

Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Reward and Punishment in Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The main objective of this study is to describe how teachers of Islamic Religious Education perceive the concepts of reward and punishment, how they understand their educational functions, and how they implement these strategies effectively in Islamic Religious Education learning processes at vocational high schools that are integrated with Islamic boarding schools and their moral values.

Methodology: This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a field study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and key informants, classroom observations, and document analysis. The analytical framework was based on Skinner's operant conditioning theory, including positive and negative reinforcement and punishment types I and II, to interpret teachers' perceptions and educational practices within Islamic learning contexts.

Main Findings: The findings indicate that teachers of Islamic Religious Education generally hold positive perceptions of reward and punishment in the learning process. Reward is considered an effective positive reinforcement to enhance students' motivation, participation, and discipline, while punishment is implemented as an educational, proportional measure aligned with school regulations and Islamic boarding school culture.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study offers novelty by examining teachers' perceptions and the implementation of reward and punishment within Islamic Religious Education learning at vocational high schools integrated with Islamic boarding schools, using an operant conditioning framework. The findings contribute to Islamic educational psychology by emphasizing humanistic and contextually grounded reinforcement and punishment practices that foster moral development, character building, and value-based learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia, particularly within Islamic boarding school-based institutions, is fundamentally oriented toward developing students' moral character, ethical behavior, and internalization of Islamic values. Learning in Islamic boarding school-based vocational high schools integrates formal vocational instruction with the Islamic boarding school system, emphasizing not only academic achievement but also discipline, responsibility, and adherence to Islamic principles [1], [2]. In this context, teachers are responsible not

only for transferring knowledge but also for guiding, nurturing, and directing students' behavior in accordance with Islamic moral and educational principles.

Behavioral reinforcement constitutes a fundamental component in the learning process, as it functions as a stimulus that can enhance students' motivation, attention, and engagement in learning activities [3]. In classroom practice, teachers frequently encounter challenges such as low discipline, limited participation, and behavioral deviations that hinder learning objectives [4]. Therefore, pedagogical strategies are required that focus not only on content delivery but also on shaping students' behavior and character. One commonly applied strategy is the use of rewards and punishments. Rewards are forms of positive reinforcement given for behaviors or achievements that meet expected standards, while punishment refers to corrective consequences intended to reduce inappropriate actions [5]. Psychologically, behaviors followed by positive outcomes tend to be repeated, while those followed by negative outcomes are avoided.

From the perspective of educational psychology, these strategies are rooted in B. F. Skinner's operant conditioning theory, which explains that behavior is shaped through reinforcement and consequences [6]. Positive reinforcement increases the likelihood of repeated behavior, while punishment reduces undesired actions. However, the direct application of Skinner's theory in Islamic education requires contextual adaptation. Within Islamic boarding schools, the concept of *ta'dib* functions as a normative boundary, ensuring that punishment is applied proportionally, educationally, and humanely, fostering moral development and character formation rather than mere behavioral compliance [7], [8]. This highlights the importance of integrating classical behavioral principles with Islamic ethical values.

Previous research has widely examined the use of reward and punishment in general educational contexts, focusing on classroom management, motivation, and discipline [9], [10]. Studies consistently indicate that positive reinforcement is more effective than coercive approaches in fostering long-term discipline. However, what has not been widely researched is the perceptions of Islamic Religious Education teachers regarding reward and punishment, particularly within Islamic boarding school-based vocational high schools. Limited attention has been given to how teachers interpret and implement reinforcement strategies in learning environments that integrate vocational education with Islamic boarding school culture [11], [12]. Moreover, few studies explore how Islamic educational values, such as *ta'dib*, shape teachers' decision-making in applying reward and punishment in classroom practice.

This article positions itself within this research gap by examining Islamic Religious Education teachers' perceptions and implementation of reward and punishment in Islamic boarding school-based vocational high schools. The novelty of this study lies in integrating operant conditioning theory with Islamic educational values, emphasizing humanistic, value-based reinforcement and punishment practices that support moral development and character building. The urgency of this research is underscored by the need to develop Islamic Religious Education learning strategies that are both effective in shaping discipline and aligned with Islamic moral principles [12], [14]. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining Islamic Religious Education teachers' perceptions and implementation of reward and punishment in Islamic boarding school-based vocational high schools. The novelty of this research lies in integrating operant conditioning theory with Islamic educational values, emphasizing ethical, humanistic, and character-based reinforcement practices.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This design was chosen to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of how teachers of Islamic Religious Education perceive and implement *reward and punishment* in learning at Islamic boarding school-based vocational high schools. Qualitative descriptive research is suitable for exploring social phenomena, experiences, and perspectives without manipulating variables, allowing findings to emerge directly from the field data [15], [16].

Furthermore, this study was conducted as a field study, where primary data were collected directly from the research site through interaction with participants and observation of teaching and learning activities. This approach enabled the researcher to capture authentic practices of *reward and punishment* as implemented in daily instructional processes.

2.2. Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at an Islamic boarding school-based vocational high school in Cianjur Regency, West Java, Indonesia. To maintain ethical standards and institutional confidentiality, the school's identity is anonymized. The site was purposively selected because it integrates vocational education with the Islamic boarding school system and applies structured disciplinary regulations based on Islamic values.

The primary participants were four Islamic Religious Education teachers with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 18 years. These teachers were directly involved in planning and implementing *reward and punishment* strategies in classroom learning. Supporting informants included, The school principal, The foundation owner,

student affairs staff, and several students. These informants provided complementary data to strengthen understanding of institutional policies, implementation mechanisms, and student responses related to *reward and punishment* practices.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers and key informants to explore their perceptions, experiences, and rationales regarding the implementation of *reward and punishment* in learning. This model allowed flexibility while maintaining focus on the research objectives [17].

Classroom observations examined the actual implementation of *reward and punishment* during teaching and learning activities, enabling the researcher to compare stated practices with real classroom behavior. Documentation was analyzed to support and validate interview and observation data, including school regulations, lesson plans, codes of conduct, disciplinary records, and other relevant institutional documents.

2.4. Research Instruments

The main instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher, who actively collected, interpreted, and analyzed data. Supporting instruments were also used, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Research Instruments

Data Collection Technique	Instrument Description
Interview	Semi-structured interview guide for Islamic Religious Education teachers, principal, and other informants
Observation	Observation sheet focusing on <i>reward and punishment</i> practices in learning
Documentation	Document checklist including school rules, policies, and learning records

These instruments were developed based on research objectives and relevant theoretical frameworks to ensure data relevance and consistency [18]. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification [19]. The analytical process was carried out continuously throughout the data collection phase until coherent and systematic research findings were obtained.

2.5. Research Procedures

The research procedures were conducted systematically to ensure methodological rigor and data coherence throughout the study. The process began with a preliminary study, which involved a comprehensive literature review and initial observations at the research site to identify relevant issues and contextual conditions. Subsequently, the research planning stage was carried out, including the preparation of research instruments and the acquisition of necessary research permits. Data collection was then conducted through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation to obtain comprehensive qualitative data. Data analysis was performed simultaneously with the data collection process, allowing emerging findings to guide subsequent data gathering. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, verification and validation were conducted using triangulation techniques across data sources and methods. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the analyzed data, and the research findings were systematically compiled and reported.

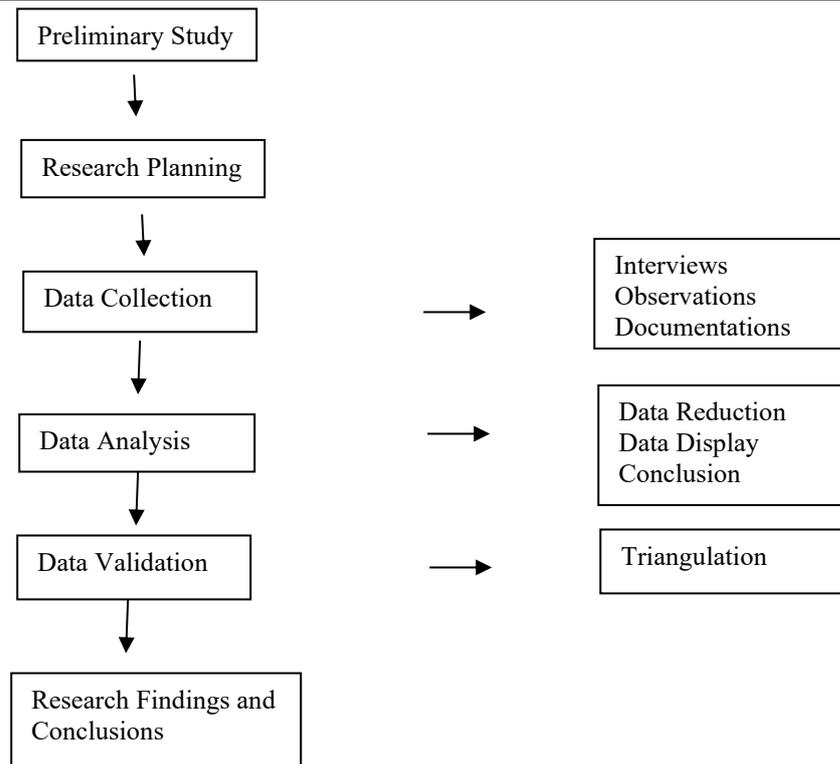


Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

2.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification [19], [20]. First, data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data. Second, data display organized information in narrative and thematic forms. Third, conclusion drawing/verification was performed continuously throughout the research to ensure consistency and accuracy.

2.7. Trustworthiness of Data

The trustworthiness of data was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. First, source triangulation compared information from different participants. Technique triangulation compared data from interviews, observations, and documentation. These strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings [16],[21].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Teachers' Perceptions of Reward

The results of this study reveal that Islamic Religious Education teachers at Islamic boarding school based vocational high schools perceive reward and punishment as essential pedagogical strategies for shaping students' discipline and character. Teachers generally understand reward as a form of appreciation given to students for positive behavior, academic achievement, or obedience to school regulations. Rewards are perceived not merely as material incentives but also as verbal praise, recognition, additional responsibilities, or moral encouragement that strengthens students' motivation to behave positively [22].

Teachers emphasized that rewards are applied more frequently than punishment in daily learning practices. Reward is viewed as an effective means to foster intrinsic motivation, increase student engagement, and reinforce positive behavioral patterns in the classroom. According to the participants, students tend to respond positively to appreciation, which in turn encourages consistency in disciplined behavior and adherence to Islamic values [22], [23].

The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers at the Islamic boarding school-based vocational high school generally hold positive perceptions toward the use of reward in the learning process. Teachers perceive reward as an educational strategy that reinforces desirable student behavior, increases learning

motivation, and supports discipline within the classroom. Reward is considered relevant and necessary, particularly in educational environments that emphasize character formation and moral development [24].

Teachers understand reward not merely as material incentives but primarily as non-material reinforcement, such as verbal praise, symbolic appreciation, and public acknowledgment of students' achievements. According to Islamic Religious Education teachers, these forms of reward are more consistent with educational values and help prevent students' dependency on material gifts [25]. This finding aligns with operant conditioning theory, where positive reinforcement strengthens desired behavior, and is supported by Korpershoek et al., who demonstrated that consistent reinforcement improves student discipline and engagement [1], [2], [26]. In the context of learning in Islamic Boarding School, such reinforcement also supports moral development, responsibility, and internalization of Islamic values [3], [17].

3.2. Forms of Reward in Islamic Religious Education Learning

The findings reveal that rewards implemented in Islamic Religious Education learning take various forms, including, (1) Verbal praise, (2) Additional trust or responsibility, (3) Public recognition, (4) Written appreciation, (5) Special privileges, such as holidays or outings granted by the kyai (head of the Islamic boarding school), (6) Material rewards, such as exemption from tuition fees for one semester.

These rewards are given to students who demonstrate academic achievement, active participation, discipline, and positive attitudes. Teachers reported that such rewards effectively enhance students' enthusiasm, classroom engagement, and willingness to comply with school regulations [14], [26]. Reward also contributes to students' self-confidence and sense of responsibility. Students who receive appreciation tend to show sustained improvement in learning behavior and discipline, indicating that reward supports both short-term motivation and long-term character development [25], [27]. These rewards also reflect Islamic educational values, encouraging responsibility, moral awareness, and character development [3].

3.3. Educational Punishment Practices

In addition to reward, punishment is implemented as an educational and corrective measure. Teachers emphasized that punishment is applied without physical violence or psychological pressure. The forms of punishment include, (1) Verbal warnings, (2) Reflective dialogue, (3) Educational assignments, (4) Light administrative sanctions.

These measures are applied gradually and proportionally, depending on the severity of students' behavior. Teachers perceive punishment as a means to help students understand the consequences of their actions and encourage behavioral improvement. Punishment functions as a boundary-setting mechanism rather than a repressive tool [1], [2], [28], [29]. Observed practices align with Islamic principles of ta'dib and ta'zir, emphasizing moral development, responsibility, and character cultivation.

3.4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The implementation of reward and punishment is supported by, (1) Clear written school regulations, (2) A strong Islamic boarding school culture emphasizing discipline, (3) Close teacher–student relationships. The involvement of school leaders and the foundation in formulating disciplinary policies strengthens institutional consistency [13], [30], [31].

However, several inhibiting factors were identified, including, (1) Students' diverse backgrounds, (2) (3) Variations in character, (4) Limitations in monitoring and documentation systems. These factors affect the consistency of reinforcement and punishment practices in daily instruction [25], [31].

3.5. Documentation Evidence from Observation

In addition to interviews and direct classroom observations, documentation was collected as supporting evidence to strengthen the credibility of the research findings. The documentation obtained during the observation process included written school regulations related to student discipline, teachers' lesson plans (RPP) that reflected the integration of reward and punishment strategies, student discipline records, and documentation of reward and punishment practices recorded in teachers' notes. Visual documentation, such as photographs of classroom activities, announcement boards displaying students' achievements, and written appreciation certificates, was also collected to support observational data. These documents were used to corroborate information obtained from interviews and observations, ensuring data triangulation and enhancing the validity of the research results [16], [19].

Reward as Positive Reinforcement, The findings of this study demonstrate that reward plays a dominant and strategic role in shaping students' motivation, engagement, and discipline in Islamic Religious Education within Islamic boarding school–based vocational high schools. Teachers perceive reward not merely as an external incentive but as an educational tool that reinforces desirable behaviors, including academic achievement, active participation, and adherence to school regulations. The variety of rewards identified ranging from verbal praise and public recognition to symbolic appreciation, additional responsibilities, tuition exemptions, and holiday

privileges granted by the kyai indicates that reward is deeply embedded within both pedagogical and institutional practices.

These findings are consistent with operant conditioning theory, which posits that positive reinforcement strengthens desired behavior and increases the likelihood of behavioral repetition [1], [2]. Similar conclusions have been reported in previous studies, emphasizing that reward-based strategies are effective in enhancing student motivation, classroom engagement, and discipline [11], [14], [31]. However, this study extends prior research by demonstrating that in Islamic boarding school-based vocational contexts, reward is predominantly non-material and value-oriented rather than transactional.

This difference suggests that the effectiveness of reward is strongly influenced by educational and cultural context. In Islamic education, reward functions not only as behavioral reinforcement but also as a means of internalizing moral and religious values, supporting the views of Al-Attas and Halstead that emphasize education as character formation rather than mere skill acquisition [1], [2].

Punishment as Educational and Humane Mechanism, The findings further indicate that punishment is applied as an educational and corrective mechanism rather than as a coercive or repressive tool. Teachers emphasize proportionality, gradual application, and humanity in punishment practices, avoiding physical or psychological harm. Forms of punishment observed include verbal warnings, reflective dialogue, educational assignments, and light administrative sanctions, all intended to promote self-awareness and behavioral improvement.

From the perspective of educational psychology, these practices align with Skinner's concept of punishment as a behavioral consequence aimed at reducing undesirable behavior [1], [2]. Previous studies likewise report that non-violent and educational punishment is more effective in fostering discipline than authoritarian approaches [10], [12].

However, this study differs from prior research by situating punishment within the Islamic educational concepts of ta'dib and ta'zir, where punishment is framed as moral cultivation rather than mere behavioral control. In this context, punishment serves as ethical guidance that promotes responsibility, accountability, and moral reflection.

Integration of Islamic Educational Values, a key contribution of this study lies in its analysis of how Islamic educational values shape the implementation of reward and punishment. Concepts such as targhib (encouragement), ta'dib (moral education), and ta'zir (educational sanction) provide a normative framework guiding teachers' decisions in applying reinforcement strategies. The findings indicate that teachers' understanding of these concepts significantly influences the fairness, consistency, and ethical quality of reward and punishment practices.

Previous studies have acknowledged the importance of moral and character education in Islamic schools [15], [16]. However, few studies have explicitly examined how Islamic values interact with psychological reinforcement theories in daily instructional practice. This study addresses that gap by showing that teachers with stronger pedagogical and psychological competence tend to integrate Islamic values more effectively into reinforcement strategies, supporting social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of teacher modeling in shaping student behavior [4], [10].

Role of the Boarding School Environment, the boarding school environment emerges as a crucial contextual factor strengthening the effectiveness of reward and punishment. Structured disciplinary regulations, close teacher-student relationships, and a strong institutional culture rooted in Islamic values create a learning climate in which rules are perceived as moral and religious obligations rather than mere institutional demands.

This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the role of school culture in shaping discipline and character development [13], [27],[30]. The integration of vocational education with the Islamic boarding school system further enhances the moral legitimacy of reinforcement strategies, encouraging students' internal motivation to comply with rules.

Research Novelty, Implications, and Generalization, the novelty of this study lies in integrating operant conditioning theory with Islamic educational values within the context of Islamic boarding school based vocational high schools. This study bridges psychological and Islamic educational frameworks, demonstrating how reinforcement strategies are transformed by religious norms, moral objectives, and institutional culture.

Practically, the findings suggest that teachers should apply reward and punishment in a balanced, ethical, and value-oriented manner, emphasizing non-material reinforcement and humane corrective measures. Theoretically, this study extends classical behavioral theory by contextualizing it within Islamic education, where reinforcement functions not only behaviorally but also morally and character-wise [14], [23], [29].

In general, this study indicates that reward and punishment, when grounded in ethical, religious, and pedagogical principles, function not only as tools for classroom management but also as mechanisms for long-term character formation. Although the findings are context-specific, they may be generalized to similar Islamic educational institutions that integrate formal schooling with boarding school culture, particularly those emphasizing character education and moral development

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education teachers at pesantren-based vocational high schools perceive reward and punishment as important pedagogical strategies for shaping students' discipline and character, with reward applied more dominantly and considered effective in increasing students' learning motivation, engagement, and positive behavioral patterns, while punishment is implemented as an educational and humane corrective measure aimed at guiding behavior rather than imposing repressive control. These findings indicate that the application of reward and punishment aligns with the principles of operant conditioning, particularly the role of positive reinforcement in strengthening desired behaviors. Furthermore, the effectiveness of these strategies is influenced by teachers' consistency in implementation, the supportive disciplinary culture of the pesantren environment, and the availability of behavior monitoring mechanisms, where clear school regulations, strong Islamic boarding school values emphasizing discipline, and positive teacher–student relationships serve as key supporting factors. Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools strengthen teachers' pedagogical competencies related to reinforcement strategies and develop more systematic monitoring and documentation of student behavior, while future research is encouraged to conduct comparative or longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of reward and punishment practices across different Islamic educational settings.

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