

Building a supportive learning climate through school culture and discipline: Evidence from a rural secondary school in indonesia

Melkior Wewe, Karolina Anu, Maria Anastasia Nono
STKIP Citra Bakti Ngada, Indonesia

Received: August 15, 2025 | Revised: November 20, 2025 | Accepted: December 24, 2025

ABSTRACT:

Background: A supportive learning climate is widely viewed as a foundation for student engagement and character development. In rural school settings, where limitations in facilities and access can affect learning conditions, the strength of school culture and the consistency of discipline practices often become decisive in maintaining an orderly and encouraging environment.

Aims: This study investigates how school culture and discipline practices work together to build a supportive learning climate in a rural secondary school in Indonesia. It focuses on the ways daily routines, social interaction norms, and structured student programs shape students' learning experiences.

Methods: A qualitative descriptive case study design was applied. Data were gathered through two weeks of direct observation, semi structured interviews with the principal and several teachers, and document analysis of school regulations and routine activities. Data were analyzed through thematic and narrative approaches to capture recurring patterns and meaningful links between culture, discipline, and engagement.

Result: The findings show that the learning climate is strengthened through consistent rule enforcement, clear reward and sanction procedures, and the cultivation of respectful social relations in everyday school life. Extracurricular and routine activities provide additional spaces for students to practice responsibility and belonging, which reinforces discipline not as punishment, but as shared expectations supported by the school community.

Conclusion: This study concludes that a supportive learning climate in rural contexts is primarily sustained by coherent school culture and disciplined practices that are implemented consistently and experienced collectively.

Keyword: Discipline practices; Learning climate; Rural secondary education; School culture; Student engagement

Cite this article: Wewe, M., Anu, K. & Nono, M. A. (2025). Building a supportive learning climate through school culture and discipline: Evidence from a rural secondary school in indonesia. *Journal of Literacy Education*, 1(4), 262-273.

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* Corresponding author:

Melkior Wewe, STKIP Citra Bakti Ngada, INDONESIA
melkiorwewe@gmail.com 

INTRODUCTION

A supportive learning climate is often the difference between a school that merely runs lessons and a school that truly enables learning. Students do not experience schooling only through what is taught, but through how school life feels and unfolds each day (Hirsh & Segolsson, 2021; Zorkić et al., 2021). When expectations are clear, interactions are respectful, and routines are stable, students tend to participate more confidently and develop a stronger sense of belonging (Banks et al., n.d.; Kahu et al., 2022). In contrast, when rules are applied unevenly or relationships feel distant, the school environment may become unpredictable, and student engagement can gradually erode even if the curriculum is well designed.

School culture provides the practical foundation for this climate. Culture is visible in the small but repeated practices that shape everyday life, such as how teachers speak to students, how students greet one another, how order is maintained, and how the school community responds to problems. These practices create shared meanings about what is valued and what is expected (Markus et al., 2021). In many cases, culture is not stated explicitly, but learned through participation and reinforced through repetition (Bisbey et al., 2021; Jancovich & Stevenson, 2021), which is why it can shape behavior in a more enduring way than occasional instructions.

Discipline practices are deeply intertwined with this cultural foundation. Discipline is often misunderstood as punishment, yet in well-functioning schools it operates more as a system of guidance that protects learning time and builds responsibility. Consistent rules, fair sanctions, and meaningful rewards help students understand boundaries, while also signaling that the school environment is stable and trustworthy (Yang et al., 2025). When discipline is enacted within a respectful culture, students can interpret rules as shared commitments rather than threats, and this interpretation can strengthen both compliance and engagement.

The significance of culture and discipline becomes even more visible in rural contexts. Rural secondary schools frequently face constraints that are less prominent in urban settings, including distance from services, limited facilities, and uneven access to learning resources (Zamir & Wang, 2023). At the same time, rural schools may benefit from social closeness and stronger community ties that support shared norms (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Mayger & Hochbein, 2021). In such settings, the coherence of school routines, the credibility of rule enforcement, and the quality of daily interactions can become decisive factors in creating a learning climate that feels supportive, not merely controlled.

In Indonesia, current reforms emphasize character development, student agency, and curricular flexibility. However, discussions of reform often prioritize curriculum and teaching strategies, while the everyday organizational work of building a supportive climate receives less attention (Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Ralebese et al., 2025). For rural schools especially, it is important to understand how supportive learning conditions are produced through practical routines, cultural norms, and discipline systems that shape student experiences in real time.

School climate is commonly understood as the overall quality of school life, reflected in relationships, safety, fairness, teaching practices, and organizational order (González et al., 2023; Grazia & Molinari, 2021). Studies across educational contexts have repeatedly shown that a positive climate is associated with stronger academic engagement and healthier social development (Chaudhry et al., 2024; Tomaszewski et al., 2024). A supportive climate is therefore not simply an emotional atmosphere, but an institutional condition that influences how students interpret school

expectations and how willing they are to participate. School culture is often described as the deeper layer that sustains climate over time (Barker et al., 2023; Waters & Orange, 2022). Culture includes shared beliefs, habitual routines, and informal norms that guide behavior even when no one is explicitly instructing students what to do. When these cultural elements are stable and widely practiced, they can reinforce a sense of predictability and belonging that supports learning (Cena et al., 2021; Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023). Discipline practices function as the operational link between values and behavior. Effective discipline is typically associated with clarity, consistency, and fairness, rather than severity (O'Donohue, 2023; Patel, 2021). When rules are enforced transparently and paired with guidance, discipline can protect learning time and foster responsibility. In this sense, discipline contributes to climate not only by limiting disruption, but by strengthening trust in the school's routines and decisions. Student engagement is shaped by these conditions and is often reinforced through participation beyond formal lessons. Extracurricular activities and structured routines provide spaces where students practice teamwork, commitment, and identity as members of a community. In rural schools, where schools often serve as key social institutions, extracurricular programs can be especially important in sustaining engagement and reinforcing cultural and disciplinary coherence.

Interest in school climate, several limitations remain in the literature. Many studies rely on large scale surveys that describe climate as a general score (Charlton et al., 2021; Gonzales et al., 2025), which makes it difficult to explain how supportive climates are actually built through daily routines and interactions. This leaves a practical gap, because schools do not improve climate through abstract indicators, but through concrete cultural practices and discipline systems that students encounter every day. Discipline is also frequently treated as a management tool focused on preventing misbehavior (AbdulRaheem, 2023; Cruz et al. (2021), rather than as a cultural practice that shapes shared expectations and institutional stability. When discipline is separated from culture, it becomes harder to understand why the same rules may foster responsibility in one school yet produce resistance in another (Lustick, 2021). A closer examination of discipline as part of a wider cultural system is therefore needed to explain how supportive climates are formed. In addition, rural secondary schools in Indonesia remain underrepresented in international discussions of climate formation (Martha et al., 2021; Tang, 2025). Research often prioritizes curriculum reform and teacher competence, while the lived organizational dynamics of rural schools receive less analytical attention (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Leach & Bradbury, 2024). Qualitative evidence from rural settings is therefore needed to explain how supportive learning climates can be constructed and maintained in geographically peripheral contexts.

In response to these gaps, this study examines the relationship between school culture and discipline practices in shaping a supportive learning climate within a rural Indonesian secondary school. Rather than treating climate as a broad perception measure, the study focuses on the everyday mechanisms through which stability and support are produced, including interaction norms, routine activities, and the practical use of rewards and sanctions. This approach offers a grounded understanding of how students experience school climate through repeated participation in institutional life. The study is also relevant to current reform goals that emphasize character development and responsible student participation. Such goals depend on environments that combine support with structure. By documenting how a rural school builds stability through cultural and disciplinary coherence, the study provides insights that may inform school improvement

strategies, particularly in contexts where material resources are limited but organizational consistency can be strengthened.

METHOD

Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative case study approach to gain a contextual understanding of how school culture and discipline practices contribute to the formation of a supportive learning climate in a rural secondary school in Indonesia. The choice of a case study design was grounded in the intention to explore institutional dynamics as they unfold in everyday school life, rather than to produce broad generalizations. The research focused on interpreting lived practices, routines, and interaction patterns that shape the school environment over time.

Field engagement was carried out over a two-week period, during which the researchers were directly present in the school setting. This immersive process allowed the researchers to observe classroom instruction, daily routines, disciplinary implementation, and extracurricular activities in their natural context. Rather than isolating variables, the study sought to understand how different institutional elements interacted to create a stable and supportive environment.

To structure the inquiry, the researchers developed an analytical framework that guided observation and data interpretation. The framework conceptualizes a supportive learning climate as emerging from interconnected institutional dimensions, including school culture, consistent discipline systems, social interaction norms, extracurricular engagement, institutional stability, and student belonging. This framework functioned as an organizing lens rather than a fixed hypothesis model.

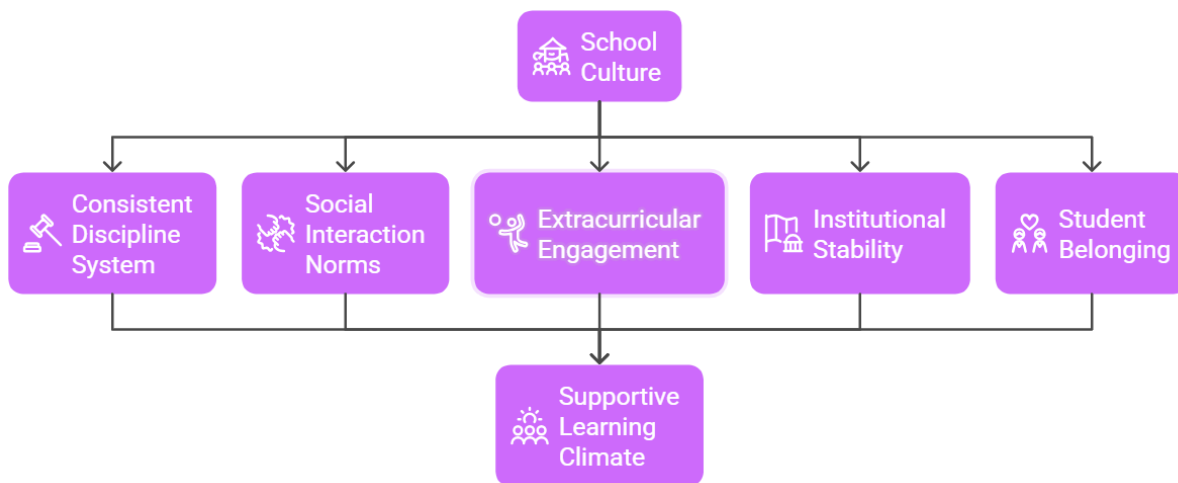


Figure 1. Analytical Framework Guiding the Study

The framework positions school culture as a foundational dimension influencing discipline practices, interaction norms, and structured student engagement. These dimensions collectively contribute to institutional stability and a sense of belonging among students, which together shape the supportive quality of the learning climate. The framework was used to guide data collection and thematic categorization throughout the research process.

Participant

The study involved key members of the school community, including the principal and several teachers who were actively engaged in instructional and managerial responsibilities. Participants were selected purposively based on their familiarity with school policies, discipline procedures, and daily institutional routines. Although students were not formally interviewed, their presence and participation in classroom activities, extracurricular programs, and daily interactions were central to the observational data. The school is located in a rural area, where institutional practices are closely intertwined with local social dynamics. This context provided a meaningful setting for examining how supportive learning conditions are constructed in everyday practice.

Instrument

Data were gathered through three complementary techniques: direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Observation was the primary method, focusing on classroom processes, disciplinary interactions, school routines, and extracurricular activities. Detailed field notes were recorded to capture both descriptive events and contextual interpretations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal and selected teachers to explore their perspectives on school culture, rule enforcement, reward and sanction mechanisms, and the intended purposes behind institutional routines. The flexible format of the interviews allowed participants to elaborate on experiences while maintaining focus on the central research theme. Document analysis included examination of school regulations, organizational records, and activity schedules. These documents provided formal representations of institutional expectations and supported triangulation of observational and interview data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted iteratively. Observational notes and interview transcripts were first reviewed repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the material. The researchers then identified meaningful segments related to cultural routines, discipline systems, social interaction patterns, extracurricular engagement, institutional stability, and student belonging. These segments were coded and organized into thematic categories aligned with the analytical framework. The analysis emphasized the relationships among themes rather than treating them as isolated variables. Narrative interpretation was employed to explain how these interconnected dimensions contributed to the formation of a supportive learning climate. To enhance credibility, findings were cross-checked across multiple data sources, ensuring that interpretations were supported by consistent patterns within the school context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study show that the supportive learning climate observed in the rural secondary school was not produced by a single initiative or policy. Instead, it emerged from a set of interconnected institutional practices that were consistently enacted in daily school life. Through thematic analysis of observations, interviews, and institutional documents, six major dimensions were identified as shaping the school environment. Table 1 summarizes the overall distribution of coded segments across these dimensions.

Table 1. Distribution of Thematic Findings on Supportive Learning Climate

No	Thematic Dimension	Number of Coded Segments	Percentage (%)
1	School Culture Routines	22	22.4
2	Consistent Discipline System	18	18.4
3	Social Interaction Norms	17	17.3
4	Student Belonging	15	15.3
5	Extracurricular Engagement	14	14.3
6	Institutional Stability	12	12.3
	Total	98	100

As reflected in Table 1, school culture routines appeared most prominently in the data. Daily practices such as morning greetings, structured assemblies, shared responsibilities for classroom order, and collective participation in routine activities were repeatedly observed. These practices were not isolated events; they formed a patterned rhythm that organized the school day. The repetition of such routines seemed to reduce uncertainty and clarify expectations, allowing students to navigate school life with greater predictability. Consistent discipline practices constituted the second strongest theme. The school implemented a clearly staged system of sanctions, beginning with verbal reminders and progressing to formal documentation and parental communication when necessary. During the observation period, seven minor violations were recorded, primarily related to punctuality and uniform compliance. What stood out was not the severity of the sanctions, but their consistency. Students appeared to understand both the boundaries and the procedures, suggesting that discipline functioned as a stabilizing structure rather than a reactive response to misconduct.

Social interaction norms further reinforced this stability. Respectful communication between teachers and students was regularly observed, particularly during moments when behavioral correction was required. Teachers did not rely solely on authority; they combined firmness with guidance. This pattern of interaction seemed to sustain order without generating visible resistance. Extracurricular engagement provided an additional layer of reinforcement. Five active programs, including scouting and sports activities, extended institutional expectations beyond the classroom. Participation in these activities appeared to strengthen students' attachment to the school community. Attendance records during the observation period averaged approximately 93%, indicating sustained involvement in daily routines and scheduled activities.

Institutional stability, while less frequently coded as an isolated theme, was evident as an outcome of these interconnected practices. Regular morning supervision, consistent announcements, and structured transitions between activities contributed to a sense of organizational continuity. Stability was not merely administrative; it was experienced through the steady repetition of shared practices. To ensure that these patterns were not limited to a single data source, triangulation was conducted across observation, interview, and document data, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Triangulation of Data Sources Across Thematic Dimensions

Thematic Dimension	Observation	Interview	Document Analysis	Convergence Level
School Culture Routines	14	6	2	Strong
Consistent Discipline System	11	5	2	Strong
Social Interaction Norms	10	5	2	Strong

Thematic Dimension	Observation	Interview	Document Analysis	Convergence Level
Student Belonging	6	6	3	Moderate
Extracurricular Engagement	8	3	3	Moderate
Institutional Stability	5	4	3	Moderate
Total Segments	54	29	15	

The triangulation results demonstrate that the dominant dimensions, particularly school culture routines and discipline systems, were consistently supported across all three data sources. Observations captured the lived enactment of routines, interviews clarified institutional intentions, and documents confirmed formal regulation. This convergence strengthens the credibility of the findings and indicates that the supportive learning climate was embedded not only in discourse but also in sustained practice.

Taken together, the results suggest that the supportive learning climate in this rural secondary school was sustained through institutional coherence. Cultural routines provided the normative foundation, discipline ensured structural clarity, interaction norms maintained relational balance, and extracurricular engagement reinforced belonging. Rather than relying on material expansion or external intervention, the school appeared to cultivate supportive conditions through the steady alignment of its internal practices.

Discussion

The evidence gathered in this study suggests that a supportive learning climate in the observed rural secondary school did not arise from ambitious reforms or external interventions. Instead, it was shaped through the gradual alignment of everyday institutional practices. School culture and discipline were not operating as separate domains; they appeared intertwined in ways that structured how students experienced daily life at school (Attard et al., 2021). This alignment seems to have generated a sense of order that felt steady rather than restrictive. In this sense, supportiveness was less about leniency and more about clarity (Dundon, 2025).

One of the most striking patterns in the findings was the centrality of routine. Greeting practices, morning assemblies, shared responsibilities, and consistent classroom procedures formed a recognizable rhythm that organized the school day. These routines were repeated often enough that they ceased to feel imposed and instead became part of the school's identity (Brown et al., 2021). Students appeared to move within a framework of expectations that were rarely ambiguous. In rural settings, where institutional environments are closely tied to local social relations, such repetition may carry particular significance because it reinforces collective norms beyond formal instruction (Cheng et al., 2025).

Discipline, in this context, did not function primarily as a deterrent mechanism. The structured sanction process and clearly staged warnings suggested an emphasis on procedural fairness rather than punishment. Observations indicated that students generally understood the consequences of their actions and responded without overt resistance. This pattern implies that discipline gained legitimacy through consistency (Haack et al., 2021). When enforcement is predictable, authority becomes less confrontational and more institutional (Jordanoska, 2021). The supportive climate, therefore, did not emerge despite discipline but partly because discipline was enacted in a transparent and stable manner.

Equally important was the relational texture of daily interactions. Teachers did not rely solely on formal authority when addressing attendance or behavioral concerns. Their responses often combined correction with explanation and attentiveness. This relational approach may have contributed to students perceiving discipline as guidance rather than hostility (Hagenauer et al., 2023). Trust, even if subtle, seemed to underpin many interactions. Such relational legitimacy strengthens institutional coherence because students are more likely to comply when authority feels grounded in shared responsibility (Lo, 2025).

Extracurricular engagement provided further insight into how belonging was cultivated. Activities outside formal lessons were not treated as optional diversions; they extended the same expectations of responsibility and cooperation observed in the classroom. Participation appeared to reinforce identity as members of a collective rather than isolated learners (Jones et al., 2021). In rural contexts, where schools frequently serve as focal points of community life, structured extracurricular programs may deepen students' attachment to institutional norms. Engagement in these spaces seemed to connect discipline with positive participation rather than mere compliance. Taken together, the findings indicate that supportive learning conditions were sustained through institutional coherence. Culture supplied shared meanings, discipline supplied structural boundaries, interaction norms supplied relational stability, and extracurricular engagement supplied opportunities for collective identification. None of these dimensions alone would likely have produced the same effect. It was their alignment that appeared to generate a stable learning environment. In this rural setting, supportiveness was experienced not as freedom from rules, but as confidence within clearly understood boundaries.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that cultivating a supportive learning climate in rural secondary schools does not begin with large structural reform, but with strengthening everyday institutional consistency. The observed school did not rely on sophisticated programs or external interventions; instead, it maintained stability through predictable routines and transparent disciplinary procedures. This indicates that school leaders may benefit from focusing on internal coherence before pursuing broader innovation. Reinforcing shared cultural practices, clarifying behavioral expectations, and ensuring procedural fairness may create a stable environment in which students feel secure to participate and learn. The study also implies that discipline systems should be reframed as formative structures rather than reactive control mechanisms. When discipline is implemented with clarity and relational sensitivity, it can contribute to trust and responsibility rather than fear. Schools may therefore reflect on how rules are communicated, how sanctions are staged, and how authority is exercised in daily interaction. Consistency, rather than severity, appears to be central in sustaining supportive conditions. Moreover, structured extracurricular engagement should not be underestimated. In the rural context examined here, activities beyond formal instruction reinforced collective identity and extended institutional norms into collaborative spaces. Strengthening such programs may serve as a practical strategy for deepening belonging and engagement, especially in communities where schools function as central social institutions.

Research contribution

This study offers a grounded contribution to the discussion of supportive learning climates by situating the analysis within a rural Indonesian secondary school. Much of the existing literature approaches school climate through large-scale surveys or perception-based measures. In contrast,

this study examines how climate is enacted through repeated institutional practices that students encounter in everyday routines. By foregrounding lived experience, it adds a process-oriented perspective to climate research. The study also advances a more integrated understanding of school culture and discipline. Rather than treating these domains separately, the findings demonstrate how cultural routines, disciplinary consistency, interaction norms, and extracurricular engagement function together to produce institutional stability. This alignment perspective contributes to theoretical discussions that emphasize coherence as a foundation for supportive environments. Finally, the study highlights the relevance of organizational steadiness in resource-limited contexts. It suggests that supportive conditions can be sustained not solely through material investment, but through disciplined alignment between values and practice. In doing so, it broadens the conversation about rural education by emphasizing institutional coherence as a meaningful resource in itself.

Limitations

This study is bounded by its focus on a single institutional setting. While the depth of observation allows for detailed interpretation, it limits the extent to which the findings can be extended to other schools. Rural contexts vary considerably in demographic composition, leadership style, and community dynamics, and these variations may influence how culture and discipline operate. The period of field engagement, although sufficient to capture recurring patterns, does not account for long-term institutional shifts or seasonal fluctuations. In addition, students' perspectives were inferred primarily through observation rather than collected through in-depth interviews. As a result, the analysis may not fully capture the subjective meanings students attach to institutional practices. These limitations invite cautious interpretation of the findings as contextually situated rather than universally representative.

Suggestions

Future research may expand the scope of inquiry by examining multiple rural schools to explore how variations in leadership, community involvement, and local norms shape the construction of supportive climates. Incorporating direct student narratives could deepen understanding of how institutional coherence is experienced from the learner's perspective. Longitudinal approaches may also provide insight into how cultural and disciplinary alignment evolves over time and how it relates to academic outcomes, attendance patterns, or student well-being. Further investigation into how rural schools negotiate the balance between relational closeness and procedural authority would also enrich theoretical discussions of climate formation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how a supportive learning climate can be built through the everyday interplay of school culture and discipline in a rural secondary school in Indonesia. The findings show that a supportive climate is not produced by one program or policy in isolation, but by the cumulative effect of routines that are practiced consistently and experienced collectively. Cultural practices such as regular school rituals, shared responsibilities, and predictable daily rhythms created a stable sense of what school life should look like. Within that cultural structure, discipline worked less as punishment and more as a clear institutional framework that protected learning time and clarified behavioral expectations. The analysis also indicates that supportive conditions were strengthened when discipline was enacted with procedural consistency and accompanied by respectful interaction. Students appeared more willing to comply when rules were predictable and authority was expressed

through guidance rather than hostility. Extracurricular participation further reinforced this process by extending shared norms into collaborative spaces where belonging and responsibility could be practiced, not merely discussed. Overall, the study suggests that supportiveness in this rural context was experienced not as freedom from rules, but as security within well understood boundaries. Where resources may be limited, the most influential leverage point may lie in institutional coherence, aligning cultural routines, disciplinary procedures, and relational practices so that students encounter school as both structured and humane.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to the principal, teachers, and school community who generously provided access and shared their time and insights during the research process. Their openness and cooperation made it possible to understand the daily practices and institutional dynamics examined in this study. The authors are also grateful to colleagues who offered constructive feedback during the development of this manuscript.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Melkior Wewe conceptualized the study design and coordinated the field observation process. He led the data collection activities, including classroom observations and interviews with school leaders and teachers, and contributed substantially to the drafting of the methodology and results sections. Karolina Anu contributed to the literature review development and assisted in organizing the theoretical framework related to school environment, discipline, and extracurricular engagement. She participated in data collection and contributed to the interpretation of findings, particularly in the discussion and conclusion sections. Maria Anastasia Nono was responsible for data documentation, verification, and narrative analysis. She contributed to synthesizing observation records and interview transcripts and assisted in revising the manuscript to ensure coherence and clarity.

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