power structures. Particular attention was given to works associated with theorists such as Michel Foucault, Émile Durkheim, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, Michael Apple, and Henry Giroux, as well as Persian-language sources in the fields of education, sociology of education, educational philosophy, and school management. Sources that dealt with discipline only in a purely technical or unrelated manner, without conceptual, educational, sociological, or theoretical relevance to the research problem, were excluded from the final analytical corpus.

Data were collected through documentary and library research. In this type of qualitative study, the principal data collection tools were theoretical texts, academic documents, books, scholarly articles, and conceptual sources related to school discipline and power theories. Since the study was conceptual rather than experimental or survey-based, no questionnaire, interview protocol, psychological scale, or observational checklist was used. Instead, the process of data collection relied on a structured documentary review procedure. The researcher first identified relevant keywords and conceptual domains, including school discipline, educational order, classroom order, disciplinary power, normalization, social control, symbolic power, reproduction

of inequality, critical pedagogy, educational policy, and school studies. Then, related sources were reviewed in a focused manner to extract definitions, theoretical assumptions, conceptual distinctions, historical interpretations, and analytical propositions. To increase the systematic nature of data collection, a document review form and note-taking framework were used. This framework included information such as the title and author of the source, theoretical orientation, definition of discipline, explanation of the function of discipline, relationship between discipline and power, implications for schooling, and relevance to the central research question. The collected material was organized around several major conceptual axes, including the historical transformation of discipline, the educational and managerial function of discipline, the Foucauldian interpretation of disciplinary power, the role of discipline in symbolic and cultural reproduction, and the implications of critical and participatory approaches for educational policy and practice. Through this process, the study attempted to move beyond a descriptive review of previous literature and toward a deeper conceptual interpretation of the meanings and functions of discipline in the school context.

Data analysis was carried out using a critical–analytical and interpretive approach. After the relevant sources were collected and organized, the texts were read repeatedly in order to identify their central concepts, theoretical assumptions, and implicit or explicit interpretations of school discipline. The analysis began with open conceptual reading, through which key ideas related to discipline, order, obedience, control, punishment, reward, surveillance, assessment, normalization, subject formation, symbolic power, and educational justice were extracted. These concepts were then compared across different theoretical traditions in order to identify convergences, contradictions, and conceptual transformations. In the next stage, the extracted concepts were categorized according to their theoretical orientation. For example, functionalist perspectives were analyzed in terms of educational order and socialization, Foucauldian perspectives were analyzed in terms of disciplinary power and normalization, Bourdieusian perspectives were analyzed in terms of symbolic power and social reproduction, and critical pedagogical perspectives were analyzed in terms of dialogue, participation, agency, and democratic discipline. The analysis did not treat the reviewed texts as neutral sources of information; rather, each text was interpreted within its historical, social, and theoretical context. This made it possible to examine how discipline has been constructed differently across educational, sociological, managerial, and critical discourses. In order to enhance the credibility of the analysis, the study used theoretical comparison, conceptual consistency, and repeated review of the documentary material. The final interpretation was developed by linking the findings of the conceptual analysis to the main research question: how discipline in school studies has evolved from an instrument of educational order into a power-oriented construct. Through this analytical process, discipline was understood not merely as a mechanism for classroom management, but as a multidimensional educational and social construct that contributes to the regulation of behavior, the internalization of norms, the reproduction of institutional power, and the formation of educational subjects.

Findings and Results

The documentary profile of the study showed that the analysis was based on a qualitative and conceptual corpus rather than on human participants. Therefore, the demographic reporting in this section refers to the descriptive characteristics of the documentary and theoretical sample. The final analytical corpus consisted of twenty-three selected academic sources in the fields of sociology of education, philosophy of education, school studies, classroom management, critical pedagogy, and theories of power. These sources included classical theoretical texts, contemporary critical works, Persian-language educational sources, and studies related to school discipline, educational order, social control, and educational justice. In terms of language and intellectual orientation, the reviewed sources included both international and Persian-language works, allowing the study to compare global theoretical discussions of discipline with Iranian educational and sociological interpretations. The

publication period of the sources ranged from classical foundational texts in the mid-twentieth century to more recent educational and sociological works. The documentary sample included functionalist interpretations of discipline, psychological and managerial approaches to classroom order, Foucauldian analyses of disciplinary power, Bourdieusian interpretations of symbolic reproduction, critical school studies, and contemporary humanistic and participatory approaches. Since the study was theoretical and qualitative, no demographic variables such as age, gender, educational level, or socioeconomic status were applicable to individual participants. Instead, the main descriptive characteristics of the sample were theoretical orientation, disciplinary field, historical period, and relevance to the conceptual transformation of school discipline. This profile indicates that the findings of the study were developed through the comparative and interpretive analysis of diverse theoretical traditions rather than through statistical measurement or field-based participant data.

Table 1. Conceptual and Historical Transformation of Discipline in School Studies

Historical and Conceptual Stage	Dominant Meaning of Discipline	Main Educational Function	Main Disciplinary Mechanisms	Position of the Student	Position of the Teacher or Institution	Type of Order Produced	Relationship with Power	Main Conceptual Finding
Traditional and pre-modern schooling	Discipline as obedience, moral submission, and respect for authority	Preservation of behavioral order and moral conformity	Direct punishment, moral advice, teacher authority, repetition, memorization, and hierarchical control	The student is viewed as a passive learner who must obey the teacher and accept established norms	The teacher is the central figure of authority and the main source of discipline	Moral and personal order	Power is direct, visible, personal, and often coercive	Discipline in this stage is mainly attached to obedience and teacher-centered authority rather than institutional regulation
Classical functionalist education	Discipline as social morality and collective order	Socialization of the younger generation and transmission of collective norms	School rules, moral instruction, institutional expectations, and collective rituals	The student is viewed as a future social member who must internalize social norms	The school functions as an agency of social integration and moral education	Social and normative order	Power appears legitimate because it is connected to collective life and social cohesion	Discipline is understood as necessary for preparing individuals for social life, but its power-laden dimensions remain largely unexamined
Psychological and classroom-management approach	Discipline as behavioral management and classroom control	Improvement of learning conditions, prevention of disruption, and regulation of student behavior	Reward, punishment, classroom routines, behavior modification, monitoring, and teacher intervention	The student is understood mainly as a behavioral subject whose actions can be corrected and managed	The teacher is a manager of classroom behavior and learning conditions	Pedagogical and managerial order	Power is technical, practical, and embedded in classroom-management strategies	Discipline is reduced to an operational problem of behavior control, while broader social and political meanings are minimized
Modern bureaucratic schooling	Discipline as institutional regulation and formal order	Standardization, predictability, efficiency, and administrative coordination	Timetables, attendance systems, grading, examinations, disciplinary codes, ranking, and school regulations	The student becomes an institutional subject classified by rules, grades, and records	The school becomes a bureaucratic institution that regulates time, space, movement, and performance	Formal and bureaucratic order	Power is institutional, structural, and embedded in official regulations	Discipline becomes systematic and impersonal, moving beyond the personal authority of the teacher toward the authority of

								the school system
Foucauldian interpretation	Discipline as disciplinary technology and normalization	Production of obedient, productive, and norm-conforming subjects	Surveillance, examination, documentation, spatial organization, scheduling, and continuous assessment	The student is produced as a disciplined subject who gradually internalizes norms and monitors the self	The institution functions as a network of surveillance and normalization rather than only as a place of learning	Normalizing order	Power is dispersed, invisible, internalized, and productive	Discipline is not merely a response to disorder; it actively produces the type of student considered normal, useful, and governable
Social reproduction perspective	Discipline as symbolic control and cultural selection	Reproduction of dominant culture and maintenance of social hierarchy	Classification, labeling, ranking, cultural valuation, punishment of difference, and legitimization of dominant norms	The student is positioned according to cultural capital and proximity to the dominant school culture	The school legitimizes certain cultural forms as normal, correct, and valuable	Reproductive order	Power is symbolic and cultural	Discipline does not affect all students equally; it may reproduce inequality by treating dominant cultural behaviors as natural standards
Critical school studies	Discipline as ideological regulation	Formation of subjects compatible with the dominant social, economic, and political order	Standardized policies, competition, obedience, assessment regimes, and hidden curriculum	The student is shaped as a compliant and competitive subject	The school operates as a political and ideological institution, even when it presents itself as neutral	Ideological order	Power is ideological and linked to broader social structures	Discipline contributes to the reproduction of dominant values and may restrict critical thinking, autonomy, and student agency
Critical pedagogy	Discipline as a dialogical and transformable process	Development of agency, responsibility, critical awareness, and democratic participation	Dialogue, shared rule-making, reflective practice, student participation, and self-regulation	The student is recognized as an active participant in the construction of school order	The teacher becomes a facilitator of ethical, democratic, and participatory relations	Democratic and participatory order	Power is relational, negotiable, and potentially redistributable	Discipline can be redefined as a participatory educational process rather than a mechanism of domination
Contemporary humanistic approach	Discipline as dignity-centered self-regulation	Moral development, respect for human dignity, and internal responsibility	Self-regulation, restorative practices, respectful dialogue, shared responsibility, and flexible rules	The student is viewed as a developing moral and social subject capable of responsible action	The school is expected to create a humane and supportive environment	Ethical and developmental order	Power becomes transparent, relational, and oriented toward care	Discipline is legitimate only when it preserves dignity, encourages responsibility, and avoids humiliation or coercion

The findings presented in Table 1 show that the concept of discipline in school studies has undergone a major semantic and functional transformation. In its earlier and traditional meaning, discipline was mainly associated with obedience, teacher authority, moral order, and direct behavioral control. In classical functionalist education, discipline acquired a broader social meaning and was understood as a necessary mechanism for socialization and the internalization of collective norms. However,

this interpretation still treated discipline as a largely positive and necessary element of schooling and did not sufficiently address its connection with power. With the emergence of psychological and managerial approaches, discipline became a technical matter related to classroom control, behavioral regulation, and educational efficiency. Although this approach contributed to practical classroom management, it narrowed the meaning of discipline and separated it from broader social and institutional structures. The findings further indicate that the formation of modern bureaucratic schooling transformed discipline into a systematic and institutional mechanism. In this stage, discipline was no longer dependent only on the personal authority of the teacher; rather, it operated through timetables, examinations, grading systems, attendance records, disciplinary regulations, and administrative procedures. The most significant conceptual transformation appears in Foucauldian, Bourdieusian, and critical interpretations, where discipline is no longer seen merely as educational order but as a mechanism of normalization, symbolic control, social reproduction, and ideological formation. From this perspective, discipline produces particular types of students, defines normal and abnormal behavior, and contributes to the reproduction of institutional and social power. At the same time, critical pedagogy and contemporary humanistic approaches indicate that discipline does not necessarily have to remain authoritarian or controlling. It can be reconstructed as a participatory, dialogical, dignity-centered, and self-regulatory process. Therefore, the first major finding of this study is that school discipline is a historically changing concept that has moved from moral obedience and educational order toward a complex power-oriented construct, while still retaining the possibility of democratic and humane redefinition.

Table 2. Theoretical Analysis of School Discipline from the Perspective of Power Theories

Theory or Approach	View of Power	Interpretation of School Discipline	Main School-Based Mechanisms	What Discipline Produces	Main Risk or Critical Problem	Educational Implication	Relevance to the Present Study
Durkheimian functionalism	Power is generally viewed as legitimate authority necessary for social cohesion	Discipline is a moral and socializing force that teaches students to live according to collective norms	Moral instruction, school rules, teacher authority, collective values, and institutional expectations	Socially adjusted individuals who accept shared norms and collective obligations	The approach may naturalize institutional authority and overlook domination, inequality, and coercion	Discipline should support social integration, but it must also be critically reviewed to prevent authoritarianism	Provides the starting point for understanding discipline as educational order
Psychological and behavioral management theories	Power is understood as a practical tool for regulating behavior and maintaining learning conditions	Discipline is a method for reducing disruptive behavior and increasing classroom effectiveness	Reinforcement, punishment, feedback, behavioral correction, monitoring, and classroom routines	Manageable classroom behavior and short-term order	Discipline may become overly technical and may ignore students' voice, identity, social background, and rights	Classroom management should be combined with ethical awareness and student participation	Explains the managerial reduction of discipline to behavior control
Foucauldian theory of disciplinary power	Power is dispersed, productive, internalized, and present in everyday institutional practices	Discipline is a technology of power that produces obedient, useful, and normalized subjects	Surveillance, examination, ranking, documentation, spatial arrangement, timetables, and constant evaluation	Docile bodies, self-monitoring students, and normalized educational subjects	Students may internalize surveillance and come to regulate themselves according to institutional norms without questioning them	Schools should critically examine hidden forms of control embedded in ordinary routines	Forms the central theoretical basis for interpreting discipline as a power construct
Bourdieu and Passeron's reproduction theory	Power operates symbolically through culture, legitimacy, and hidden forms of domination	Discipline is a mechanism through which dominant cultural norms are imposed as natural and legitimate	Cultural classification, grading, labeling, ranking, reward of dominant cultural behaviors, and	Reproduction of cultural hierarchy and unequal educational outcomes	Students from less privileged cultural backgrounds may be labeled as undisciplined or deficient	Disciplinary policies should be sensitive to cultural capital, social class, and educational justice	Shows how discipline can reproduce inequality under the appearance of neutrality

punishment of difference							
Apple's critical school studies	Power is ideological and connected to political, economic, and curricular structures	Discipline is part of the hidden curriculum that reproduces obedience, competition, and conformity	Standardization, competition, hierarchical authority, testing regimes, and compliance-oriented policies	Students who accept dominant social and institutional values	Discipline may limit critical consciousness and reduce education to conformity and performance	Schools should question the ideological function of rules, assessment, and behavioral expectations	Demonstrates the ideological dimension of school discipline
Giroux's critical pedagogy	Power is relational and can be challenged, redistributed, and democratized	Discipline should be transformed from control into democratic participation and critical responsibility	Dialogue, student voice, participatory rule-making, reflective classroom practice, and ethical responsibility	Critical, responsible, and active educational subjects	Without democratic reconstruction, discipline remains a tool of domination rather than development	Discipline should strengthen agency, voice, and civic responsibility	Provides a constructive alternative to authoritarian and controlling discipline
Iranian sociology of education	Power is structural, institutional, and connected to social order and inequality	Discipline is part of the wider mechanism of social control in schools and society	Formal regulations, school hierarchy, ranking, reward and punishment, and administrative control	Rule-following students who become accustomed to institutional evaluation	Excessive emphasis on order may weaken creativity, participation, and social justice	Iranian school discipline should be analyzed in relation to social inequality and institutional authority	Connects global theories of power to the Iranian educational context
Iranian philosophy of education	Power must be evaluated ethically in relation to dignity, justice, and human development	Discipline is legitimate only when it respects the learner's dignity and supports moral growth	Dialogue, ethical education, self-regulation, justice-oriented rules, and respect for individuality	Responsible, reflective, and morally developed learners	Discipline may become illegitimate when it humiliates, suppresses, or objectifies students	Educational discipline should be grounded in human dignity, dialogue, and moral agency	Provides an ethical foundation for redefining discipline in school studies
Contemporary participatory approaches	Power is shared, transparent, and negotiated through educational relationships	Discipline is a cooperative process for creating order, responsibility, and self-regulation	Shared classroom rules, restorative practices, peer dialogue, reflective evaluation, and student participation	Self-regulating students who understand and accept rules consciously	Participation may remain superficial if institutional structures remain authoritarian	Schools should move from imposed discipline toward co-constructed order	Offers a practical model for moving from power-based control to democratic discipline

The findings in Table 2 indicate that school discipline receives fundamentally different meanings depending on the theoretical framework through which it is interpreted. Functionalist and psychological approaches tend to understand discipline as a necessary condition for educational order, socialization, and effective learning. In these perspectives, discipline is generally viewed as a positive or practical mechanism that supports classroom organization, moral development, and the regulation of behavior. However, the critical analysis of these approaches shows that they often underestimate the hidden power relations embedded in school rules, classroom routines, and institutional authority. The Foucauldian perspective provides the most direct theoretical shift by showing that discipline is not simply imposed from outside; rather, it works through everyday practices such as surveillance, examination, recording, scheduling, and comparison. In this sense, discipline becomes productive because it creates self-monitoring and norm-conforming students. Bourdieu and Passeron's theory further deepens this analysis by showing that discipline may reproduce social inequalities through symbolic power. Students whose language, behavior, and cultural capital correspond more closely to the dominant school culture are more easily recognized as disciplined, while students from different cultural or social backgrounds may be labeled as deviant, disorderly, or unsuccessful. Apple's critical school studies add an ideological dimension by showing that discipline is connected to broader systems of competition,

standardization, obedience, and social reproduction. In contrast, Giroux's critical pedagogy, Iranian philosophy of education, and contemporary participatory approaches open the possibility of reconstructing discipline in more democratic and humanistic ways. These perspectives do not deny the need for order in schools, but they reject authoritarian, humiliating, and purely controlling models. The second major finding of the study is therefore that school discipline is a multilayered construct: it can operate as moral order, classroom management, institutional regulation, disciplinary power, symbolic reproduction, ideological control, or democratic self-regulation depending on the theoretical and practical framework through which it is organized.

Table 3. Main Analytical Findings and Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

Main Finding	Evidence from Conceptual Analysis	Meaning for Educational Policy	Meaning for School Management	Meaning for Classroom Practice	Possible Consequences if Ignored	Recommended Direction
Discipline is not a neutral concept	The reviewed theories show that discipline carries moral, institutional, cultural, political, and power-related meanings	Policymakers should avoid defining discipline only as obedience to regulations	Principals should recognize that disciplinary decisions shape school culture and student identity	Teachers should understand that every disciplinary action communicates values and expectations	Policies may reproduce domination while appearing merely administrative	Discipline should be defined as an educational, ethical, and social process
Discipline has historically shifted from personal authority to institutional control	The analysis shows a movement from teacher-centered obedience to bureaucratic systems of examination, ranking, and regulation	School rules should be reviewed in terms of their institutional effects, not only their administrative usefulness	School leaders should evaluate whether regulations support learning or merely reinforce control	Teachers should avoid reducing discipline to compliance with fixed routines	Students may become passive, dependent, and overly controlled by institutional systems	Regulations should be flexible, transparent, and educationally justified
Modern discipline works through normalization	Foucauldian analysis shows that surveillance, assessment, and comparison define what counts as normal behavior	Policies should examine how standards and disciplinary codes construct normal and abnormal student identities	Schools should prevent labeling students as problematic based only on conformity to institutional norms	Teachers should use assessment and feedback without humiliating or stigmatizing students	Students may internalize negative identities and experience exclusion, anxiety, or resistance	Discipline should support self-understanding rather than labeling and normalization
Discipline can reproduce social and cultural inequality	Reproduction theory shows that dominant cultural norms are often presented as natural school expectations	Disciplinary policies should be designed with attention to class, culture, language, gender, and social background	Administrators should monitor whether some groups of students are punished or labeled more frequently	Teachers should distinguish between harmful behavior and culturally different behavior	Marginalized students may face disproportionate punishment and educational exclusion	Discipline should be justice-oriented and culturally responsive
Discipline is connected to the hidden curriculum	Critical school studies show that discipline teaches obedience, competition, silence, conformity, and acceptance of hierarchy	Educational policy should evaluate the implicit values transmitted through disciplinary systems	School management should avoid creating a culture of fear, silence, and excessive competition	Classroom rules should teach responsibility, cooperation, and critical reflection rather than blind obedience	Schools may produce compliant subjects rather than critical and responsible citizens	Discipline should become part of democratic citizenship education
Punitive discipline produces only short-term order	The analysis of behavioral and managerial models shows that punishment may control behavior temporarily but does not necessarily build responsibility	Policies should reduce reliance on exclusionary and punitive disciplinary measures	Principals should replace punishment-centered systems with restorative and developmental models	Teachers should use reflection, dialogue, and problem-solving instead of immediate punishment	Students may obey externally but fail to develop internal responsibility	Discipline should focus on self-regulation and moral development

Participatory discipline strengthens agency	Critical pedagogy and humanistic approaches show that students become more responsible when they participate in rule-making	Policies should create space for student voice in disciplinary regulations	School leaders should involve students in developing shared norms and school expectations	Teachers should collaboratively formulate classroom rules and consequences with students	Students may view rules as imposed, unfair, and unrelated to their own moral reasoning	Discipline should be dialogical, participatory, and responsibility-based
Teacher education is central to disciplinary reform	Theoretical findings show that teachers are key actors in either reproducing or transforming disciplinary power	Teacher training programs should include power analysis, classroom ethics, restorative practices, and democratic discipline	School administrators should support teachers in moving beyond authoritarian classroom management	Teachers should learn to identify hidden bias, unequal treatment, and coercive patterns in discipline	Reform may remain only at the policy level without changing daily classroom interaction	Professional development should focus on humane and critical disciplinary practices
Discipline can either restrict or develop students' subjectivity	Power theories show that discipline participates in the formation of educational subjects	Educational policy should ask what kind of student and citizen each disciplinary model produces	Schools should develop discipline models that support autonomy, responsibility, and critical awareness	Teachers should treat students as active moral agents rather than passive objects of correction	Students may become dependent, silent, fearful, or resistant	Discipline should contribute to the formation of active, self-regulating, and responsible citizens
Democratic discipline requires structural change	The analysis shows that classroom-level reform is insufficient if school policies remain authoritarian	Policymakers should align disciplinary regulations with justice, participation, and human dignity	School leaders should redesign school culture, not merely individual punishment procedures	Teachers should be supported by institutional policies that allow participatory practice	Democratic discipline may become superficial if deeper structures remain unchanged	Reform should occur simultaneously at policy, school, and classroom levels

As shown in Table 3, the practical implications of the study are extensive and operate at several interconnected levels. The findings demonstrate that disciplinary reform cannot be limited to the classroom or to the personal behavior of individual teachers. Since discipline is embedded in educational policy, school management, classroom interaction, assessment systems, and institutional culture, reform must occur at all these levels simultaneously. At the policy level, the most important implication is the need to redefine discipline beyond obedience, punishment, and formal regulation. Educational policies should clearly distinguish between necessary educational order and authoritarian control. They should also examine whether disciplinary rules unintentionally reproduce inequality, silence students, stigmatize difference, or normalize one dominant model of behavior. At the school-management level, principals and administrators should recognize that discipline is not simply a tool for preventing disorder; it is also a mechanism through which school culture, teacher–student relations, and students' sense of belonging are shaped. Schools that rely heavily on punishment, ranking, surveillance, and exclusion may achieve short-term silence and order, but they are unlikely to develop responsibility, ethical judgment, or active participation. At the classroom level, the findings suggest that teachers should move toward dialogical, reflective, and participatory forms of discipline. This means that classroom rules should be explained, negotiated where possible, and connected to students' moral and social development. Students should be helped to understand why rules exist, how their behavior affects others, and how they can participate in creating a respectful learning environment. The findings also show that punitive discipline is insufficient because it often addresses visible behavior without addressing meaning, motivation, inequality, or identity. In contrast, democratic and restorative disciplinary practices can strengthen self-regulation, cooperation, social responsibility, and critical thinking. The third major finding of the study is therefore that a critical understanding of discipline has direct implications for educational justice, school reform, teacher education, and the development of responsible citizenship. School discipline should

not be eliminated, but it should be reconstructed in a way that transforms it from a mechanism of control into a process of ethical, participatory, and humanizing education.

Overall, the findings of the study reveal that school discipline is a complex and historically constructed concept that cannot be reduced to classroom order or behavioral control. The analysis showed that discipline has at least four interrelated dimensions: an educational dimension related to the organization of learning, a moral dimension related to socialization and responsibility, an institutional dimension related to rules and regulation, and a power-related dimension connected to surveillance, normalization, symbolic reproduction, and ideological formation. The findings further suggest that the dominant understanding of discipline in many educational systems has often emphasized order and obedience while neglecting the ways in which discipline shapes students' identities, regulates their bodies and minds, and reproduces broader social relations. However, the study also found that discipline is not inevitably oppressive. When reconstructed through critical pedagogy, humanistic education, educational justice, and student participation, discipline can become a constructive process that supports self-regulation, responsibility, democratic engagement, and human dignity. Therefore, the central finding of this study is that school discipline should be understood as a multidimensional educational and social construct. It can either reproduce domination and inequality or contribute to the formation of active, responsible, and critically aware students, depending on how it is conceptualized, institutionalized, and practiced within the school.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to provide a conceptual and theoretical analysis of discipline in school studies by examining its transformation from an instrument of educational order into a power-oriented construct. The findings showed that school discipline is not a fixed, neutral, or purely technical concept; rather, it is a historically developed and theoretically multilayered phenomenon that has moved across different meanings, including moral obedience, classroom order, behavioral management, institutional regulation, disciplinary power, symbolic reproduction, ideological control, and democratic self-regulation. The first major finding indicated that discipline has historically shifted from teacher-centered and moral forms of obedience in traditional education toward systematic, bureaucratic, and institutional mechanisms in modern schooling. This finding is consistent with historical analyses of schooling in which traditional educational order was closely tied to teacher authority, moral hierarchy, memorization, and direct behavioral control (3). It also aligns with Durkheim's classical view that discipline serves as a mechanism of socialization through which schools transmit collective norms and moral expectations to the younger generation (1, 2). From this perspective, discipline has an integrative function because it prepares students to participate in collective life. However, the findings of the present study suggest that this integrative function is only one dimension of discipline and cannot explain the full complexity of disciplinary practices in modern schools.

The historical transformation identified in this study also supports the argument that the modern school institutionalizes discipline through curriculum, regulation, assessment, and administrative order. In modern education, discipline is no longer limited to direct teacher authority; it is embedded in the organization of school time, classroom space, examinations, ranking systems, official rules, and curricular structures. This interpretation is supported by Fathi Vajargah's emphasis on curriculum planning as a structured system that organizes educational goals, content, evaluation, and learning sequences (4). Similarly, educational management literature has traditionally viewed discipline as a requirement for creating a predictable, safe, and effective learning environment (5). Classroom management studies also confirm that routines, rules, reinforcement systems, and behavioral expectations are central to effective instruction (6). Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that when discipline is understood only as classroom management, it becomes reduced to a technical instrument and its deeper social,

cultural, and power-related implications remain hidden. Therefore, the study confirms the value of managerial and pedagogical approaches, but also demonstrates their insufficiency for a critical understanding of discipline.

The second major finding showed that school discipline operates as a mechanism of power, normalization, and subject formation. This finding is strongly aligned with Foucauldian theory, which conceptualizes discipline as a modern technology of power that acts through surveillance, examination, documentation, spatial arrangement, scheduling, and continuous evaluation (7, 8). From this perspective, the school does not merely respond to disorder; it actively produces disciplined subjects who gradually internalize norms and regulate themselves according to institutional expectations. Deacon's interpretation of Foucault in educational contexts similarly shows that schooling is one of the central sites in which disciplinary power becomes embedded in everyday practices such as teaching, monitoring, testing, and classification (9). The present findings confirm this theoretical claim by showing that the ordinary mechanisms of schooling, including attendance control, grading, comparison, records, and behavioral codes, are not merely administrative procedures. They are also technologies through which schools define normality, classify students, and shape the learner as a governable educational subject.

The analysis also demonstrated that discipline may contribute to the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities. This finding is consistent with Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of reproduction, according to which schools legitimize dominant cultural norms and present them as neutral educational standards (10). In this framework, discipline does not affect all students equally. Students whose cultural capital, language, behavior, and family background correspond more closely to the dominant school culture are more likely to be recognized as disciplined and successful, while students whose cultural dispositions differ from institutional expectations may be labeled as problematic or undisciplined. This finding is also supported by Iranian sociological analyses that understand school discipline as part of a broader mechanism of social control and normalization (11). The present study therefore suggests that disciplinary systems should not be judged only by their ability to maintain order, but also by their consequences for justice, inclusion, and equality. In this regard, the findings are consistent with studies emphasizing the connection between discipline and educational justice in Iranian schools (19, 22). If disciplinary rules are designed or implemented without attention to students' social, cultural, and individual differences, they may intensify exclusion and reproduce inequality under the appearance of neutrality.

The findings further indicated that discipline is connected to the hidden curriculum and ideological formation. This result is consistent with Apple's critical curriculum theory, which argues that schools reproduce dominant values not only through official knowledge, but also through organizational routines, assessment structures, and everyday practices (12). In this sense, school discipline teaches more than rule-following. It may teach silence before authority, acceptance of hierarchy, competition, conformity, and adaptation to institutional expectations. Bagheri's philosophy of education also supports the need to examine educational practices in relation to moral agency and human development rather than treating them as merely technical procedures (15). Soleimani's analysis of power and school disciplinary policies similarly supports the argument that discipline must be interpreted through theories of power because disciplinary regulations may normalize obedience and reproduce authority relations (20). Accordingly, the present study contributes to school studies by showing that discipline is both visible and invisible: it is visible in rules, sanctions, and classroom management, but invisible in the deeper formation of attitudes, identities, expectations, and patterns of self-regulation.

The third major finding of the study showed that discipline can be reconstructed through democratic, participatory, humanistic, and dignity-centered models. This finding is consistent with critical pedagogy, which argues that education should not be reduced to compliance and control, but should develop critical consciousness, agency, participation, and democratic responsibility (13). Rahimi's work on student participation also supports the idea that school order should be developed through dialogue and active student involvement rather than through unilateral imposition (14). In the Iranian philosophical context,

Khosropanah's critical philosophy of education emphasizes that educational practices must be evaluated according to their relation to human dignity, justice, and moral development (16, 17). Khodadadi's attempt to redefine discipline in modern schools also aligns with this finding by emphasizing that discipline should be understood beyond authoritarian control and should be reconstructed in relation to responsibility and self-regulation (18). Therefore, the findings suggest that discipline is not inevitably oppressive. Rather, its function depends on the theoretical assumptions, institutional arrangements, and relational practices through which it is enacted.

The practical implications of this finding are especially important for school management and educational policy. Mazaheri's work on democratic discipline emphasizes that school administrators play a decisive role in transforming disciplinary culture from coercion to participation (21). The present study supports this argument by showing that disciplinary reform cannot be limited to the classroom level. It requires changes in policy, school leadership, teacher education, assessment systems, and institutional culture. Recent studies on learning schools and students' managerial skills further suggest that schools are increasingly expected to cultivate self-management, cooperation, initiative, and responsibility rather than passive obedience (23). Similarly, research on teachers' role in curriculum development indicates that teachers are not passive implementers of educational rules; they actively shape learning environments and participate in the construction of educational experiences (24). This means that teachers and administrators should be viewed as key agents in redefining discipline. Their task is not only to maintain order, but also to create conditions in which students understand rules, participate in their formation, and develop internal responsibility.

The findings also gain renewed significance in contemporary educational environments shaped by technological change, digital learning, and new curriculum demands. Xie's study on co-designing artificial intelligence education curriculum with high school teachers indicates that emerging educational fields require collaborative, interdisciplinary, and participatory forms of curriculum development (25). Such contexts cannot be governed effectively through rigid, authoritarian, or purely compliance-based models of discipline. Students who are expected to engage with complex technological, ethical, and creative challenges need forms of school order that promote autonomy, reflection, collaboration, and responsible decision-making. Furthermore, recent empirical evidence shows that disciplinary practices are closely related to belonging and unequal treatment. Doyle and colleagues found that an empathy intervention reduced the gender gap in school discipline and facilitated students' sense of belonging (26). This finding supports the present study's argument that discipline should be understood as a relational and justice-oriented process. When disciplinary practices are experienced as unfair, biased, or humiliating, they may damage belonging and increase alienation. In contrast, when discipline is grounded in empathy, participation, and dignity, it can strengthen inclusion, responsibility, and educational engagement.

Overall, the discussion of the findings indicates that school discipline should be understood as a multidimensional construct that simultaneously involves order, power, morality, socialization, institutional regulation, and subject formation. The study supports earlier functionalist and managerial views to the extent that schools require order for effective learning; however, it also extends and critiques these views by showing that order is never purely neutral. The central contribution of the present study lies in demonstrating that discipline is not merely a response to student behavior, but a conceptual and institutional framework through which schools produce certain forms of subjectivity, define normality, reproduce or challenge inequality, and shape the relationship between authority and agency. Therefore, a critical and theoretical understanding of discipline can help policymakers, teachers, and school leaders move beyond punishment-centered and obedience-based models toward forms of discipline that are democratic, participatory, dignity-centered, and educationally transformative.

This study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research was conceptual and theoretical in nature and did not include direct empirical data from students, teachers, school administrators, or

policymakers. As a result, the findings provide an interpretive and analytical understanding of discipline rather than measurable evidence about disciplinary practices in specific schools. Second, although the study attempted to use a broad theoretical corpus, the analysis was necessarily selective and depended on the sources included in the documentary sample. Other theoretical traditions, such as feminist pedagogy, postcolonial education, disability studies, and student resistance theories, could provide additional insights into the meaning of discipline. Third, because the study focused primarily on the conceptual transformation of discipline and its relation to power, it did not examine in detail the practical diversity of disciplinary policies across different school levels, regions, socioeconomic contexts, and institutional types. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings is conceptual rather than empirical.

Future studies should extend the present conceptual analysis through empirical and field-based investigations. Qualitative research based on interviews with students, teachers, principals, and parents can clarify how discipline is experienced in everyday school life and how students interpret fairness, authority, punishment, participation, and self-regulation. Comparative studies across public, private, rural, urban, advantaged, and disadvantaged schools can also show how disciplinary power operates differently in diverse educational contexts. In addition, future research can examine the relationship between disciplinary models and outcomes such as student belonging, academic motivation, classroom participation, psychological safety, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Mixed-methods studies would be especially useful for combining theoretical interpretation with measurable indicators of disciplinary climate and educational justice. It is also recommended that future studies investigate emerging forms of discipline in digital learning environments, artificial intelligence-based education, online classrooms, and data-driven assessment systems.

Educational policymakers, school administrators, and teachers should reconsider discipline as a developmental and ethical process rather than a merely punitive or administrative mechanism. School disciplinary policies should be revised in ways that reduce excessive reliance on punishment, exclusion, humiliation, and rigid control. Instead, schools should adopt participatory, restorative, and dialogue-based approaches that help students understand the meaning of rules and take responsibility for their behavior. Teacher education programs should include systematic training on democratic classroom management, power relations, implicit bias, educational justice, student participation, and dignity-centered discipline. School leaders should also create institutional cultures in which students have opportunities to express their views, participate in rule-making, and experience discipline as fair, transparent, and supportive. In practice, discipline should aim not only to maintain order, but also to cultivate self-regulation, empathy, cooperation, critical reflection, and responsible citizenship.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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