

# From daily routines to disciplinary habits: Examining how school culture cultivates student self-discipline in secondary education

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## ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Student discipline in secondary education is often regulated through rules and sanctions, yet compliance may fade when it depends mainly on surveillance. A culture-based approach offers a more durable route by embedding self-discipline in everyday routines and shared expectations.

**Aims:** This study explores how school culture cultivates student self-discipline through daily routines, teacher modeling, and reward-based reinforcement, and how these practices gradually become disciplinary habits.

**Methods:** Using a qualitative case study design, data were generated from participant observation of routine school activities, in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and selected students, and document analysis of school regulations and discipline-related records. The analysis followed iterative steps of data reduction, thematic grouping, and triangulation across sources to strengthen credibility.

**Result:** The findings show that consistently implemented routines, such as morning assemblies and classroom duty schedules, supported punctuality and active participation while normalizing adherence to school norms. Teacher modeling functioned as a visible reference point that helped students translate expectations into everyday conduct. Reward mechanisms further reinforced positive behavior by recognizing disciplined actions and encouraging students to sustain them voluntarily. At the same time, the continuity of these habits was not shaped by school culture alone, as family support and peer influence affected how steadily students maintained self-discipline across contexts.

**Conclusion:** School culture can nurture student self-discipline when routines are meaningful, adult modeling is consistent, and reinforcement emphasizes recognition rather than fear. Stronger school family alignment helps extend disciplinary habits beyond the school setting.

**Keyword:** Behavioral internalization; Disciplinary habits; School culture; Secondary education; Self-regulation

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## INTRODUCTION

Student discipline continues to attract attention in secondary education, particularly in situations where order is maintained largely through rules and corrective sanctions (Jabarin et al., 2022). Although such measures may produce observable compliance, they do not always generate lasting self-regulation (Antle & McLaren, 2024a). Students may adhere to expectations while under supervision yet struggle to maintain consistent conduct when external monitoring decreases. This pattern suggests that discipline grounded primarily in control mechanisms may lack long-term sustainability.

This concern has gradually shifted attention toward understanding discipline as a developmental process rather than a purely regulatory outcome (Antle & McLaren, 2024). Within this perspective, discipline is not limited to obedience but involves the gradual formation of self-guided behavioral standards. Schools function not only as instructional institutions but also as cultural environments in which norms are repeatedly enacted and reinforced (Flatau-Harrison et al., 2023). What students experience daily within school life can shape how they interpret responsibility, punctuality, and accountability.

In this context, school culture becomes a central framework for understanding how discipline is cultivated (Flatau-Harrison et al., 2023). Culture manifests through shared routines, relational patterns, and collective expectations that structure everyday interaction. Morning assemblies, classroom duty rotations, greeting practices, and procedural norms are not isolated activities; they form recurring structures that subtly guide student behavior. Through repetition, these routines can move beyond mechanical compliance and begin to influence internal habits (Lupu & Liu, 2025).

The role of educators is particularly significant within this cultural environment (Uralovich et al., 2023). Students often interpret expectations through what they observe in adult behavior. When teachers demonstrate consistency, punctuality, and adherence to institutional norms, they provide concrete illustrations of disciplined conduct. Modeling thus bridges the gap between written regulations and lived practice, allowing students to translate abstract expectations into observable standards (Bolger et al., 2021; Li et al., 2025).

At the same time, reinforcement practices shape how students respond to these routines (Akram & Abdelrady, 2025). Recognition of disciplined behavior can encourage students to associate adherence with positive identity rather than fear of sanction. However, discipline formation does not occur exclusively within school boundaries. Family attitudes and peer dynamics may either strengthen or weaken the continuity of habits developed at school (Giordano, 2022). Understanding discipline, therefore, requires examining how daily routines within school culture interact with broader social influences.

Scholarly discussions on discipline and character development increasingly distinguish between compliance and internalization (Wiggers & Paas, 2022). Compliance reflects behavior shaped by external control, whereas internalization involves the adoption of norms as part of one's own regulatory framework. Research suggests that repeated social practice plays a critical role in this transition. When students encounter stable expectations across daily interactions, they are more likely to develop consistent behavioral patterns. Studies on school culture indicate that institutional routines can function as behavioral scaffolding (Wolthuis et al., 2022). Consistent implementation of structured activities has been associated with improved punctuality, participation, and reduced minor misconduct. Rather than relying solely on episodic correction, culture based approaches

emphasize continuity, where expectations are reinforced through repetition. Teacher influence has also been widely recognized as a formative factor in student behavior (Näsström et al., 2021). Observational learning mechanisms suggest that students align their conduct with visible adult models, particularly when those models consistently embody institutional norms (Mensah et al., 2022; Zha et al., 2025). Modeling gains further significance when integrated within routine practices, as it normalizes disciplined behavior within everyday interaction. Recognition based reinforcement has been examined as an alternative to punitive discipline systems (McDonald & Hanson, 2024; Quail & Ward, 2022). Positive reinforcement may strengthen students' intrinsic motivation to maintain responsible conduct. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature treats routines, modeling, and rewards as separate influences. Fewer studies explore how these elements operate together within a unified cultural system that shapes disciplinary habits over time.

Although research acknowledges the importance of school culture in shaping behavior, several limitations remain. First, discipline is frequently examined through outcome indicators such as attendance or rule violations, without sufficient attention to the process through which repeated routines evolve into habitual self-discipline. The mechanism connecting daily practice to internalized conduct remains underexplored. Second, many studies analyze teacher influence, reward systems, or institutional policies independently (Førland & Roxå, 2024). This segmented approach overlooks how these components interact within a cohesive cultural environment. Understanding discipline formation requires examining how routines, modeling, and reinforcement function simultaneously rather than in isolation. Third, there is limited qualitative insight into how students experience this transformation (Davids et al., 2023; Petchamé et al., 2023). Statistical improvements in discipline do not fully capture how students interpret expectations or how repeated participation gradually reshapes their sense of responsibility. Without examining lived experience, explanations of discipline risk remaining surface level. Finally, while family and peer contexts are frequently acknowledged as influential (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021), their interaction with school based discipline practices is rarely analyzed in depth. As a result, the stability of disciplinary habits across contexts remains insufficiently understood.

Addressing these gaps requires a contextual and process oriented approach. By focusing on everyday routines within a single secondary school, this study seeks to illuminate how repeated participation, teacher modeling, and reward based reinforcement collectively shape student self-discipline. A qualitative case study allows close examination of the meanings attached to daily practices and how these practices gradually become habitual (Cleland et al., 2021). Understanding discipline as a cultural outcome rather than a reactive measure can inform more sustainable educational strategies (Gregory et al., 2021; Hogan & O'Flaherty, 2022). If self-discipline emerges from consistent cultural reinforcement, schools may design routines that prioritize internal growth over external control. Additionally, recognizing the role of external social environments helps situate school based discipline within a broader developmental context.

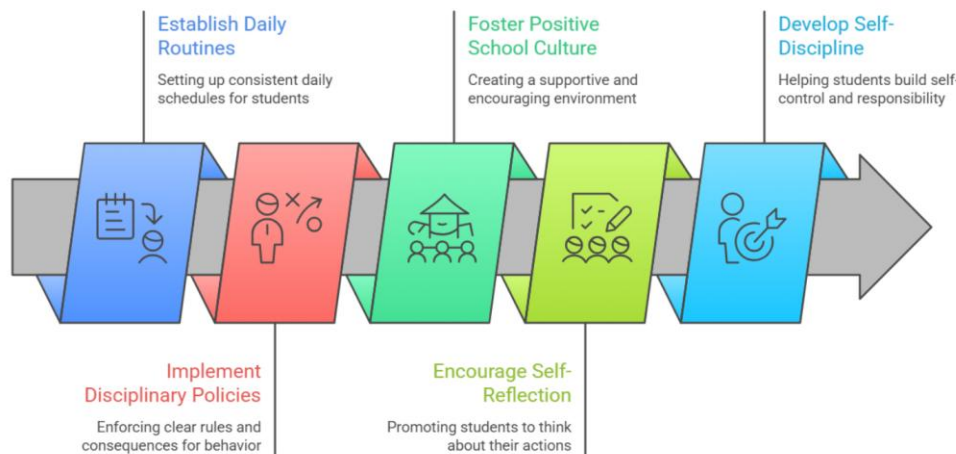
This study aims to examine how school culture cultivates student self-discipline in secondary education by analyzing the role of daily routines, teacher modeling, and recognition based reinforcement. It seeks to explain how repeated engagement in structured practices contributes to the formation of disciplinary habits and how external influences affect the continuity of those habits. Guided by an exploratory qualitative design, the study focuses on understanding mechanisms and meanings rather than testing predetermined statistical hypotheses.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how school culture contributes to the formation of student self-discipline. The case study design was chosen because the phenomenon under investigation discipline as a habitual outcome of daily routines cannot be fully understood through surface indicators alone. It requires close attention to everyday practices, interactions, and shared meanings within a specific school setting.

The research was conducted in a secondary school that consistently implements structured routines, disciplinary procedures, and recognition practices. Rather than treating discipline as a measurable output, this study approached it as a process that unfolds gradually through repeated participation in institutional practices. To guide observation and analysis, the study was informed by an analytical framework that conceptualizes discipline formation as a progression from daily routines toward internalized habits. The framework organizes the interplay between routine practices, policy implementation, cultural reinforcement, reflective processes, and the development of self-discipline.



**Figure 1.** Analytical framework of disciplinary habit formation through school culture.

The figure was not used as a rigid model imposed on the data, but as a guiding structure that helped focus attention on how different cultural elements interacted within the school environment.

### Participant

Participants were selected purposively to ensure that multiple perspectives on school culture and discipline were represented. The study involved the school principal, several teachers particularly those responsible for classroom management and student guidance and a group of students who regularly participated in routine disciplinary activities. The principal contributed insight into institutional priorities and policy direction. Teachers provided detailed accounts of how routines and reinforcement were enacted in daily practice. Students were included to capture how these practices were experienced and interpreted from their standpoint. This combination allowed the study to explore discipline formation from administrative, instructional, and experiential perspectives.

### Instrument

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observation focused on routine school activities such as morning assemblies,

classroom duty schedules, enforcement of rules, and teacher–student interactions. Field notes were recorded to document patterns of behavior, consistency of implementation, and student responses. Interviews were conducted with open-ended guiding questions that encouraged participants to reflect on how routines, modeling, and recognition influenced student conduct. The flexible format allowed participants to describe experiences in their own terms while maintaining relevance to the study focus. Relevant documents including school regulations, attendance records, disciplinary notes, and documentation of recognition programs were examined to contextualize observed practices and corroborate interview accounts.

### Data Analysis

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observation focused on routine school activities such as morning assemblies, classroom duty schedules, enforcement of rules, and teacher–student interactions. Field notes were recorded to document patterns of behavior, consistency of implementation, and student responses. Interviews were conducted with open-ended guiding questions that encouraged participants to reflect on how routines, modeling, and recognition influenced student conduct. The flexible format allowed participants to describe experiences in their own terms while maintaining relevance to the study focus. Relevant documents including school regulations, attendance records, disciplinary notes, and documentation of recognition programs were examined to contextualize observed practices and corroborate interview accounts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The findings suggest that student self-discipline in the observed secondary school did not develop as an immediate reaction to strict rule enforcement. Instead, it appeared as a gradual outcome of repeated engagement in everyday school routines. Discipline was less frequently described by participants as “following rules” and more often as “becoming used to” certain expectations. This shift in language reflects a movement from externally prompted compliance toward patterned, self-guided behavior. Across data sources, four interrelated dimensions were identified as central to this transition. These dimensions are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Dimensions of Disciplinary Habit Formation within School Culture

Dimension	Cultural Practice	Evidence from Field Data	Observed Behavioral Development
Routine Regularity	Morning assemblies, classroom duty rotations, structured scheduling	Consistent implementation observed; students anticipated daily procedures	Increased punctuality and consistent task completion
Adult Modeling	Teachers’ punctuality, preparedness, adherence to procedures	Students referenced teacher behavior when describing discipline	Greater imitation of disciplined conduct
Recognition Practices	Public acknowledgment of responsible behavior	Students expressed pride in being recognized; fewer reminders required	Discipline associated with positive self-identity
External Influence	Family routines and peer dynamics	Variation in students’ behavior beyond school context	Uneven stability of habits outside school

### **Routine Regularity and Behavioral Familiarity**

Observation revealed that structured routines created a predictable rhythm within the school day. Morning assemblies were conducted consistently, and classroom duties followed a clear rotation system. Students rarely required repeated instructions once these routines were established. Interviews suggested that many students began adjusting their schedules independently, arriving earlier or preparing tasks in advance. The repetition of these practices appeared to reduce behavioral hesitation and foster familiarity. Over time, responsibility seemed less like an obligation imposed by authority and more like a normal part of school life.

### **Adult Modeling as Behavioral Reference**

Teacher conduct emerged as a powerful interpretive anchor. Students frequently described discipline in relation to what they observed teachers doing rather than what was written in school regulations. When teachers demonstrated punctuality and procedural consistency, expectations were perceived as fair and realistic. Observational notes indicated alignment between teachers' statements and actions, reinforcing the credibility of norms. In this context, modeling functioned as a lived demonstration of discipline, helping students translate abstract rules into observable practice.

### **Recognition and Motivational Reframing**

Recognition practices also contributed to shaping how discipline was understood. Public acknowledgment during assemblies or classroom sessions appeared to encourage students to sustain responsible behavior. Rather than acting merely to avoid sanction, some students described feeling motivated by appreciation and visibility. School records reflected a decline in minor routine-related infractions, particularly concerning punctuality and incomplete duties. Although the study does not rely on statistical measurement, triangulated evidence across interviews and documentation suggests a noticeable behavioral shift.

To illustrate the consistency of findings across data sources, Table 2 presents a triangulation summary.

**Table 2.** Triangulation of Evidence Supporting Disciplinary Habit Development

<b>Finding</b>	<b>Observational Data</b>	<b>Interview Insights</b>	<b>Documentary Evidence</b>
Improved punctuality	Fewer late arrivals during assemblies	Students reported adjusting arrival time without reminders	Attendance records indicated fewer tardiness cases
Stronger task responsibility	Duties completed with minimal prompting	Teachers observed increased initiative	Duty logs showed consistent fulfillment
Reduced minor violations	Decreased corrective interventions	Students described clearer understanding of expectations	Fewer recorded minor infractions
Voluntary compliance	Students followed procedures independently	Discipline described as "habitual"	Recognition records documented repeated acknowledgment

### **External Context and Habit Continuity**

Despite these positive patterns, discipline was not equally stable across all contexts. Interviews revealed that family routines and peer relationships influenced how consistently students maintained disciplined behavior beyond school hours. Students who described structured home environments appeared more likely to sustain habits developed at school. Conversely, peer influence sometimes disrupted behavioral consistency. This suggests that while school culture initiates and reinforces disciplinary habits, their durability is shaped by broader social conditions.

## **Integrative Interpretation**

Taken together, the results indicate that disciplinary habits emerged through the interaction of structured repetition, credible modeling, and meaningful reinforcement. The process was incremental and relational rather than abrupt. Daily routines provided continuity, teacher behavior legitimized expectations, and recognition practices strengthened motivation. However, the stability of self-discipline extended beyond institutional boundaries, highlighting the importance of contextual reinforcement. The movement from daily routines to disciplinary habits thus reflects a dynamic process shaped by cultural consistency and social interaction.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study suggest that student self-discipline in secondary education is cultivated less through isolated acts of control and more through sustained cultural participation (Mbaluka et al., 2021). Discipline did not appear as an immediate outcome of regulation; rather, it evolved through repeated engagement in structured daily practices. This indicates that when behavioral expectations are embedded in the rhythm of school life, they gradually shift from external obligations to internalized patterns. In this sense, school culture operates not simply as a backdrop for discipline but as the medium through which discipline is formed.

The consistency of daily routines plays a pivotal role in this transformation. Repetition appears to reduce uncertainty and clarify expectations Geiger et al. (2021), allowing students to anticipate required behaviors without constant supervision. When routines such as assemblies and classroom responsibilities are implemented steadily, they create a stable environment in which responsible conduct becomes predictable. Over time, predictability fosters familiarity, and familiarity supports habit formation (Karlsson et al., 2025). Thus, discipline emerges not through heightened enforcement but through the normalization of structured participation.

Yet routine alone does not fully explain the transition toward internalized self-discipline. The presence of credible adult modeling strengthens the legitimacy of expectations (Gladstone & Cimpian, 2021). Students in this study frequently interpreted discipline through what they observed teachers consistently practicing. When educators demonstrated punctuality and adherence to procedures, the gap between institutional policy and lived experience narrowed. Modeling therefore served as a connective layer between regulation and practice, reinforcing the authenticity of norms and encouraging behavioral alignment (Siddiki & Frantz, 2023). Discipline, in this context, became relational rather than merely procedural.

The function of recognition further deepens this dynamic. Acknowledgment practices appeared to shift the motivational basis of disciplined behavior (Iqbal et al., 2024). Instead of acting primarily to avoid corrective consequences, students increasingly associated discipline with personal reliability and social affirmation. This reframing of motivation suggests that reinforcement strategies influence not only behavioral frequency but also how students interpret their own conduct (Santana-Monagas et al., 2024). When discipline becomes linked to identity rather than fear, the likelihood of sustained self-regulation increases.

At the same time, the findings caution against viewing school culture as a self-contained system. Variations in the stability of disciplinary habits beyond school boundaries indicate that self-discipline develops within a broader network of social influences (Hagger et al., 2021). Family routines and peer relationships either reinforced or disrupted habits formed at school. This observation underscores that internalization is not finalized within institutional space; rather, it is

negotiated across contexts (Stein, 2021). The durability of disciplinary habits therefore depends on alignment between school practices and external environments.

Bringing these strands together, the discussion highlights a cumulative process moving from structured repetition toward internalized habit (Ross & Glăveanu, 2025). Daily routines provide the structural foundation, modeling confers legitimacy, recognition reshapes motivation, and contextual reinforcement influences persistence. Discipline, accordingly, should be understood as a dynamic and socially mediated process rather than a fixed behavioral outcome (Blanco Carrasco et al., 2025). By foregrounding this progression, the study shifts attention from short-term compliance toward the cultural conditions that enable enduring self-discipline to take shape.

### **Implications**

The findings invite schools to reconsider how discipline is conceptualized and sustained in secondary education. If disciplinary habits develop gradually through repeated participation in structured routines, then consistency becomes more influential than intensity. Rather than relying primarily on corrective measures, schools may strengthen the everyday structures that quietly shape behavior. Routines such as assemblies and classroom responsibilities should therefore be viewed not merely as administrative necessities but as formative spaces in which responsibility is practiced repeatedly until it becomes familiar. This emphasis on cultural consistency naturally extends to the role of educators. Because students interpret expectations through observation, teacher conduct carries formative weight. When educators demonstrate punctuality, preparedness, and procedural integrity, they provide visible standards that students can align with. Discipline, in this sense, is reinforced less by verbal instruction and more by embodied example. Schools that invest in reflective professional practice may therefore strengthen the credibility of disciplinary expectations. The findings also point toward the importance of reinforcement strategies that affirm responsible conduct. Recognition practices appear to reshape how students interpret discipline, encouraging them to associate it with reliability and self-respect rather than sanction avoidance. When reinforcement supports identity formation, discipline becomes self-sustaining. However, since habit continuity is influenced by external environments, collaboration between schools and families may further enhance stability. Alignment across contexts can reinforce the habits cultivated within school culture.

### **Research contribution**

Building on these implications, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about discipline by shifting analytical focus from outcomes to processes. Instead of treating discipline as a measurable endpoint, the research examines how daily participation gradually transforms into patterned conduct. By foregrounding the interaction between routine repetition, adult modeling, recognition, and contextual influence, the study presents discipline as a socially mediated progression rather than an isolated institutional policy. Moreover, the study offers qualitative insight into how students themselves experience this transition. Their descriptions of becoming “accustomed” to certain expectations illuminate how internalization unfolds incrementally. This process-oriented lens enriches scholarship on school culture by highlighting how everyday practices, when enacted consistently, cultivate behavioral continuity. In doing so, the research situates self-discipline within lived experience rather than abstract regulation.

### **Limitations**

Despite these contributions, several limitations frame the interpretation of the findings. The research was conducted within a single secondary school, and institutional culture varies widely across contexts. While the case provides depth, it does not claim universal applicability. Cultural norms, leadership approaches, and community dynamics may produce different patterns of disciplinary development elsewhere. In addition, the qualitative design privileges interpretative richness over numerical measurement. Although triangulated data enhance credibility, the study does not quantify behavioral change or track statistical progression over time. Future work that combines qualitative depth with longitudinal or mixed-method approaches may provide further clarity regarding the durability and scope of habit formation. Finally, while family and peer influences were identified as important moderating factors, the research relied primarily on participant accounts rather than direct observation beyond school boundaries. As a result, contextual interpretations remain indicative rather than exhaustive.

### **Suggestions**

Recognizing these limitations opens avenues for further inquiry. Comparative studies across multiple schools may illuminate how differing cultural configurations shape disciplinary trajectories. Examining institutions with contrasting routine structures or reinforcement systems could clarify which elements most strongly support internalization. Longitudinal research may also deepen understanding of how disciplinary habits evolve across developmental stages. Observing students over extended periods could reveal whether habits consolidated in structured environments persist during transitions between grade levels or educational phases. Finally, future investigations might explore collaborative models that align school routines with family practices. By examining discipline as a shared social responsibility rather than an exclusively institutional task, researchers may better understand how self-discipline becomes durable across contexts. Such inquiry would extend the present findings and contribute to a more holistic account of how daily routines ultimately transform into enduring disciplinary habits.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study affirms that self-discipline among secondary school students does not simply arise from rules or corrective measures. Instead, it takes shape through repeated participation in everyday school practices that gradually become familiar and meaningful. When routines are implemented consistently, when teachers embody the expectations they communicate, and when responsible behavior is acknowledged constructively, discipline begins to move beyond compliance. It becomes part of how students organize themselves within their environment. At the same time, the findings remind us that disciplinary habits are not formed in isolation. Their continuity depends on how school culture interacts with family dynamics and peer influence. Viewed in this way, discipline is not a fixed trait to be imposed but a relational process that unfolds through stability, example, and reinforcement. Understanding this progression from daily routines to enduring habits offers a more sustainable perspective on how schools can cultivate responsible and self-regulated learners.

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### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Maria Carmelita Tali Wangge contributed to the conceptualization of the study, research design development, and coordination of data collection in the field. Angela Merici Silvina Sada was responsible for conducting interviews, organizing observational data, and performing the initial stages of qualitative data analysis. Maria Folenta Sina contributed to data validation through triangulation, interpretation of findings, and drafting as well as revising the manuscript for intellectual content and coherence. All authors participated in reviewing the final version of the manuscript and approved it for publication.

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